



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 15, 2023
7 p.m.

Transcript No. 30-4-9

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP), Deputy Chair
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP),* Acting Deputy Chair
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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services

Hon. Mike Ellis, Minister

Marlin Degrand, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Security

Brad Smith, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services

Alex Thompson, Executive Director, Community Justice and Integrated Services

Alberta Emergency Management Agency

Stephen Lacroix, Assistant Deputy Minister and Managing Director

7 p.m.

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

**Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table. My name is Jackie Lovely, and I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and chair of this committee. We will start, beginning to my right.

Mr. Shepherd: David Shepherd, MLA for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Yao: Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Ms Fir: Tanya Fir, Calgary-Peigan.

Mr. Yaseen: Muhammad Yaseen, MLA, Calgary-North.

Mr. Smith: Good evening. MLA Mark Smith, Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Long: Martin Long, the MLA for West Yellowhead.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Good evening. Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I'm Mike Ellis. I am the MLA for Calgary-West and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services. I have with me today my deputy minister, Rae-Ann Lajeunesse. I have Mr. Brad Smith, who is assistant deputy minister of financial services and SFO. I also have Mr. Marlin Degrand, assistant deputy minister of public security, and Mr. Alex Thompson, executive director of community justice and integrated services, with me here today. Also, in the gallery I have Mr. Stephen Lacroix, the assistant deputy minister, Alberta Emergency Management Agency. I have Ms Elizabeth Macve, the assistant deputy minister of strategy, support, and integrated initiatives, and Mr. Brad Wells, executive director of financial services.

Thank you, Chair.

Member Ceci: Evening. Joe Ceci, MLA for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. I'm also joined by our caucus staff Parul Kanwar.

The Chair: Thank you.

Joining us remotely we have Mr. Gotfried. Mr. Gotfried, please introduce yourself.

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

The Chair: I'd like to note the following substitution for the record: Mr. Shepherd will be substituting as deputy chair for the hon. Ms Sigurdson.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and visual stream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are

encouraged to turn on your camera while speaking and mute your microphone when not speaking. Remote participants who wish to be placed on a speakers list are asked to e-mail or message the committee clerk, and members in the room should signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Regarding speaking rotation and time limits, hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services. Standing order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times. In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus. Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but speaking times may be combined between the member and the minister.

After this, speaking times will follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and the government caucus. The member and the minister may each speak for a maximum of five minutes, or these times may be combined, making it a 10-minute block. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or rotation, please send an e-mail or a message to the committee clerk about the process.

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 a break? Okay. Seeing none, we'll have a break.

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 and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

Pages are also available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. 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.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the speaking block time and the overall three-hour meeting 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 estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 16, 2023. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk with 20 hard copies. An electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both questions and answers without interruption during estimates debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, please, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

I would now invite the minister of public affairs and emergency services to begin with your opening remarks, sir.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Good day, everyone, and thank you for being here. I'd first like to acknowledge that I am honoured to be speaking here today on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional gathering place of many diverse First Nations and Métis people.

Today I will be presenting the Public Safety and Emergency Services business plan and estimates and, first, would like to introduce my ministry officials. I did miss one earlier, so I'm going to repeat: Ms Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services; Mr. Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister of financial services and SFO; Mr. Marlin Degrand, assistant deputy minister of public safety; Mr. Alex Thompson, executive director of community justice and integrated services; and of course we have in the gallery Ms Fiona Lavoy, assistant deputy minister of correctional services – thank you for being here – Mr. Stephen Lacroix, assistant deputy minister, Alberta Emergency Management Agency; Ms Elizabeth Macve, assistant deputy minister of strategy, support, and integrated initiatives; and Mr. Brad Wells, executive director of financial services.

When I became Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, the role came with a very clear and bold mandate to get right to work on making sure Alberta is a role model for safe and secure communities. As a former Calgary police officer that is a mandate that I've spent my career considering how to achieve. Even though I've had a limited period of time to carry out that mandate, I've given many years of attention to it. Though there are no easy answers, no single solution to how we keep Albertans safe and ensure people feel secure in their communities, there are a few paths that can lead us in the right direction.

That pitch and path, should I say, includes creating real solutions to keep people safe while linking those who need help with the services that can make a difference for them. It requires supports for our correctional services and provides the right tools to enhance public safety while facilitating treatment and recovery for inmates. It must ensure Alberta is ready to face any emergency that comes our way, from disaster mitigation to preparedness right through to emergency response and recovery, and we need to do it all in a way that keeps the taxpayer in mind so that we can create long-term stability in the funding of these important priorities.

It's a tall order, but this year we're making some very significant investment in Public Safety and Emergency Services, increasing the budget by \$163 million to support Albertans and their families to feel safe and secure in their homes and communities and work, of course, on the road. That means that the consolidated budget for the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services is about \$1.2 billion. When it comes to public security, we're shifting our approach to one that keeps the safety of Albertans in mind while also recognizing that communities have unique needs, and people who need help must be able to find and access resources in the community.

Since I was sworn in as the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, I've talked openly and often about the paradigm shift that must occur in policing. No longer will police serve and be seen and used as an arm of the state; rather, they must be an extension of the community, and in fact they must be a reflection of that community. It means that police are not forces anymore but services that respond to the people's needs when called upon. They are professionals, and that means that we have to put our budgetary resources into a greater variety of public safety systems and tools that are available to help.

This year's budget for the public security division is \$711 million. That includes a significant investment in the Alberta sheriffs, our correctional facilities, and in the provincial police service agreement. It's an investment that means more law enforcement resources will

be available to increase the number of boots on the ground to make sure Albertans are secure no matter where they live. It includes investments such as \$27.3 million for Alberta sheriffs to increase the number of officers available to serve rural communities, courthouses, correctional facilities and to support the new exchange of services agreement with corrections Canada; provide sheriff highway patrol equipment and address inflationary expenses; support for efforts to improve border security such as creating a firearms investigative unit within ALERT in Edmonton and Calgary to provide intelligence resources throughout the province and deal with illegal firearms coming in from abroad; an additional \$5.5 million dollars for Indigenous policing to ensure Indigenous police services have the resources they need to provide safe and secure communities; and \$26.7 million funding to boost within contract policing to support communities covered by the provincial police service agreement with the RCMP for increases in RCMP officers and civilian positions.

7:10

We've also heard loud and clear from Indigenous communities and municipalities that they want policing solutions that reflect a deeper understanding of the geographical area, the people that live there, the issues that they're facing, who the community leaders are, and what's happening on a day-to-day basis. We want to support those policing solutions, because for the police services to be effective and responsive, they have to reflect the communities they service, and local communities should be able to forge that path forward in their own way. That's why Budget 2023 is also offering financial assistance to all municipalities and First Nations and Métis settlements in the province that are interested in investigating the potential benefits of developing a local policing model to keep Albertans safe.

When people do find themselves in contact with the correctional system, it's important that we support that system in ways that promote public safety while also reducing recidivism throughout supports to offenders. Alberta's hard-working correctional staff are on the front line each and every single day for the safety and security of Albertans and for those they oversee, and we want to support them in that. Budget 2023 adds \$51.7 million for correctional services division, for a total operating budget of \$341 million this year. That includes additional resources for our correctional facilities and the staff operating them to make sure that they have the resources they need to serve Albertans effectively. We're also using additional funding to increase staff in the custody operations branch, community corrections, the training academy, and the youth correctional programs.

While there are some public safety challenges, we can predict that it's not as easy to predict the ways we will be tested, of course, by Mother Nature. Floods, wildfires, tornadoes, and other emergencies can strike at any time. I recently toured the new Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre during the first in-person emergency exercise since before COVID, and I was impressed by the complexity of the work and the dedication of the staff that were there. People typically don't realize how much they need emergency services until, unfortunately, there is an emergency. As a government we recognize how vital those services are, and we're making sure that we support the work to prepare Alberta as best as we can for any emergency.

In Budget 2023 the Alberta Emergency Management Agency will receive an additional \$3 million in funding. This additional funding will provide the staff needed to sustain 24/7 access to provincial emergency management support. It will also deliver evidence-based, informed emergency management training; the preparation and implementation of emergency and business

continuity plans; training and program supports for emergency social service planning and processes; and incident management support during a response to widespread emergencies and disasters. Ultimately, it's an investment in making sure that we can support Alberta's municipalities, Métis settlements, and First Nations when emergency events occur in their communities.

In conclusion, Budget 2023 creates a path forward for the new ministry, created with a strong focus on making sure Albertans can feel safe and supported in their communities no matter where they face as they go about their daily lives. Though we will continue to support all those things that are working well, we also recognize that we can't always meet new public safety challenges with old and sometimes ineffective strategies. There comes a time when you have to step out and step up and support new ways of doing things, as part of that, letting communities lead the way towards their own solutions while remaining a strong partner in helping them meet their solutions. It's about making sure our police and other public safety partners are a safe community presence to deter crime and to help link people in trouble to the services that they need, it's about supporting our correctional centres so that we can ensure security and reduce recidivism by helping inmates get the help that they need to move their lives forward, and it's about making sure individuals and communities are prepared in the face of a disaster. We're prepared to move forward in a new direction for Public Safety and Emergency Services, and Budget 2023 will help us get there.

I'd like to thank you very much. I'd like to thank the committee for having me here today and all of the staff in the department here as well.

With that, Madam Chair, I will cede the floor back to you. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams. Member, would you like to combine your time with the minister's?

Mr. Sabir: Sure.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Ellis: We'll do block time if you don't mind.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go with block time.
Please proceed.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. It's my pleasure to be here to discuss the Public Safety and Emergency Services estimates. I'm a bit disappointed. Back and forth would have facilitated better dialogue, but that's the minister's call. Anyway, thank you, Minister, for being here, and thank you to all your staff for being here and for the work you do to keep our communities safe.

You indicated on page 104 of your business plan 2023-26:

[The ministry's] business plans should be considered in conjunction with all budget documents – including the Fiscal Plan, Government Strategic Plan, and Estimates – which work together to provide a complete overview of government's commitment to responsible fiscal management.

I will be asking questions relating to all these documents and about some of the recent developments relating to your ministry.

The first set of questions are about the business plan 2023-26. On page 103 of the business plan it states:

Working alongside partners in law enforcement, justice, health, and social services, the ministry supports a fair and accessible

criminal justice system that supports the unique needs of Albertans while upholding the rule of law.

The first question I have is: would you agree that a fair and accessible justice system that supports the unique needs of Albertans while upholding the rule of law is one that is free from political interference? Yes or no?

The second question. Last year it was discovered that former Justice Minister Kaycee Madu called the Edmonton police chief about his distracted driving ticket. An investigation was then conducted by former Justice Adèle Kent. The investigation concluded that Minister Madu attempted to interfere in the administration of the justice system. This is an egregious act for a minister, especially for a Justice minister. Do you think having the Justice minister attempting to interfere like this achieves the goal of a fair and accessible criminal justice system that supports the unique needs of Albertans while upholding the rule of law?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order called. Please proceed.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: I don't have the – is it 23 . . .

Mr. Yao: It's 23(b).

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Standing Order 23(b). Talking about another minister is irrelevant to the actual line item that we should be talking about.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Sabir: Chair, I think that it's not a point of order. The ministry's business plan highlights what they're doing to uphold the rule of law. The question is about the rule of law and about something that happened within this government's tenure last year. I'm just simply asking about that incident, and I still have more questions about that, how it relates to the rule of law. I will be asking further questions about it.

The Chair: To be honest, I can hear you now, but before you were talking very low. I couldn't really hear what you were saying. Because I couldn't hear it, I would say that it's not a point of order. But, Member, if you could please speak into the microphone and, you know, step it up a little bit in terms of volume, then we can all hear you.

Mr. Sabir: Is everybody else able to hear? Minister, are you able to hear?

Mr. Smith: That's way better.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. The question relating to the same is: what safeguards, if any, are in place to make sure no minister in the future ever reaches out to police chiefs for any personal matters such as over a traffic ticket?

The third question, a little bit different. In December the Premier admitted twice to having talked to Crown prosecutors about specific cases. I understand the Crown prosecution service is under Justice, but then in January the Premier admitted that she had spoken to the accused in one of the cases before the court, I believe. Minister, would you consider the Premier speaking to the accused in court cases – is that a hallmark of a fair and accessible criminal justice system?

7:20

Mr. Smith: Point of order.

The Chair: We've had a point of order called. Go ahead.

Mr. Smith: I would speak to 23(b), "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." It would help, if nothing else, if the hon. member would at least read through or give us a line item or point to the page number in the sentences that he's speaking to when he brings up a question like that. As far as I can see, he's already suggested that this is an issue for Justice, not an issue for the minister here. We should maybe try to keep this focused so that it's in the minister's purview.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: I think I indicated earlier that page 104, which states that the business plan, the fiscal plan, the strategic plan, and the estimates should be viewed together to get a fulsome understanding of the ministry, and I also provided a reference from the business plan which highlights the ministry's role to uphold the rule of law. My questions are squarely about the rule of law. It's not a point of order. It's fairly relevant how the ministry will uphold the rule of law.

The Chair: I'm just going to pause for a minute to do a brief consultation. Just one moment, please.

All right. You wanted to say something else, Member?

Mr. Smith: Perhaps we could have a bit of a dialogue here. Maybe I'm getting confused, but you referenced page 104. Page 104 of the business plan?

Mr. Sabir: Page 104:

Working alongside partners in law enforcement . . .

It lists some departments.

. . . the ministry supports a fair and accessible criminal justice system that supports the unique needs of Albertans while upholding the rule of law.

Mr. Smith: Is that paragraph 1, 2, 3?

Mr. Sabir: I think page 104, if you have read it before.

Mr. Smith: Which paragraph was it?

Mr. Sabir: Oh. Page 103, the first paragraph.

Mr. Smith: Page 103, the first paragraph. Okay.

Mr. Sabir: I even have it written, 103.

Mr. Smith:

Working alongside partners in law enforcement, justice, health, and social services, the ministry supports a fair and accessible criminal justice system that supports the unique needs of Albertans while upholding the rule of law.

That's what you're referring to? Okay. So now, with your comments, I can put that into a context.

Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect. Okay. Let's bring it back to the chair, please. Conversation through the chair. My ruling is that we really do need to focus on the estimates.

If you could please proceed with your question, Member.

Mr. Sabir: The question. In that context, I was asking the minister: do you think it's appropriate for any public office holder to speak to an accused, and is that a hallmark of a fair and accessible criminal justice system?

The next question relates to another significant incident, the Coutts border blockade. It's an important border crossing that was

blocked for 21 days, and some UCP MLAs visited that blockade as well. It cost Alberta . . .

The Chair: Sorry. Excuse me, hon. member. I'm having a hard time understanding how that relates to estimates in any way. You're really straying here.

Mr. Sabir: No. Madam Chair, let me explain. We are talking about the rule of law. Alberta's one major border was blocked for 21 days.

The Chair: We're here for estimates.

Mr. Sabir: This ministry has . . .

The Chair: Member, please don't interrupt me. We're here for estimates. I'd like you to please get to the questions. We're here to ask questions of the minister. We're in the budget estimates. If you could please ask questions as they relate to the budget.

Mr. Sabir: So you don't want me to ask questions about the business plan?

The Chair: Well, you can ask questions about the business plan.

Mr. Sabir: That's about the business plan, about the rule of law. Under 13(2) I would ask you to explain your ruling so I can understand what I can ask and what I cannot ask.

The Chair: Just one moment, please.

It's fine for you to create a context, but you really do need to move on to the matter, the question at hand. If you could please just get to the question.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

My question is squarely about upholding the rule of law and the role that the ministry plays in it. That border was blocked. The question I have is: what happened there? What went wrong?

Mr. Smith: Point of order.

Mr. Sabir: Why were we not able to uphold the rule of law?

The Chair: We have a point of order called.

Hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. The point of order speaks to 23(b), "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." The hon. member has spoken to page 103, the first paragraph, the sentence:

Working alongside partners in law enforcement, justice, health, and social services, the ministry supports a fair and accessible criminal justice system that supports the unique needs of Albertans while upholding the rule of law.

That is the sentence that the hon. member has been referring to. I do not believe that that sentence in any way, shape, or form supports this line of questioning. It is referring to that the ministry will support and work with other ministries like Justice, like Health, like social services to support and allow Albertans to have "a fair and accessible criminal justice system that supports the unique needs of Albertans." That's not talking about anything that we have under the question that is under discussion right now, and therefore I would argue that it is outside of the scope of these budget estimates. It does not refer to the budget estimates, and it should not be put forth to the minister.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, again. As I said, I'm trying to tie my question squarely to the ministry's obligation to uphold the rule of law. That's in the ministry's business plan. That's the opening line of the ministry's business plan. That's what the ministry exists for. Law enforcement plays an important role in upholding the rule of law. If our border gets blocked, we don't send MLAs to open it. It's law enforcement who does that job.

Simply, the question is: what went wrong? My next question was going to be: what steps is the ministry taking to make sure that similar incidents don't happen again?

The Chair: All right. Well, I do find this to be a point of order. The member opposite is falsely implying that a government ministry official has ulterior motives. If you could please get to your question.

Mr. Sabir: Chair, under 13(2) . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, please.

Mr. Sabir: Under 13(2) I'm just simply asking for . . .

The Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: . . . an explanation of the ruling.

The Chair: Hon. member, please. Please, let us be respectful of one another. Please be respectful of the chair, and please don't cut me off when I'm speaking. We'll have a nice dialogue back and forth. I'm happy to listen to you, but at the same time my expectation is that you'll be happy to listen to me. So please don't talk over me. It's disrespectful.

That is my ruling. If you could please move on and get to your question.

Mr. Sabir: Under the standing orders I do have a right to ask you to explain the ruling under section 13. I did not imply any ulterior motives. I am asking simply for an explanation, and I am well within the standing orders to ask you to explain it.

The Chair: I find it's under 23(i).

Please, if you would kindly just move on to your questions for the minister.

Mr. Sabir: I'm still, under section 13, asking for an explanation of the ruling. The question was on relevance, and you ruled that somehow I . . .

The Chair: Member, we are here for budget estimates. My expectation is that you're going to ask questions as it relates to the budget estimates, and you're not doing that. You're making accusations. We're here for budget estimates. If you would just please ask questions, then we can move on. I want to hear what your questions are so the minister can answer them.

Mr. Sabir: Chair, again under 13(2). You are now straight up telling me that I'm making accusations. Can you explain under 13(2): where did I make accusations?

The Chair: You made accusations in this room. That's where you made them.

Mr. Sabir: Any example? Where did . . .

The Chair: What you just said. I mean, do we need to get *Hansard* back so I can repeat it?

I've made my ruling. We're moving on.

7:30

Mr. Sabir: Well, these were the questions about rule of law, so I will move on to page 103 if the government doesn't want to hear this.

The ministry also leads the coordination, collaboration, and cooperation of all organizations involved in the prevention of, response to, and recovery from emergencies in the province. The collaboration of these organizations ensures our province is prepared for and resilient to the impacts of disasters.

The question I have is: what specific role does your ministry play in it, and how much money does the ministry spend on these efforts?

Second related question. On June 13, 2020, northeast Calgary was hit by Canada's fourth-largest natural disaster. It was a significant event, and people are still trying to recover fully from its impact. We did not see any government support, response, or co-ordination efforts there. Was there any analysis done on that disaster? What can be done differently when it comes to government response and recovery from it? Any advice for those living in northeast Calgary should there be another hailstorm?

Page 103:

With eight provincial adult correctional centres, two provincial youth correctional centres and over 40 probation offices across the province, the ministry is responsible for the custody and supervision of adults [in custody].

In relation to that, they have questions. What's the total inmate population in all these centres, and how does it compare to the previous year? It also talks about the rehabilitation opportunities. What rehabilitation opportunities are available to inmates, and how do we evaluate those, whether they are effective?

Same paragraph, page 103. It says:

The ministry strives to support, guide and inspire its correctional services clients to make positive, sustainable and lawful choices in order to reduce their interactions with the criminal justice system and ensure strong communities across Alberta.

Minister, can you talk about these efforts with some specific examples of what steps you have taken in this regard?

Page 103:

The ministry provides . . . policing services through an agreement with the federal government that establishes the . . . (RCMP) as the provincial police service and supports municipal policing through policing grants.

The question I have is: what's the total cost of these agreements to the province? What is the total amount that the federal government provides as subsidy for these agreements?

The second question. There are 47 municipalities and 22 First Nation communities who have direct agreements for contract policing with the RCMP. The question I have is: do you have any role to play in those agreements? Second, what's the cost to the province for the agreements with these 47 municipalities? What's the cost for the province for the agreements that these 22 First Nations have in place with the RCMP?

Page 103: "The ministry supports specialized policing programs, as well as grant funding for crime prevention and restorative justice programs." Minister, can you talk about these programs and the costs associated with each of those programs?

Page 103 talks about: "The delivery of programs and services to support victims of crime, including those affected by domestic violence, and human trafficking." It also says that the ministry "is working to implement a new service delivery model to ensure victim services are consistent and accessible across the province." Let me provide a little bit of context. The government introduced the victims of crime amendment act in 2020, which allowed the government to use the fund on things other than supporting victims of crimes directly. These changes have resulted in less services

while the government is still trying to figure out their new model. Certainly, these changes have real consequences for the victims of crimes and survivors of those crimes. Organizations supporting victims, police-based victims' services are all against these changes. So the question I have is: what will it take for the government to listen to them?

Page 103: "Alberta is committed to issuing emergency alerts that provide critical information about emerging situations, immediate disaster . . ."

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Now we'll go over to the minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, wonderful. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. First of all, I'd like to start by going back to the hon. member's first comments, and he was noting the business plan here.

Public Safety and Emergency Services is keeping Alberta communities safe and secure. Working alongside partners in law enforcement, justice, health, and social services, the ministry supports a fair and accessible criminal justice system that supports the unique needs of Albertans while upholding the rule of law.

Madam Chair, this is really about the recovery-oriented system of care. Now, we can substitute the word "recovery" for holistic or human or wellness, but really it is about a system of care that involves all ministries, okay? What we're talking about here is the law enforcement community. Whether some people like it or not, the law enforcement community has to be at the pointy end of the stick. They're the ones that are not to be cast aside, and this is the paradigm shift that we're trying to do here in Alberta when it comes to policing.

As I said in my opening remarks, the police will be no longer seen as an arm of the state; they will be seen as an extension of the community. They will be seen as a reflection of that community, so when they go and talk to people, people will receive them with a thank you because they're there to help them. They should never be engaging with the community out of fear, right? This is part of that shift when we're talking about policing.

But it's not just necessarily about this ministry. Under previous governments, over the course of time, quite frankly, you would see a lot of silos. These silos did not include social services and health and justice. My experience will tell me and, I would argue, what other people's experience would tell them is that a lot of the primary motivating factors for people that engage with law enforcement or that are in the justice system, unfortunately, have drugs or alcohol as a contributing factor, so understanding that drugs is a neurobiological illness is to understand that people need help with that illness.

Now, that doesn't exonerate a person from, unfortunately, any criminal act that they may or may not have committed, but it's also to understand that when that person is in the throes of their addiction, when that person has been engaged with the justice system – and we take the scenario where nobody has actually committed a crime – those law enforcement officers are there to provide guidance and support to help that person into a form of treatment or detox or maybe just a safe place to be for the night.

Now, when it comes to those that are involved in the justice system, yes, they may have to answer for the criminal acts which they may or may not be charged with; that being said, that is not the end of their journey, and that is why in our justice system – and, specifically, I'm going to get ahead on one of the questions that the hon. member asked that has to do with our corrections facilities.

We're putting in therapeutic living areas within our justice system. What does that mean? When somebody has an addiction, which is that neurobiological illness, that person will be able to get

help. It's not about just sitting there doing their time and then giving that person an LRT ticket at the end of their sentence, where the pattern of abuse goes over and over again and the recidivism continues; it's about ensuring that that individual, when they leave a correctional facility, is in a better place from which they started.

What else did we include in that? We included the virtual opioid dependency program in those correctional facilities and actually in the jails within Alberta, in the RCMP detachments, also the larger municipalities as well. So what does that mean? Before anybody even has their handcuffs taken off, Madam Chair, I can tell you that a question would be asked of them: do you have an opioid dependency problem? And if you do, before the handcuffs are taken off, that person is already on a journey to talk to a doctor in order to get a prescription and get them on evidence-based medication.

I can tell you who does appreciate this, and that's the defence attorneys. The defence attorneys appreciate that because when that individual is showing the willingness to get help for the illness that they have, within that justice system, that is a contributing factor that would lead to them possibly being released on a form of bail, for instance. So these are all good things, and that really is what that first statement is about.

7:40

Let me just talk about Crown prosecutors for a moment here. Look, Crown prosecutors – I can tell you that their integrity is something that I believe should never be questioned. In regard to the incident that that member was talking about, I think that the Crown prosecutors have put out a statement. I will further add that this is related to, obviously, the Justice portfolio. That being said, I believe that Crown prosecutors work very, very hard, have heavy caseloads, do their jobs with the utmost integrity, and I do not believe that they ever, ever should be questioned, quite frankly.

Now, I will add that in regard to the Coutts blockade – I will actually pass it over to my assistant deputy minister Marlin Degrand to talk on the level of – oh, sorry. Before I do that, Marlin, let me just be very clear. I believe that – and I've been very public about this; this is not the first time anybody should be hearing this, okay? I believe that no politician – and I'm going to say this again: no politician – should be directing law enforcement. No politician should be certainly directing anything to do with the justice system.

To the member when he said, you know, that we don't send MLAs, well, I would argue that not only do we not send MLAs; we don't send the law enforcement community. That is a job. The law enforcement community is independent. If they believe that there is a threat, then they will do their job, and I believe that they will show the integrity to do their job with the utmost integrity. But it is not at the direction of me, and it's not at the direction of any politician to be telling law enforcement to go and execute whatever political belief that they think that they may have.

With that, I'm going to pass it to Marlin Degrand.

Mr. Degrand: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, sir, for the question. The role that I played during the Coutts border blockade was the direct liaison to the commanding officer of the RCMP, who were responsible for the operational response to that from a policing perspective. My role as the departmental representative was to communicate on a regular basis with the commanding officer, obtain updates from the commanding officer in relation to the status of the event, and to offer any assistance that could be offered from the department to the RCMP, who were, of course, in command and control, which included at different times allowing for our sheriffs branch to support the RCMP operationally. But once turned over to them, they of course retained command and control of the incident, so I didn't direct the

operations in any way, shape, or form for the police, and I was actually quite careful to avoid doing that, sir.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Thank you very much, Assistant Deputy Minister.

You know, another question you talked about was related to Alberta emergency management. Let me just say: very impressed with what I saw. I think, to just put in a little bit of context, for years, quite frankly, even under your government, there was a bit of a belief that Alberta kind of comes in and takes command and control of a specific incident. That's actually not the case. The municipality is actually the one that is in charge, and Alberta emergency management actually provides support to those municipalities when they are in a form of a disaster.

Before I ask my assistant deputy minister to talk a little bit more broadly about that and also to talk to you about northeast Calgary, because I know that's something that is near and dear not just to your heart but also MLAs within the UCP as well – and I'm sure he's happy to talk to you about that – I think you asked a question regarding last year, that 2,917 adults were in custody. I think, with that, I'm going to pause on that one.

I'm going to ask Stephen Lacroix: if you could just go to the mic there. Obviously, Stephen Lacroix is the head of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and can provide some context. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Lacroix: Thank you, Madam Chair, Minister, hon. member. To talk quickly about how we expend the funds in the estimates, I can break it, maybe, in three main buckets. You will notice that there's \$77 million in there. Of that, \$43 million is essentially a grant that goes back to the 911 call centres, so I don't really see that money. It comes in; 100 per cent of it goes out. There's left about \$33 million. It's how we develop and deliver our program. As Minister Ellis mentioned . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll go back to the member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for touching on those questions, which I was not even let to ask.

Page 103 talks about emergency alerts, about emerging situation, and recommended precautions. A couple of weeks ago the government tested this emergency alert, and many Albertans, including myself and, I hope, the minister as well, got multiple alerts instead of one. I know it was a test alert, but what assurance can you provide to Albertans that this alert will function properly in the time of need, and what steps have you taken since then to correct that? And is there any test alert planned to test it again to see if it works properly? It certainly plays an important role and can help save lives and protect Albertans in case of emergencies.

Page 104 talks about government action to reduce police response time, deter crime, and reinforce property rights. It also talks about how the government is granting Alberta sheriffs the authority to investigate a wider range of offences. Can you please share what investigations will now be handled by the sheriffs? What are those wider range of offences? Will they be getting additional training, and what's the cost of their training? How long will that training be for? And who did you consult with on this change? Were RCMP, municipalities, First Nations consulted on this?

Page 104: "A review of police service delivery in the province, including further examination of an Alberta Police [force], will help identify opportunities to increase frontline personnel and better address the root causes of crime." I have two or three questions about it. I think you made a comment about increasing RCMP and

civilian positions. If you could provide details on how many RCMP officers and civilian positions will be created.

The second question I have is in relation to the examination of the Alberta provincial police force. The government commissioned a report, a PricewaterhouseCoopers report, which Albertans paid \$2 million for. That report talks about the feasibility of the Alberta provincial police force. It provides options, cost options. According to that report there will be \$366 million in additional cost in terms of transition. It gives two different scenarios ranging between \$734 million to \$754 million.

7:50

Alberta Municipalities, Rural Municipalities of Alberta have opposed this government plan. Since this continues to be a priority and the government is saying that they will further examine it – both of these cost scenarios are way more than what Alberta is paying today – what will it take for the government to listen and abandon this idea? It's quite costly. If we are paying somewhere around \$340 million to \$350 million in contract policing right now, that will cost us \$734 million to \$758 million, excluding \$366 million in transition costs.

Page 104 talks about the ministry's work with Mental Health and Addiction and other partners to support a recovery-oriented system of care. You talked briefly about it, and I do really appreciate the experience you bring as a front-line police officer and also that shift in paradigm, how police need to work as an extension and reflection of the community and reflect the community needs. Again, the question is: what's your ministry's role in establishing, maintaining that system of care?

It also talks about therapeutic units in correctional facilities. How many of these units are already there in Alberta's correctional facilities, and what's the cost of these units? How many employees are working in these units? What's the intake like, what's the caseload like for these units?

Page 104 talks about reducing the impact of regulatory and administrative processes. It talks about, essentially, red tape and then also talks about undertaking a review of permit approvals to seek feasible opportunities to streamline processes and reduce wait times for Albertans. A couple of questions. Can you provide some examples of the work your ministry has undertaken that will count as reducing red tape? Second question: when did that review of permit approvals start? Who is doing it, and will there be a public report? Also, talk generally about what kind of permits we're talking about here.

Page 104, again, talks about reducing unnecessary government oversight to attract investments and grow Alberta business. Can you provide some examples of steps you have taken that will reduce unnecessary government oversight in order to improve access to government services, attract investment, and grow Alberta businesses?

On page 105 of the business plan key objective 1.1 talks about working with municipalities, police services, community-based organizations, and others to improve alignment of mental health and addiction crisis. The last three years have been the worst when it comes to overdose deaths. What specific role is your ministry playing to address that crisis?

Another question relating to this is that it also talks about working with community-based organizations. What is the government plan to support curbing prolific offending? Will the focus in funding be for enforcement only, or will there be opportunity to fund programs and services in conjunction with law enforcement? And how many of such programs have been funded so far?

I have 21 seconds now, 18, 16. I won't be able to finish another question, so I will cede that time, and I will ask my next question in the next set of the time block that I will have.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Over to the minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, I guess, to the hon. member, everyone in the room, and, of course, everybody who's watching us today. First of all, regarding the emergency alerts, yes, I was disrupted as well as everyone in the room. I'm going to ask my assistant deputy minister Stephen Lacroix to come up and speak to everyone about this. I appreciate the fact that he's willing to take the bullet on this; however, all the memes are about me.

Go ahead, Deputy.

Mr. Lacroix: Madam Chair, Assistant Deputy Minister Stephen Lacroix, managing director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. The member's questions were twofold, so I guess I'll take you back from the beginning. It's a bit of a long story, and I'll try to not be too technical.

We embarked on a process by which we would transition to the national alerting system. Months of meetings with a number of stakeholders both at the federal level – this is overseen by the CRTC and Public Safety Canada. There's a national vendor, Pelmorex, or the Weather Network. And those meetings took place.

When we transitioned on March 1, at 1355 to be exact, you will all remember seven alerts. Actually, there were nine because there were another two that were cancellations. The cause was identified within six minutes, actually, very, very quickly. Actually, there was a lot of learning in a very short period of time on that day. But the cause was that one of the vendors had left some old code within the system, and it created a loop. These systems are meant to be unidirectional, so go one way, but this one was pinged against the federal system, which created that loop. We initially thought it was the federal vendor, actually, that was creating the problem. It was another vendor and neither here nor there. It was identified very quickly, and the code was deleted.

To answer your questions, Member, via Madam Chair, the next alert testing would be scheduled for November. What assurances do we have that this will not happen again? Of course, we did not leave it there. We did a detailed investigation as to what went wrong because something did go wrong, but that's, again, why we do those tests. This report has been produced. The CRTC, who oversees the federal program as an arm's-length agency in collaboration with Public Safety Canada, is looking at our data, but from an Alberta perspective there was already another Amber Alert issued locally that did not generate any such looping mechanisms and troubles for the system. The only thing I can say is that I'm confident in the system and its ability to operate now. I'm extremely confident that what happened during the testing is not going to occur again.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Assistant Deputy Minister.

You know, I will say that I've been doing this for eight years, and I've never seen a group of MLAs more interested in an answer to an estimates question in my life. Kudos to all of you who were listening, and thank you again.

You know what? Let me just say this – and not to your question, but I've got to say this on record. Those are wonderful people that are working there. They are trying to protect Albertans. I think everybody here knows that. I know you know that, hon. member. You know, this is why we do the test, right? That is really what it boils down to. Thank you very much.

I'll go on to your next question, which had to do with, you know, government action, police response times, and sheriffs. Yeah. Look, I mean, I was there, just as you were, hon. member, several years ago, even under the previous government, when we had, you know, 2,000 rural Albertans on the doorsteps of the Legislature because of the rural crime problem. Sadly, the stories, when it comes to rural crime, have not necessarily, at least, alleviated to my satisfaction.

8:00

I will tell you that the sheriffs have done a great job in alleviating some of the pressures for the RCMP, especially when it comes to impaired driving. I know that there have probably been well over 2,000 cases, I believe it was, where the sheriffs were able to do the impaired driving calls themselves. Now, under the past protocols, of course, they would have to call in an RCMP member, which would take them away from their regular duties. So we're trying to do what we can to alleviate that pressure.

I've also said very publicly as well that I, quite frankly, don't care what the uniform is. When somebody calls 911, I need somebody to show up, right? I don't think there's anybody here that would disagree. I know it's tough for folks that are living in Calgary and Edmonton and some of the larger municipalities that have their own police services to really understand that, because when they do call 911, the police will show up. But sometimes that tends to not necessarily be the case in rural Alberta, and these are not just one-off anecdotal stories. This was a consistent message that myself and my predecessors had heard time and time again.

So when it comes to the sheriffs, yes. Maybe I might get Marlin to talk about the training and the additional cost to that. But, ultimately, for those who are the highway patrol – I'll just put in a little context. Those who are the highway patrol officers – there are different levels for the sheriffs. You, of course, have the court prisoner security component of it, you do have the ones that do prisoner transfers, and then you have the folks that do the highway patrol. Those highway patrol officers are really the closest thing that we have to police officers while still being peace officers. Now, the training gap on that is actually very, very minimal, but the thought process with that is to augment the current RCMP. So it's not necessarily to take over in any way. What it is is that if the RCMP need backup or if the RCMP have a sheriff who is, you know, a bit closer to a call, great. That sheriff can go, and then the RCMP will then follow suit to finish the call. It's really just augmenting and providing support.

Go ahead, Marlin, if you want to add some further context to that regarding costs and the training gap.

Mr. Degrand: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Member. Really quickly, the training gap is, as the minister articulated, quite small in terms of the enhancement to the sheriffs highway patrol, which will now be moving towards being able to respond in the first instance to support the RCMP in emergency calls. The training gap is probably going to be less than a week of training, and it's really designed to ensure that they mesh operationally with the RCMP's standard operating procedures and to ensure that they have the right equipment and training to deal with the myriad of new types of calls that they might be facing. The cost for that is estimated at about \$0.5 million, or \$500,000, for this year.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you.

I know Marlin can answer the next question better than I did. You talked about increasing RCMP and civilian positions. Marlin, could you just talk a little bit about, I think, the cost to that and how much we're adding to the RCMP?

Mr. Degrand: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, sir. The RCMP budget is increasing by – I’ll have to give you the number. It’s \$25 million or \$26 million – I’ll have to get that for you momentarily – in total. Part of that is, of course, in large part associated to the police funding model reinvestment. The RCMP have committed to creating up to 500 new positions underneath that, of which approximately 240 are designed to be civilian support positions in areas such as analysts, crime prevention specialists, callback units, operational support, data entry, et cetera. It’s been passed to me that about \$25 million is the increase. The reason I say approximately 240 civilian positions out of the approximately 500 that I quoted is that the year 4 expansion is still being worked on in terms of how the RCMP will actually disseminate those positions and the funding that they’re being provided.

Mr. Ellis: Good. Thank you.

You know, I’ll just reiterate again, as I’ve said publicly as well: there is no decision that has been made regarding an Alberta police service. I think, just for the members to be aware of, the contract with the RCMP does run out in 2032.

The federal government, Public Safety Canada, has signal checked on several different occasions regarding their, you know, desire to maybe not continue doing contract policing, and that is why British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia are all looking at alternative models. In British Columbia, for instance, an all-party committee, that consisted of the NDP, that consisted of the Green Party and the Liberals, were all in agreement that they need to start looking at another model. I’ve said this before. It would be negligent on my part, as we get closer to the year 2032, that we do not – we have to explore all options. That’s why we want to empower municipalities.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Over to the member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. At the next opportunity if you can speak to the increased costs that are projected by the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, that would be great.

I think there were a couple of other questions. I hope that you will be able to address them in the next block. If not, I would appreciate it if you undertake to provide answers later on.

The next set of questions is about key objective 1.2, and that talks about increased border supports to keep guns, drugs, and other crimes out of Alberta. The simple question is: can you talk about the steps you have taken, and what does this increased border support mean or look like?

Speaking of guns and gun violence, Calgary had seen 100-plus shootings last year involving guns, and roughly, I believe, 38 to 40 per cent of them were in the northeast quadrant of the city, the area that I represent. I want to ask: what specific steps has the ministry taken or will be taking to address that spike in gun violence?

Key objective 1.3 talks about enhanced authorities. I think you briefly talked about the new power that sheriffs will have, but I think the question I asked was more specifically about what other areas they will be assisting RCMP in. I appreciated the highway patrol example. In that one I guess training is minimal, but some other areas may need more training. If you can touch on that briefly.

Key objective 1.4 talks about accountability of law enforcement and examination of a provincial police service and establishing an independent agency to resolve policing complaints. Two questions relating to that. Last sitting, I believe, we passed legislation to create an independent oversight body. The question I have is: when will that body be fully operational? Any timeline? Have we hired the executive director, whatever the position name was that was listed

in the legislation? If not, when do we expect to hire that person? With respect to the current agency what’s the backlog, the workload like in ASIRT right now?

8:10

Key objective 1.5 talks about municipalities and Indigenous communities exploring a different model of policing. I think that earlier you mentioned some supports, \$5.5 million for Indigenous policing. Have any Indigenous communities signed up to avail that grant and explore their own police service?

On page 105, under initiatives supporting key objectives, \$1.7 million will support increasing surveillance in rural communities through the expansion of the sheriffs investigative unit. I would want you to talk briefly about this sheriffs investigative unit and then about the kind of surveillance that is happening or that will happen and who will oversee this program. I certainly recognize that it’s an important function of your department, but given that the Lethbridge police unlawfully surveilled our MLA colleague Shannon Phillips and given concerns about bias and racism, it’s important to know how that surveillance is conducted, what checks and balances are in place. Also, are you reviewing education and training to ensure that Albertans can have the trust and confidence that no one will be surveilled unlawfully?

On page 105 it says, “In 2023-24, \$2 million will establish a Fugitive Apprehension Sheriff Support Team to locate and remand individuals who are a threat to public safety.” Can you talk about this program? Is it a new program, and is this program related to ensuring that the warrants are dealt with in a timely manner?

On page 106, performance indicator 1(a), violent and property crime rates per 100,000 population. Violent and property crime rates went up in rural Alberta in 2021. When can we expect numbers for 2022? What’s the reason for that increase? What more specific steps are you taking to address it? You already mentioned that back in the day, when we were in government, there were people on the Legislature’s doorstep, but since then violent and property crime rates, unfortunately, have gone up under the watch of this government.

Your first outcome mentions that you’re focused on hate-motivated crime work. I have two or three questions relating to that. Can you please confirm that you are overseeing the hate crime co-ordination unit? If you are overseeing the hate crime co-ordination unit, what is the budget for it? What does the department structure look like?

The second question relating to that is that in September last year the government announced funding for two hate crime studies on Alberta hate crimes and organizations for prevention of violence. Can you tell us about the progress on those studies? What is the status? Will you be sharing them with the public? If so, when? The concern here is that despite these units the violence continues to increase, and that’s a huge concern for racialized communities. In fact, last week leaders from the Muslim community were here at the Legislature, who met both UCP MLAs and the opposition caucus, and that’s one of their concerns. They want targeted efforts to address hate crimes and Islamophobia.

I think I will ask my next set of questions in the next block of time and cede time to you.

The Chair: Oh, sorry. The minister has eight seconds, you said? The minister has no time. Does he not? Is that the end of the segment?

Mr. Roth: That’s it.

The Chair: We go to the government caucus side.

Ms Fir: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister and his team for being here tonight and for the important work that you

do. Certainly, there could be no one better, in my opinion, to hold this ministry than somebody with your background. The job that you did previously and that your colleagues do and everyone does in policing: it can't be stressed enough that it truly is one of the hardest jobs in the world, where they literally are putting their lives on the line every day, yet at the same time is one of the most scrutinized and criticized and critiqued positions. As I clearly recall you saying once in a member's statement, these are the same people that are the most scrutinized and criticized, yet when someone calls them, they're there, and they put their life on the line for Albertans. So thank you for that, for the previous role you had and the role that you're doing right now, and to your team and ministry for being here tonight.

Why don't we start off. If we look at page 91, the \$27 million increase, I know our government has been further utilizing the sheriffs to fill in gaps that are currently in the policing system such as the pilot projects that are currently being undertaken with the Calgary Police Service and Edmonton Police Service. So I've got a few questions on that, the first one being: can you elaborate on how much is going to the Alberta sheriffs?

Mr. Ellis: Sorry, Madam Chair. Out of respect for my colleague in the opposition I should have told you that I'd like block time for the UCP members as well.

Ms Fir: Oh, I forgot to ask.

The Chair: I knew you guys would work it out.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Thank you.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Minister. My apologies. I failed to ask that question. Thank you for jumping in.

Yeah. I'll go through my questions, then. We know that the Alberta sheriffs are being utilized further and hope that you can provide further details on what specific new initiatives they're undertaking with this raise and how many new sheriffs are being recruited due to this increase. We also understand that there are a few different kinds of sheriffs, and we want to know what kinds of sheriffs will be recruited with this additional funding and what impact this will have on public safety in Alberta.

Further, we know it's important that Albertans are supported when they interact with the justice system and our victims of crime. Key objective 2.1 in the business plan is to "continue to improve support for victims of crime, including the implementation of a new victim service delivery model to ensure victims receive the help they need, when and where they need it." I'm hoping that you can highlight the ways your ministry supports victims of crime and perhaps give an overview of how the new victim service delivery model is going to work.

Continuing on or staying with key objective 2.1, hoping that the minister can tell us what funding is allocated to supporting victims. On page 108 of the business plan in the estimates there is funding for capital investments for the victims of crime and public safety fund. Looking for the minister to tell us what those capital investments are.

Again back on page 91 of the fiscal plan, it mentions the creation of an Alberta office to combat trafficking in persons and a centre of excellence. Please expand on how those offices will assist in preventing human trafficking. Page 91 also mentions the creation of an Alberta office to combat trafficking in persons and a centre of excellence. Can the minister expand on how these offices, again, as I mentioned before, will assist in preventing human trafficking?

Those were some of my questions.

Am I able to cede my time to Member Yaseen? Okay. I'll pass it to Member Yaseen to continue.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Madam Chair and thank you, Minister.

Can I go back and forth? Or it's still block?

8:20

The Chair: They said block at the beginning. You can't change it.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

Thank you, Minister. Thank you very much for the work that you do on this difficult issue. I know that you brought in a lot of experience and wisdom into this particular file, and that is much appreciated.

I think you said earlier, in the beginning, a fundamental change – I think you called it a paradigm shift, and I am aware of two things that will certainly qualify it in terms of saying "a paradigm shift." First, to what you said, I think the police will not be seen as an arm of the state but as an extension or reflection of the community they serve. Second, I also heard some communication that police would wear body armour, which would be good for police as well as people they are trying to protect and help. Though there may be other things there as well, I am so thankful for you for making it happen like that. I think police, you know – for the most part of society and particularly newcomers it's very important that they see police as part of them, a reflection of them, friendly police. So thank you for that, and thank you also to the people who help you, beside and behind you, to do the job that you're doing.

Now I want to focus on key objective 1.1, ensuring recovery is a central component of effective community policing and corrections, especially when we're talking about the issues like mental health and addictions as some of the causes of social disorder. So in that context, can you please elaborate or provide us with a few examples of how this new recovery-oriented system of care will be incorporated into police response? As well, what has the response been to Alberta investing more in mental health and addictions support in order to address some of the challenges with social disorder? I will move on to further on the same line. Thank you. I'm pretty sure you will get an answer on that. I am pleased to see that you would also tell me: how much funding has been allocated to some of these initiatives?

Now I will move on to a different subject a little bit. On page 179 of government estimates documents under investment it shows more than tripling the investment in public security over the last year. I think it's going up from \$695 million to \$2,695 million. Huge increase there. Can you please expand on what investments are planned with this huge increase?

That is pretty well what I had, Minister, for you. Thank you very much.

I will pass on my remaining time to MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Member. Chair, through you to the minister, the fiscal plan lays out that \$709 million will be going to public security to fund contract policing and a few other essential aspects for public safety. Can you please elaborate on just how much is going to contract policing in Alberta?

Also, Minister, thank you for all that you do. You do a really good job, and I know your previous experience as a police officer – we're very lucky to have you in this position.

Do we know how the additional investment in increasing public safety by that – how many RCMP officers can be hired?

Also, on page 105 of the business plan the first initiative supporting the key objectives states that up to \$53.2 million will be dedicated, primarily through Alberta law enforcement response teams, or ALERT, to deal with and investigate organized crime, child pornography, gun violence, drug, and – something very dear to myself – human trafficking, domestic violence, and prolific

offenders. Minister, I'm not sure how many Albertans know about ALERT, but could you talk a little bit about how ALERT functions and how it keeps Albertans safe? Also, what does that \$53.2 million go towards? Is it staffing? If so, how many staff?

Chair, through you to the minister, on page 105 of the business plan I also see that \$2.4 million is dedicated to creating a new firearms investigative unit within ALERT to combat firearms violence.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now back to the minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much to my colleagues, and thank you again to the chair. I guess we'll first go to hon. Madam Fir. You were talking about the Alberta sheriffs and, of course, public safety. I think we will be – I should say: promise we'll invest an additional \$27.3 million in Alberta sheriffs to ensure rural communities, courthouses, correctional facilities have access to law enforcement resources Albertans need.

And let me be clear. Boy, I tell you. You know, the Alberta sheriffs: I would argue that they were running a very, very tight ship. I certainly appreciate all the wonderful men and women that go to work every day. They put on their uniform, and they go and they do their job. They provide safety within the courthouses. They do prisoner transfers. Talking to somebody who has done prisoner transfer in the past, in one of my previous occupations, I can tell you that that can be a dangerous job, so kudos to the wonderful men and women that are out doing that every day and also for the folks in the highway patrol.

You know, a lot of people don't realize this, but in highway patrol doing a traffic stop can actually be one of the most dangerous jobs that you do because it's known as an unknown threat, an unknown risk. You don't know who you're going to be stopping. Sure, in the vast majority of cases you're stopping a citizen that may or may not be warranted of a ticket, the ticket is written, and then that really is the extent of the day. But if you've ever stopped somebody on Deerfoot Trail, if you ever stop somebody on highway 2, I can tell you that there is no more scary experience than having somebody whizzing by at 100-plus kilometres an hour.

When I was talking earlier about the unknown threat, you know, on those rare occasions – and, unfortunately, it has happened in this province – where you have dealt with somebody who is, we'll say, less than desirable, who has ill intent, unfortunately, officers have been hurt in the past. So that makes it one of the more dangerous jobs that is out there, and we want to make sure those officers are equipped – okay? – that they have the proper equipment, whether it be the tools on the tool belt, whether it be the radios, whether it be the cars that they drive.

You know, when I first took over the portfolio and when speaking with my executive director of law enforcement, when speaking with the chief of the sheriffs, Farooq Sheikh – just a wonderful man. Let me just say this. We should be very honoured to have him as the chief of the sheriffs – and let me be clear on this – the first Muslim chief in all of Canada. I think that Alberta should be recognized for that hiring and the great work that that wonderful officer does. I've certainly had plenty of conversations with him, and I can tell you that there's no more compassionate man who believes in supporting his troops to make sure that they are equipped with the tools that they need to go out and do their job. I just have to say the kudos to the work that he does with all of his deputies to make sure that the Alberta sheriffs can succeed in their role within Alberta. But that doesn't mean that there aren't risks involved.

Let me add here that Budget 2023 will add 245 additional FTE sheriff positions. Let me just say this. The sheriffs have had their

challenges, like any other organization, and I would say that with the leadership of Chief Sheikh – you know, he's been trying to fill those gaps. He's making it a warm and welcoming place to be. He's improved, I would say, the hiring processes that they have within the sheriffs, and he is hiring top-notch and quality people that are out there to protect not only the courthouses to do prisoner transfers but, obviously, to go out there on the highways. Additionally, as we have noted here, part of the reason why we're hiring the additional sheriffs is to go and back up our RCMP members in rural Alberta, who definitely need that help.

8:30

Then, of course, as we have seen and, obviously, as this committee is fully aware, you know, we've had social and civil disorder in our two largest municipalities. I would say that if there was any complaint that I have received regarding the sheriffs who are deployed in Calgary and Edmonton, it is that it's not enough, and we need more. That has really been the feedback that I have been getting. I will say that, working with my assistant deputy minister, director of law enforcement along with Chief Sheikh, certainly, we're looking at exploring all options to make sure that the citizens of Calgary and the citizens of Edmonton are protected.

I have said this before, and I will continue to say this: there are people that – you know, we want to make sure, should I say, that we protect those who are most vulnerable. I don't think anybody disputes that. But we can also have the balance while protecting the public as well. That's fair, right? That's why we're equipping these officers with the necessary tools. When they do engage – and I'm talking about whether it be the sheriffs, whether it be the Edmonton Police Service, the Calgary Police Service – we're making sure that they are equipped with the tools so that when they come across somebody who is a vulnerable person who has not committed a crime, they have those tools in order to direct that individual to get them the help that they need.

I know one of your colleagues, I believe – and I'm jumping slightly – asked a little bit about that: what are those tools which are part of that recovery-oriented system of care? Well, you know, one of the things that we created was, of course – when I say "we," the government, should I say – the HealthIM, which is a tool that the law enforcement community uses. What it does is that it's an app that the officer has the ability to access, and it kind of gives a bit of a preliminary idea as to how to deal with somebody who might be experiencing actual severe mental health illness, as an example. There's a series of questions that is asked, and they fill in the blanks sort of thing. Then it may say, "Take them directly to the hospital; that person may be posing a danger to themselves or others," and therefore the person is then taken to the hospital under what's known as a mental health warrant form 10, or it may notify that officer that there may be some alternative places – maybe a mental health facility, maybe an addictions facility, maybe some sort of place that may be better suited for that individual – to, again, help direct that person. I'll just say this. From talking to some of those officers, if it means driving that person to get the help that they need, they will do that.

You know, I've seen that with our public safety task force teams. I was out there fairly recently in Edmonton. I walked the walk. I walked the beat with them, and I tell you what, those men and women: I've never seen a more compassionate group of people. When they were engaging with those individuals, it was not about – 15, 20 years ago when I was policing the streets and there were no resources available for people, it was always about: move them along; move them along. But where do you move them to? That's not what it was about. It was engaging on a real personal level with the people that are vulnerable, that need that help and then directing

them to the necessary resources, whatever that is going to look like, so that they can actually get the help that they need.

One of your colleagues talked a bit about the body cameras. Let me just be very clear on this. Body cameras, although there's no – you know, we'll say it's part of the overall public safety, right? The paradigm shift that my colleague was talking about here in policing: it's really about public trust, the accountability, the transparency. I can tell you that I had an opportunity to tour the Calgary facility – Calgary is the first in Alberta to have done the body cameras – and the level of professionalism, the transparency – and it works on both sides, right? It ensures that the police officers are conducting themselves at a level of professionalism which is the expectation that all Calgarians and, quite frankly, all Albertans should have on professionals who are out there serving the public in that paradigm shift that we talked about. But, also, it goes both ways, right? It protects that officer as well against any false accusations. To me, it's a bit of a win-win for everybody, and I would say that there have been a number of complaints that actually have been resolved as a result of the body-worn cameras.

I can see I have 12 seconds, so I'm going to do what my friend here did and kind of talk for a few moments. I'm happy to talk further about some of the answers, some of the other questions. I know I'd love to talk about ALERT and their function as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll take our five-minute break now.

[The committee adjourned from 8:36 p.m. to 8:41 p.m.]

The Chair: Welcome back, members.

We will return to the Official Opposition.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and with your permission . . .

Mr. Ellis: Madam Chair, could we go back and forth?

The Chair: Pardon me?

Mr. Ellis: Could we go back and forth?

The Chair: If the member elects to do that, sure.

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister. I really appreciate it. You talked about the Alberta sheriff chief, Farooq Sheikh, and how he comes from the Muslim community. I would say that the Muslim community has been around for over 100 years in Alberta, and it's a bit late that it took so long. Police certainly will have a lot to catch up to be the reflection of the community that they serve, that you are envisioning.

With that, I will move on to the questions about the hate crime unit, whether your ministry is overseeing it, and what's the budget for it and what the structure looks like.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Where's the – ah. Wonderful. Great. All right. Thank you. I mean, hate is not tolerated. I don't tolerate it. You know, when I was in the police service, we had a hate crimes unit within the Calgary Police Service. I'm pretty sure other organizations have it as well. Certainly, they provide oversight and make sure that hate crimes are actually identified and dealt with appropriately.

I know, Member, you want to probably talk about the hate crimes co-ordination unit. Is that correct?

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: One of the things that I learned – it certainly falls under the intelligence bureau within the public security division, mandated to deliver services that reduce and respond to promote recovery from hate-themed occurrences throughout Alberta. I will just add and certainly have my director of law enforcement talk about this further. You know, what I'm enjoying about this is that it's an additional resource no matter where you are in Alberta. It doesn't matter if you're in a remote rural area that has few RCMP officers or if you are in one of the larger municipalities. It provides a bit of a resource so that if officers on the ground have questions that something might be related to or they think might be a hate crime, this unit will be able to intervene and make sure that if something is a hate crime, it's actually properly addressed. Let me just add – sorry.

Oh, yes. I want to talk about the Alberta security infrastructure program grant. I think that's very, very important as well. You know, I've actually been very fortunate enough to sign off on many of these that are ensuring security is actually provided to many organizations – some are not-for-profit organizations, there are many religious organizations, many vulnerable organizations that have been victims of hate in the past – to ensure that money is provided to them so that they can have their security systems really top notch with security cameras, fencing, et cetera, et cetera.

Anyway, I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Sabir: That's an important program, and certainly I appreciate the government providing those grants. However, Minister, the problem is that many of those incidents of hate crime attacks on racialized women – Muslim, Black, hijab-wearing women – occurred not at prayer places but outside of our malls, at bus stops, on our streets. What specifically does your ministry plan to do about that?

As I mentioned, the National Council of Canadian Muslims were here with many Muslim community leaders from across the province, and they also want specific action to address that violence.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I mean, we can talk about some specific grants. You know, we talked about that grant, the ASIP grant, which basically, I think, has gone from \$2 million up to \$5 million a year.

But, really, you asked specifically – yeah, it's the paradigm shift that we're talking about, right? It's the fact that police cannot be seen as the arm of the state. They must be seen as the extension of the community and the reflection of that community. It is about understanding that hate cannot be tolerated.

You know, there are a lot of great examples. You have to excuse my bias here, but I would argue that the Calgary Police Service at a certain point in its history was probably one of the most progressive police services not just in Canada but in North America. Not only did we have a hate crimes unit, but we had units within the Calgary Police Service that were specifically liaising with all cultures, right? We had officers that were specifically for the African culture. There was an LGBTQ liaison officer. There was a Caribbean liaison officer, and I could probably go on and on and on. What is the reason for that?

Well, I can tell you what the reason is for that, right? It was one of your colleagues on the other side of the table that I thought was very good at pointing this out. It's because in some of these other jurisdictions around the world the police are the arm of the state. The police are in some cases corrupt. When people come to Canada, they need to understand that that's not the case here, that the police are here to help them, that the police are your friend, that the police are going to provide you and your family protection and service or whatever the case may be. So they had specific liaison officers that

went out in the community, engaged with that community, to let them know that.

Let me just say this. If there are people out there – and you and I and we all know that there are – that do spew hate, that do commit crimes, they need to be held accountable. I trust that the law enforcement communities, no matter where they are in Alberta, are going to do their job and hold those people accountable.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I have had the opportunity to work with the diversity unit in the Calgary Police Service. Once we had a town hall about drugs and gang violence. Last week, I believe, they were at Genesis Centre with their career fair to improve representation. That's really good and important.

Outcome 1 talks about a recovery-oriented system of care in response to addiction, homelessness, and public safety issues in Edmonton and Calgary. Two quick questions. Where are we with the implementation of this, and what about all the other places in the province? The same issues are present in Red Deer and Lethbridge and other communities.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. Are you referring to the ROSC system as a whole? Or are you referring to – sorry. Pardon me.

Mr. Sabir: It's outcome 1 that mentions that the ministry is implementing a recovery-oriented system of care in response to addiction, homelessness, and public safety issues in Edmonton and Calgary.

Mr. Ellis: Sure.

Mr. Sabir: Where is that implementation at, and what about other parts of the province?

Mr. Ellis: Boy, I could probably talk for several hours on this, but I won't. Look, we're halfway through what is considered to be an eight-year plan in the recovery-oriented system of care. You know, if you can just give me a little bit of leeway here.

8:50

This is a transformational change as well. Again, there are many jurisdictions throughout North America that really just, you know – and we talked about this momentarily. There was a grant – and sometimes grants work, and sometimes grants don't work – but there was no real system of care that has been in place. That's what the ROSC system is. It's an actual system of care whereby somebody enters in the system, they go on a journey of wellness, and then they exit the system in a better place than from which they started.

The police, you know, as it relates to, obviously, this ministry, have to be one of the first points of contact when it comes to that, and in that point of contact that person may enter the system. Now, in some cases they may have a severe opioid addiction, just as an example, right? That's why we created the pathways such as the virtual opioid dependency program, the digital overdose response system. Let me talk to you. I know I've got only a few seconds here, but the digital overdose response system: if somebody – although I don't want anybody to use drugs; all drugs I consider to be dangerous. But if you do choose, that DORS program is an app that has a timer on there to make sure that if you do OD – you know what? – the timer will get . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back over to the member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Chair. Through you to the minister, on page 105 of the business plan I also see that \$2.4

million is dedicated to creating a new firearms investigative unit within ALERT to combat firearms violence. Can you discuss how the creation of the unit will better tackle gun violence? And what is the funding being used for in terms of staffing and setting up the unit? Thirdly, why is the unit needed? How will it address gun violence?

Pardon me, Chair. Are we doing back and forth?

Mr. Ellis: Back and forth.

The Chair: Back and forth, yes.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Member. Thank you very much for the question. This is actually a very important unit that is being created. You know, one of the things that the Alberta law enforcement response teams informed me of, which I thought was very, very important – I think anybody who's listening should also understand this. It's actually not lawful gun owners that are committing these violent crimes; it's guns that are being brought across the border or actually stolen from lawful gun owners.

Now, one of the interesting things that I learned as well from the wonderful folks at the Alberta law enforcement response teams is that in many of these cases some of these guns are being used in multiple offences and not only in multiple offences; throughout multiple jurisdictions. Creating a world-class firearms unit that has the technology to not only understand and trace these guns but also work collaboratively with other jurisdictions right across Canada so that when a firearm is used – and, you know, in some of these jurisdictions they're obviously working and networking together. It can and has been determined that some of these firearms are actually being used in multiple violent offences right across Canada.

When the technology from the firearms unit, which is going to be created or, I know, has been created, but it's going to go, we'll say, to the next level, that information can be used in laying multiple charges throughout Canada or, should I say, other jurisdictions against one offender when and if that person is indeed caught. This is, again, a game changer when it comes to firearms offences.

I just want to ask my director of law enforcement if you can talk to the specifics about the cost of the unit and the hiring and stuff like that.

Mr. Degrand: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member. The unit itself is going to be funded through ALERT, through a grant for \$2.4 million. That will allow us to create two teams, one in the north and one in the south, of approximately eight to nine members, depending on the final structure that's determined by the chiefs of police.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Minister.

Chair, through you to the minister, looking at the performance metric 2(a) on page 107 of the business plan, which measures the average days to decisions for applications to the victims of crime assistance program, in 2023-2024 the target is 49 days, in 2024-2025 it's reduced to 40, and by the next year it is further reduced to 30. Can the minister highlight how the government plans to meet these targets?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I think this goes hand in hand with the member opposite when he was asking about this as well. I think for clarification's sake for all municipalities – and believe me, I have spoken to a good portion of municipalities as well across this province. You know, we want to provide consistency, right? And let me just be very clear. There are some municipalities in Alberta that had no victims of crime. I mean, again, when you're in the city

of Calgary or the city of Edmonton, I think sometimes you take these units for granted because although some of them are run by paid employees, some are run by volunteers. I was very fortunate when I was in the Calgary Police Service. I just made one simple phone call, and, boom, somebody was out there. But I can tell you that there are a number of jurisdictions throughout Alberta – I think the number is actually six – that had zero victims' services. That was part of the problem, right? It's not a bad thing that we're providing consistency throughout the province in alleviating some of the administrative pressures that are on some of these jurisdictions.

When it comes to a financial benefits program, cash acknowledgements, yeah, medical info, attending physicians, counselling, look, I mean, I'll just say this. You know, maybe it's more of me just talking from the heart and talking from some of the conversations that I've had. I can tell you that when I've talked to many victims' services all throughout this province, I can tell you the wonderful things that each and every one of them does. Let me be very crystal clear. When you're a victim of crime, that does not mean that you are not a victim of tragedy. I have to be very crystal clear on that because I think that there was some misinformation that was out there that somehow victims of tragedy would not be covered. I can tell you from first-hand experience, having been to fatalities at car accidents, having been that person that knocks on somebody's door, that even if they're not a, quote, unquote, victim of a crime, for a victim of a tragedy it is equally important to make sure that those individuals are getting the help that they need. Let me be very crystal clear. That has not changed. Those people who are victims of crime but also victims of tragedy are going to get the help that they need with the compassionate people that are out in the field around Alberta helping people. The people that are victims of tragedy: I can tell you right now from first-hand experience that we have to make sure and this government is making sure that those people are supported.

Thank you.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Minister. Chair, through you to the minister, it's really great to hear all about the human side today from you. I have great respect for anybody who has laid down their life for our safety. I just wanted to add that.

Minister, if you wouldn't mind, please, I'm going to repeat the question. On page 105 of the business plan the first initiative supporting key objectives states that up to \$53.2 million will be dedicated primarily through the Alberta law enforcement response teams, or ALERT, to deal with and investigate organized crime, child pornography, gun violence, drug and human trafficking, domestic violence, and prolific offenders. If you could talk a little bit more about how Albertans can learn about what ALERT is, and if you could talk about the functions of it and how it keeps Albertans safe.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Well, thank you, Member. Of course, we've increased the funding to ALERT. I'm trying to look for the exact number that we increased the funding for ALERT by. Maybe somebody can get that number to me, if you don't mind. Look, ALERT, the Alberta law enforcement response team, I can tell you – oh, thank you very much. A \$20.2 million net increase. Yes, so quite considerably.

Obviously, you know, they do deal with child pornography. Having known a few of the detectives that work in that unit, I can tell you that is – boy, hats off to them for doing what they do to protect children in Alberta. I'm not entirely sure that there's a person in this room, including myself, that would be able to do that job. Seeing the tragedy that they see each and every day when

they're doing that job is something that, I tell you, just brings an absolute emotional tear to my heart.

9:00

That being said, ALERT has a number of different roles, obviously investigative roles. I think this is going on to the previous member's question as well. There is a lot of gun and gang violence in different areas, not just in Edmonton but in Calgary and, as the previous member indicated, in northeast Calgary as well. I made an announcement fairly recently that made sure that members of ALERT were going to work collaboratively with the Calgary Police Service to let gang members know, in Calgary specifically and, I know, to the member's credit, in northeast Calgary specifically, that we are not going to tolerate this type of behaviour. We are not going to tolerate open gunfire in the streets and putting children and families at risk.

I will say this. If you are a gang member and you're choosing to put people at risk, you will be arrested, and if the system itself chooses to let you out and you continue to commit crime, you will be arrested again, up until the point you choose to stop that behaviour or you choose to leave this province, because that is something that we are not going to tolerate in this province.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

We'll go back over to the Official Opposition.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Just a quick question on 2.1, support for victims of crime. I'm running short of time, so I will make it really simple and concise. After the government brought forward changes with Bill 16 in 2020, those changes resulted in reduced services for victims of crime. In 2021-22 I remember that the estimate for this fund was \$62 million, and on March 10, 2021, I asked about how much was specifically spent on supports for victims of crime. Then Brad Wells, senior finance officer, responded on behalf of the minister and said: \$5 million. That's a fair bit of reduction in services.

A related question. Indigenous communities' victim services organizations have raised concerns about the redesign. Have they shared their concerns with you, and how are you going to address those concerns?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Well, certainly, there are communities that have shared concerns. I will let you know that when I do have conversations with those communities, their biggest concern, actually, Member, has to do with the concern that there are people that might not be covered under victims of tragedy. That has really been their biggest concern. So when I alleviate their concern, there is actually an understanding from the vast majority of communities that I have spoken to, that really understand that, yeah, we need to have consistency throughout the province, we need to make sure that we alleviate some of the administrative pressures, and we need to make sure that people are receiving the services to equal or better than what they already have been receiving.

Let me just say this. I'm going to ask Alex to answer this, because this is really his domain.

Mr. Sabir: If I may.

Mr. Ellis: Oh, sure. Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: Just one little addition to it: how much will go to victim services support directly from this budget? How much money? How much money will go to other initiatives?

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Minister, thank you, Member, and thank you, Chair. The entirety of the victims of crime and public safety fund is going towards services and supports for victims, so that is a total of \$39.5 million for the term of 2023-2026. There are no other initiatives outside of services and supports for victims that are funded through the fund at this point.

The other key tenet that was a concern of stakeholders when they're asking about the changes to the redesign is that victim service workers will no longer be community based, and that's also incorrect. Front-line caseworkers will remain within their communities, with their volunteer advocates in their communities, and continue to work from the RCMP detachments within those communities, so there is no reduction in services.

Mr. Sabir: I think that needs to be communicated, because there is concern that I'm hearing about that.

Mr. Ellis: I appreciate that, and that is communicated when I have these conversations on a one-to-one with these communities. Yeah. Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Outcome 2, that Albertans are supported in their interactions with the justice system. In this regard the question I have is whether the government is considering additional funding to support trauma-informed programming in conjunction with remote-testimony technology so that Albertans' interactions with the justice system are supported.

Mr. Ellis: This, again – sorry, Member; I just want to be clear here – as it relates to victims of tragedy . . .

Mr. Sabir: As it relates to Albertans' interactions with the justice system so that there are some funds for trauma-informed programming along with remote-testimony technology.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Well, I'll just say that this is a good question. I'll ask the members here to get you – unless anybody has got an answer off the top of their head?

We'll get back to you. I heard it might be related to Justice, but we'll seek clarification for you on that.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Two quick questions relating to disaster risk and response, 3.2. One is that – and that's coming straight from stakeholders – there are some cross-border challenges with respect to equipment and personnel travelling across provincial boundaries in order to support disaster recovery. This includes credential recognition for professions like medics and nurses who are licensed at the provincial level. This is something that needs to be discussed between provinces. Have you heard about this, and are you doing anything about it?

The second related question. Preventing disasters would include things like flood mitigation, changing building codes, and all that. Are there any dollars going towards prevention? For instance, the northeast hailstorm happened. There was some program to build hail-resistant roofing that will reduce the insurance costs in the long run. Any plans for the prevention piece of that?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I'll certainly ask ADM Stephen Lacroix to just go to the podium for a moment here. You know, look, the government of Alberta maintains a \$1.5 billion contingency fund for disasters and emergencies. When disasters occur, Public Safety can request funding from Treasury Board for disaster recovery programs.

I'll just further add that I have had a meeting with Minister Bill Blair, and despite what anybody in the room might think, actually we do get along quite well, probably because we're both law

enforcement officers. I can tell you that we've had a wonderful conversation. We both are in agreement that for anybody who is a victim of an emergency or a victim of a tragedy as a result of an emergency, both levels of government – or, should I say, all levels of government – need to be involved in order to make sure that we meet the needs of the community.

Mr. Sabir: Another quick addition to the same question. Now that our emergencies are prolonged kinds of events like extreme cold weather, extreme heat domes, do we have any plans or resources to address those kinds of public safety emergency events?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I'll pass it over to the assistant deputy minister.

Mr. Lacroix: Madam Chair, Minister, hon. member, I'll try to unpack your questions there.

The Chair: Mr. Lacroix, could you kindly introduce yourself for the record?

Mr. Lacroix: Sorry, Madam Chair. Yeah. Steve Lacroix, emergency – sorry – managing director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. I should know where I work.

Your first question was pertaining to cross-jurisdictional accreditation for folks. It's the first time I hear of that. I'd be more than willing to look at it if we have actual instances where that happened. What I could share, though, is that going as far back as, for example, the 2016 regional municipality of Wood Buffalo fires, we accepted a large number of external workers to pile on to the emergency management response, and as recently as last year Alberta sent a number of emergency management specialists to British Columbia with no issues whatsoever. It might be related to accreditation for specific professions, I would guess.

9:10

Mr. Sabir: Medics and nurses.

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. Exactly.

Again, going back to during the pandemic, we did accept nurses from other jurisdictions into this province, and no accreditation issues were relayed to me.

I forget the second part.

Mr. Sabir: The prevention program; for instance, hail-resistant roofing and prolonged emergencies like cold weather, heat domes, those things.

Mr. Lacroix: Thank you, Madam Chair. With all due respect, you know, I don't make policy. I implement the policy that we operate within.

In terms of the hailstorm, while I am fully empathetic to the folks who incurred, if my memory is correct, \$1.2 billion in insurable damages, the current guidelines that are in place do not allow Public Safety and Emergency Services and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency to disburse funds against what is essentially an insurable peril. That is the individual homeowner's or tenant's responsibility to fulfill.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Lacroix: In terms of large-scale disasters or events like heat domes . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll return back over to the government caucus. Shared or block?

Mr. Smith: Whatever the minister would like. Can we go back and forth?

Mr. Ellis: We can do back and forth. That's fine. Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I want to start by looking at the fact that my constituents have been very concerned about rural crime. I know the minister is aware of that. I want to refer to key objective 1.3 in the business plan, which is to enhance the authorities, role, and numbers of provincial sheriffs to support the RCMP in addressing rural crime.

I'm going to just sort of set the stage here by saying that I want to address rural crime right now. I know that governments can make a difference on rural crime. If nothing else, I'll give the NDP kudos for when they were in power and we addressed prepaying for gas. I believe the last incident where a death occurred was actually in my constituency, in the town of Thorsby. I believe that governments can make a difference, and I think one of the differences that I am aware of in rural areas is – you've talked about policing being an extension of the community. I believe that in a rural community it really is. We go to church with, we play with, and we do business with our police services. I know one of the RCMP in my church, two of the sheriffs in my constituency I taught, and we know them very well. They are an extension of our community.

We know that they're doing their best. We know that they're working hard, and they're faced with situations where sometimes there are not enough police to cover vast areas of my constituency and the province. We know that sometimes it takes as much as 45 minutes to an hour to get to a place. We know that there are unknown threats that they face every day. I can remember being stopped because I had a light out on my licence plate. A sheriff stopped me, and it was in the middle of the night. He had no idea whether he was coming up to somebody that was a danger or just a very Joe Average citizen like myself. And I thought: boy, that takes a lot of bravery, to walk up to a vehicle in the middle of the night like that. Unknown threats: yeah, they've got them by the bucketful.

I think that in a rural community we know our officers, we know our police services, we know the kinds of threats that they're facing, and we know very well what they're having to deal with. You know, for instance, I have had a constituent come into my office and talk about the fact that he had a business in town. He lived on an acreage, and his parents were out on a farm, and he had to do this three times a night. He would do a circuit to make sure that everything was okay. One night he actually took off after a guy who rammed his truck coming out of his parents' farmyard, and they did a big chase like you'd see in the movies. When he finally pushed him into the ditch and the police finally came there, they opened up the door and saw an AK-47. That's what rural crime is looking like these days.

So with all of that, I ask two questions. Can the minister talk a bit about what his ministry is doing to address rural crime, including the expanding of the role of sheriffs? Secondly, specifically on response times in rural communities, can the minister provide us with an update on how rural communities and police response times – how you've addressed police response times over the last few years?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Member. A number of things I'd like to unpack there, right? I'll just start off with simply, you know, \$5.8 million to fund the safer communities and neighbourhoods program to address problem properties and drug houses in conjunction – of course, we have the SCAN unit within ALERT that goes out and does their job; \$1.7 million will support increasing surveillance in rural communities through the expansion of the sheriffs investigative unit; \$2 million will establish a fugitive apprehension team.

I can get into that in a moment, but let me just say this. In the justice system I know there are a lot of folks, no different than when I was in Mental Health and Addiction, that think that there are very simple answers to very, very complex problems: if only we do this, then it will all be solved; if only we do that, then everything will be solved. I would just say this, that in the justice system, which can be and is very complex, there's a lot of subjectivity to it when it comes to even somebody being arrested.

If you understand the scale here, police officers have what is known as reasonable suspicion. That kind of allows me to look at you and say: wait a second, I have some reasonable suspicion that gives me some grounds. But in order for them to make the arrest, they need what is known as reasonable and probable grounds, okay? Then the Crown has a different bar. The Crown will have what is known as likelihood of prosecution, so they have to look at it from that lens. Then the judges in the judicial system have to look at it from proof beyond a reasonable doubt, right?

So we have this scale in the justice system, but we all have roles to play is the point that I'm trying to say to you, right? The officers need to do their job. They need to put together, they need to do good reports, they need to make sure that they have what is known as a show cause report, as an example. The Crown: no different. They have a job to do as well. They have to make sure that they're looking at it through the lens of likelihood of prosecution. They have to look at it when they're doing what is known as a bail hearing, a show cause hearing, show cause why somebody should be released or detained in custody. Obviously, the judge is ensuring that the person or persons, I should say, when charged – that the police have done their job, the prosecutors have done their job. Then, hopefully, they make a decision that is in the best interest of multiple different factors, whether it be the accused, whether it be the victims, whether it be the public.

Also who has a role in this is the federal government. The federal government has a role in this as it pertains to the Criminal Code and what is and is not in the Criminal Code. There has been – I know the member opposite had talked a little bit about violent crimes. We are seeing this throughout Canada, where we are seeing violent repeat offenders who are being released into the streets to commit more violent crimes and, essentially, preying on the public. Well, you know, quite simply, not that long ago the Minister of Justice and myself were summoned, along with every other public safety minister and justice minister in Canada, to Ottawa to discuss the emergency that is the bail hearing system itself, right? My point is that for you in rural Alberta and those police officers who become frustrated, who go, "Well, I just arrested somebody on a very, very serious offence, yet that person was released only a very short time later," I will say this. Credit, we'll say, to the federal government for recognizing that they made a serious error. The serious error was Bill C-75. Bill C-75 essentially lowered the bar when it comes to bail hearings.

So what does that mean? That means that in the past when we had to use what is known as primary, secondary, and tertiary grounds, so the likelihood that somebody is going to attend court, the likelihood that somebody is going to reoffend – would the administration of justice fall into disrepute if that person was to be released? That bar has essentially been lowered, so you are seeing violent criminal offenders who are being released into the streets. Our position, as far as the Alberta government was concerned, was essentially that unless immediate – immediate – and substantial action is to be taken, then we will demand that Bill C-75 be repealed.

Now, you know, I will say this. I had a good conversation, as did every other minister in the province, with the federal government. We have to believe . . .

9:20

The Chair: Sorry. Pardon me, Minister. You only get to speak for a maximum of five minutes.

It now goes back to the government side.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Sure.

Mr. Smith: Well, thank you. I'd actually like to hear you end this, so if you could continue on with your answer, that would be helpful.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, and thank you, Chair. I will just say that, you know, the federal government made a commitment to all of us ministers and Canadians – right? – that they will take – I mean, obviously, it's no different than a bill that we have here in the Alberta government. They can't tell us what's in the bill, but they've indicated that they have our commitment that substantive changes are going to be made in an upcoming bill and that they would be doing it – obviously, they can't give an exact timeline, and I respect that – as soon as possible.

At this time I will be, on good faith, optimistic that these changes will indeed occur and that this revolving door – and I would just say that, you know, we could make arguments. I talked about the role of every level here within the justice system, but in this case, when we're talking about violent criminal offenders, actual substantive changes are going to be made to make sure that these folks are not going to be released to prey upon Canadians and, specifically, Albertans.

Mr. Smith: Thank you for your answer.

I guess with the remaining time here, we've had conversations about this in my constituency. Next Tuesday I will be back in my constituency as well.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.

We'll head over to the Official Opposition.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

The Chair: Is it block or share? We need to check every time.

Mr. Ellis: We will share.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister. You described the different roles that officers play, what roles Crown prosecutors play. There is a charge assessment system described on page 24 of the 2023-2026 government of Alberta strategic plan. Certainly, it impacts the role that police officers play. To me, what it seems like is that now when a police officer stops somebody, they will now need to consult a Crown prosecutor, who will second-judge the officer's judgment and see whether there is a likelihood of conviction. It may help us reduce the caseload from the court system but may not necessarily help us reduce the crime.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Look, I mean, again, my expectation for law enforcement officers is that they are professionals. Obviously, the announcement I made the other day, which – obviously, I can't give you the exact timeline because I don't know the exact timeline yet, but I'll just say that sooner rather than later we'll have these body cameras, that add a level of accountability and transparency and all that sort of stuff.

But just remember that the threshold of that police officer is reasonable and probable grounds. If the threshold of reasonable and probable grounds is made, then obviously – but let me just add one thing. There was always a check-balance system. I don't think people realize this. When I used to work at the arrest processing unit or when I was a supervisor, even when there were promises to

appear or appearance notices, it was never just, you know, the officer laid the charge and that's it and there was nothing to it. There was always a level of oversight to make sure – and let me be very clear on this – that the officer met not only the reasonable and probable grounds, that they had evidence to support the charge, but also that there were no Charter issues, right? You have to be lawfully placed, right?

I can tell you that there are officers – look, this is no secret. All throughout Canada there are officers that – you know, spidey sense or a hunch is not good enough, right? You have to be lawfully placed. So there are checks and balances out there.

Mr. Sabir: I mean, the checks and balances that were there before: there was the police senior officer supervising the arresting officer. Now there's a new layer that now the officer will check with the Crown. Do you see any issues with that?

Mr. Ellis: Well, look, I think there comes a point in time where you have to let the police police and the prosecutors prosecute and the judges do what they do, right? I appreciate that there are people that are trying to, you know, provide extra layers, we'll say, within the system and stuff like that . . .

Mr. Sabir: No. That's in government's strategic plan . . .

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: . . . that they're moving ahead with this.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah, but you never let me finish. I think that we have to allow this initiative to see if it's actually going to work, right? You know, as far as I'm concerned, we'll see; we'll see if it's going to be successful, and we'll see if it's going to work. I mean, all I can say right now, Member, is that I'm optimistic. I mean, any sort of oversight, I would say, is valuable, right? The Crown prosecutor has a role to play in this as well. We'll see. I mean, look, let me say this regarding bail hearings, for instance. When I was a bail hearing officer, we had a very good reputation as far as making sure that we were able to do that job effectively, efficiently, hold people to account who needed to be held to account. The government transitioned to having Crown prosecutors do it. Is it successful? Maybe. Did it mean that the other system was unsuccessful? Not necessarily.

Mr. Sabir: Moving on to . . .

The Chair: Excuse me, Minister and Member. Please remember to direct the conversation through the chair. I appreciate it's a cordial conversation and don't want to interrupt that, but if the conversation, please, could run through the chair.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. Through you, line item 1.3 – I'm on to estimates now – says that the financial services budget was \$6.6 million in 2022. It's going up to \$23 million. Why is there such a huge increase?

Mr. Ellis: We'll go over to Brad. Sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister, and through the chair: thank you for the question. The reason for the significant increase is due to the reorganization within the department, and there are shared services now reflected in financial services for both the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Services, but this increase is related to strategy, support, and integrated initiatives. There was a previous question about the hate crimes unit; that budget is in here. The Alberta security infrastructure program budget is in here as well as agency governance and oversight roles from the strategy, support, and integrated initiatives division staff that are in there.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Line 2.1, about sheriffs: the budget is going up from \$94 million to \$132 million. Is it for hiring new sheriffs?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I think we – I think it was 264 sheriffs are going to be added.

Marlin, do you want to give some clarification on that?

Mr. Degrand: Madam Chair, Minister, the 25 are – actually, to correct that, I believe it should have been just over \$26 million for the provincial police service in the earlier question that was answered.

The sheriffs budget is increasing. I'm just trying to find the exact number, and I'll get it for you before the end of this, Minister.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Sure. Let me just maybe supplement. I'll let Marlin take a look at the specifics. Let me just say this. Look, we're trying to augment right now some of the concerns that we're having in rural Alberta, right? Unfortunately, as mentioned by some rural Alberta MLAs, it's taking an extremely long period of time for police to get to a call, and in some cases they're not going to the call at all. That's not acceptable. You know, if that means that we fulfill some of the training here to make sure that we have police officers that are able to go and respond to that call, that doesn't mean that the sheriffs are taking over anything; it just means we're augmenting and helping our current police system.

Let me just say this. First and foremost – and I don't think there's anybody in this room that's going to disagree with this, right? Again, I don't care what the uniform is. Maybe you do, but I don't. I want to make sure that when 911 is called, somebody goes to that call. That's what I care about.

Sorry. I don't remember what the – I don't remember his question.

Mr. Sabir: I was simply asking about that it's getting increased from \$94 million to \$132 million.

Mr. Ellis: Okay.

Mr. Sabir: So it is for hiring additional sheriffs?

9:30

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Thirty-seven point three million dollars to increase due to – \$10.2 million to address resourcing, particularly with court transport services, to keep court and correctional facilities operating efficiently; \$10 million due to transfer of budgeted funds from victims of crime and public safety fund to Alberta sheriffs; \$6.8 million to maintain current operational status, uphold the level of service Albertans depend on. There are a bunch of inflationary increases as well.

Mr. Sabir: What was that \$10 million from victims of crime fund?

Mr. Ellis: Ten million dollars due to transfer of budgeted funds from victims of crime and public safety fund to Alberta sheriffs.

Mr. Sabir: Chair, line 2.2. The ASIRT budget is going up slightly. Do you think that increase will be enough to address the backlog and workload?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I think you touched on that a little bit on one of your previous questions. Obviously, we're creating that independent investigative body that ASIRT will eventually be a part of. Look, I mean, I'll say this as a former investigator. Investigations take as long as investigations take. You know, obviously, that doesn't mean that they can be ongoing forever. The assistant deputy minister, the director of law enforcement, works very closely with

ALERT to make sure that they get the funds that are required to complete those investigations.

I don't know, Marlin, if you want to supplement that. You've been in communication with them. You know, they have – we've gotten them the funds that they've been asking for, right?

Mr. Degrand: Madam Chair, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much. That's the time.

We'll go back over to the government side.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Is it okay with you if we go back and forth with the minister?

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Ellis: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much. I'll have, basically, one more question for you, and then I'll cede my time over to Member Long.

I want to focus in on outcome 3 of the business plan, which states, "Alberta is prepared and resilient to the impacts of disasters." We had some conversation earlier about the glitch that occurred. I was going to originally ask some questions about the glitch, but I want to just sort of morph those questions a little bit. I have a private member's bill that is introduced into the House right now called the silver alert. We're having some discussions, and I can anticipate some questions about costs. When we're doing an emergency alert, whether that be an Amber Alert or whether it's a disaster or whether it could be, if we pass it through the Legislature, a silver alert, where in your budget – how much does it cost to organize that?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I mean, I'll have Stephen Lacroix come up and see if he can give you an answer to that. I just want to supplement what you were saying, Member. Look, I mean, obviously, being somebody who was in command of seniors who, unfortunately, may be facing dementia or some other sort of mental illness, as an example, that have gone missing, I can tell you that the families of those individuals – it's a loved one, right? Is it urgent? Is there an emergency? Yes. It's a missing person, right? You know, I can tell you that I've had a success rate in finding those who have gone missing, at least on my watch, but I can tell you that that's not always the case. Not every missing person, of course, has a happy ending, but that doesn't mean that any missing person is less important. I will just tell you that a senior is – I appreciate the bill that you've brought forward.

But those details I will pass forward to the assistant deputy minister.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Maybe if I could just sort of clarify that a little bit.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah.

Mr. Smith: Are there any potential costs of who manages? Is it contracts that you sign? You could be talking about social media. You could be talking about phones. You could be talking about TV and radio. You know, it can be a complex thing to look at.

Anyhow, I look forward to your answer.

Mr. Lacroix: Madam Chair, Stephen Lacroix, managing director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. I talked earlier about the migration to the national alerting system. If we move back in time before March 1, the technical costs, if you will: the system cost us approximately \$180,000. There's another \$50,000,

approximately, related to the application that we have as well. So two things.

When we migrated to that federal system, that cost went to zero except for the alert, the alerting tool, so the app. We have the app. We're still paying for that because the federal government doesn't have anything like this, but the tool, the intrusive alert tool, if you will, that you will find on your phones, on TV, on social media, and the like, is provided, for now, free of charge by the federal government through a vendor, again, Pelmorex, also responsible for the Weather Channel – or the Weather Network. Sorry. Weather Channel is in the U.S. There will probably eventually be a cost-share model applied to the federation to make this happen, but right now it's free of charge.

I make abstraction of the people that actually work on the system. For us in Alberta it's a small team that does many other things, too, so to cost share that would be extremely difficult. The other consideration in all of this is that in Alberta there are over 800 authorized users – they go from police forces, municipalities, and the like – that play in that sphere. Again, what are the costs associated with that? We'd require an inordinate amount of data mining, I would argue.

In terms of silver alerts I go back to what I mentioned before. Like, I don't make policy; I implement it. I would provide, probably, though, the following advice. Those intrusive alerts, you know, if I look at our e-mail inbox, generate a fair amount of angst amongst certain individuals, and overalerting might create – and I'll leave that decision up to you – a bit of alert fatigue if we don't frame it appropriately.

There're two jurisdictions in Canada that are currently launching silver alert pilots, I guess is the word I would use: Quebec, Ontario. I know that British Columbia is also looking at it. They're spending a large amount of time on the criteria used to trigger a silver alert. Those could be geolocated just to be specific, so each time somebody goes missing, it doesn't generate an alert across the province. But, you know, they're looking at things like: does the individual meet the definition of a missing person? And I would let my colleague Marlin expand on that if you have any questions. Does the individual have a diagnosis of a cognitive disorder of some sort? Is there an imminent threat to the life of that individual? Do we have enough information available to us, like the context, the mode of transportation maybe, their identity, what they look like, that if we were to trigger that alert, would maybe deliver a positive outcome in finding that person?

So all of this is in play, and I'm happy to take any further questions on that particular topic. Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much.

I will maybe go on to one more question here. I want to refer to key objective 1.4, which mentions that the government will further examine a provincial police force. When I talked to the people in my constituency, I've got municipal councillors on both sides of the issue, I've got some former RCMP officers that are in favour of it, some of the former RCMP officers that are against it. I know that I have been sort of tossing it back and forth in my mind. Can the minister explain what the benefits are of a provincial police force, what it would be? And what are some of the key considerations that the government is taking into account when you're exploring this?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Thank you, Member. Like I have indicated before, there are no decisions that have been made regarding a provincial police service. I can tell you that, obviously, everybody's aware here that Grande Prairie did an independent study, and their council voted 8 to 1 supporting doing their own municipal police service. In talking to the mayor, some of the things that they noted were that

they would have more oversight, that there was going to be more accountability, and when the dust settles and there's a full implementation of a municipal police service in the Grande Prairie area, they would actually be saving money is what they told me through their independent report.

9:40

Let me just say this: having your own police commission, obviously, allows that oversight to assist in making sure that the needs of the community are met, right? With all of those factors in place, that was the decision that has been made. Again, I have no interest in imposing anything on anybody. Despite what some people might say, I have actually had some communities indicate to me that they want an Alberta police service. You know, we have to respect everybody's opinions on this. I've had some communities indicate that they're not interested in that, and that's fine. That's why we created this fund to empower the municipality. You let me know what you want, here is a grant, you do your own independent study, and if it determines that you're satisfied with your needs or the current service provider that you have is providing and meeting your needs, fine.

Mr. Smith: Is that what you've been doing with the Paul band? I got information the other day that the Paul band is looking into this.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Yeah, the Paul band. We've had five Indigenous organizations, or communities, should I say, that have indicated that they would like to look at something different. I think it is no secret that Siksika is well under way into establishing their own police service. This is going to be the first time, I think, in 14 years that a new Indigenous police service is going to be established. Again, while I was in Ottawa . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.
Back to the Official Opposition.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

The Chair: Are you sharing time or block?

Mr. Ellis: Sharing time. Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: My question is about line items 2.4, 2.8, 3.2, and 3.3, with respect to increases in those line items. Meanwhile you sort that out.

The question I have for the minister is that we continue to see Indigenous communities overrepresented in our criminal justice system. Is there anything you are doing specifically to address that overrepresentation?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Yeah. Thank you very much for the question. So, no different than when I was on the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness many, many, many years ago, there has been overrepresentation . . .

Mr. Sabir: You're aging yourself.

Mr. Ellis: Pardon?

Mr. Sabir: I said you're aging yourself.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah, I know. You don't know my age. Anyway.

There is an overrepresentation of our friends in the Indigenous community. That's why we embarked on the recovery-oriented system of care, to do something different, right? People need to understand that drugs – and there are no safe drugs out there – are many times a contributing factor as to why somebody gets involved

in the justice system. Understanding that, we're trying to do education, we're trying to do prevention, we're trying to do intervention, and we're trying to help people who have severe addiction issues. That is why – and you talked about this, Member, the therapeutic living units, right? The therapeutic living units are for people that are currently in the system. I'm not talking about the ones that, you know, are in the process but actually in the system. They actually have a place so that they can get well when they exit the system. They are actually dealing with their addiction.

Let me just further add. Through our friends that are in the Blood reserve, as an example – right? – that community has been very clear that they want to provide healing for their communities. That's why this government, under the previous portfolio that I was involved in, embarked in a \$30 million recovery facility to be put on the reserve. There was never a, you know, "It's the federal government's problem" or any other community's problem. It's saying that we're all Albertans here; your community is suffering through overdoses, significant overdoses, I would say disproportionate in the community. You talked about the justice system. Many people were getting involved in the justice system. So what is the answer to this? Again, very complex, no single silver bullet solution. But they asked us for a healing facility, and that's what we're delivering there. Again, a very complex question that you asked. What are we doing? We're trying to ensure that people get healing for their addictions so that they do not get involved in the justice system, and if they are involved in the justice system, we make sure that they get healing and treatment so that they exit the justice system in a better place.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

I think that now you may be able to address increases to line items 2.4, 2.8, 3.2, and 3.3, just briefly.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. From the 2023 budget forecast: a \$15.1 million increase due to \$13.7 million for staff for the Alberta police review commission along with creating a dedicated implementation team tasked with planning and designing the commission and for the start-up costs such as offices, furniture, IT equipment, and \$1.4 million for the drug-impaired driving federally funded agreement.

Look, I mean, that police review commission was obviously passed under Bill 6. There are start-up costs to that. That's just the reality, right?

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Line 2.8?

Mr. Sabir: Line 2.8.

Mr. Ellis: Thanks. From the 2022-23 budget: a \$20.2 million net increase due to \$15 million due to a transfer of budgeted funds from the victims of crime and public safety fund to ALERT; \$10.2 million for additional grant funding to ALERT in fulfillment of a government platform commitment announced in 2019; and \$5.2 million for additional grant funding to ALERT in support of a new firearms unit, which I discussed earlier, and to cover the additional costs of RCMP noncommissioned officers seconded to ALERT due to a salary increase awarded in a recent settlement.

Then I'll give you 3.2, if you don't mind, from the 2022-23 budget. A \$31.4 million increase in funding is primarily due to a \$22.5 million increase in the SWB; \$18 million for staffing pressures that include medical escorts and hospital duty, remand and correctional centres; \$1.7 million for the youth justice program, a funding increase from the federal government for youth justice services and programs; \$2.8 million for a budget transfer from Mental Health and Addiction to Public Safety and Emergency

Services for the therapeutic living units that I was talking about there, an \$8.9 million increase in supplies and services; \$8.1 million mainly for increased costs of goods and services that include food service contracts, centre equipment and services, and supplies for inmates; \$0.8 million for the youth justice program, a funding increase from the federal government for youth justice services programs.

I think you have one more, sir, if you don't mind, line 3.3. From the 2022-23 forecast: an \$8 million increase in funding primarily due to \$5.9 million primarily for support, specialized court, and additional funding to address staffing pressures; \$2.1 million for contractual obligations, including mobile reporting systems and Indigenous community service contracts.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Two more questions. One relates to schedule 11, which talks about the wildfire/flood support contingency fund, and the contingency fund for Public Safety and Emergency Services is listed as zero.

The second question is about schedule 22, page 161. There is an increase of 698 employees to Public Safety and Emergency Services. Where will they be allocated, and what's the breakdown?

One final request. One block of questions went completely unanswered, so if you would kindly undertake to provide those answers, that would be great.

Thank you for the good estimates, good discussion.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Thank you.

Your first question has to do with the wildfires. Is that correct?

Mr. Sabir: No contingency fund is there.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. I think I can ask Stephen Lacroix. Stephen, if you could just, please, be brief, though, on this one.

Mr. Lacroix: Absolutely. Madam Chair, Steve Lacroix, Alberta Emergency Management Agency. The contingency fund for disasters is actually held by Treasury Board and Finance, to the tune of \$1.5 billion. We draw upon that once we ask for disaster . . .

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

9:50

Mr. Ellis: That's fine. Thank you very much.

We talked about the FTEs. I think you were talking about that, right? So six FTEs for the creation of the minister's office in Public Safety and Emergency Services; 165 FTEs for the implementation of several new sheriffs initiatives in the public security division; 121 FTEs for the creation of the Alberta independent police complaints oversight agency; one FTE for the creation of a search and rescue team co-ordinator in the public security division; seven FTEs within the correctional services division to provide mental health training and supports in critical incident stress management services; 46 FTEs for medical escort teams in correctional facilities; 30 FTEs for an electronic monitoring system in the correctional services division to support broader implementation of electronic monitoring options; nine FTEs in the correctional services division to increase probation officer support within specialized courts; 17 FTEs for the increase in capacity and training in the correctional services division to support training required for correctional services and new sheriffs initiatives; 12 FTEs for field operations in the Alberta Emergency Management Agency to ensure staff needed to sustain 24/7 access to provincial emergency management support and to meet the needs of municipalities, First Nations, and, of course, our friends in the Métis settlements.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

One last question with respect to yesterday's body cam announcement: where will those cameras be procured from, how will data be stored, and third, what's the timeline for implementation of that?

Mr. Ellis: Right. There's absolutely no preferred service provider, I'll say. Obviously, the Calgary Police Service, which has already established themselves – there is going to be a working group . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.
Back over to the government side.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Are you sharing your time?

Mr. Long: If that's okay with the minister.

Mr. Ellis: Sure.

Mr. Long: We're running out of time very rapidly. Thank you to the minister and the department and staff as well for being with us here this evening to answer some questions about your budget, about your priorities, and, inevitably, the priorities of Albertans.

I know that there has been a bit of discussion tonight around the federal government, obviously, around policing, and I know that a comment earlier was around, you know, police sometimes not responding to a call or taking way too long. It's inevitable that we've heard those stories in rural Alberta.

Something else we've heard in my communities, and if you'll allow, I'd just like to share a few stories that are inevitably putting public safety at risk in my communities. Just a few short months ago a fellow was arrested. He had 41 criminal convictions prior to this arrest, and he was arrested when he stabbed a man, who had to be airlifted to hospital. Within hours he was released with an order to appear. That same week, a few months ago, a lady was arrested with 19 outstanding warrants and, again, released within hours with an order to appear.

Thankfully, this week there was some good news. A man in my community was actually visiting from Calgary with 36 outstanding warrants, and the good news is that when our police service arrested him, he was actually remanded into custody. Maybe this is an isolated incident, or maybe we're going to be turning in the right direction.

Inevitably, I do talk openly with police officers and with leadership in my communities, and they're feeling, you know, that they're putting so much effort into doing their jobs, yet the bail system itself is not helping them out. The same six or seven, eight or 10 offenders, prolific offenders, in our communities are using up 80 to 90 per cent of the policing resources. I think that that's something that we'll hear in a lot of our rural communities.

Now, coincidentally, my riding is four and a half hours across from one end to the other, and the police detachments will often represent an area that is a couple of hours in distance. If they're on one end of their service area and they get a call to another end, then, yes, it will take a substantial amount of time.

Now, with all that said, one thing I noted in your budget. It's actually on page 175, item 3.2. It shows that we are more than doubling the budget for capital investment for custody operations. I'm just curious if you can expand on what those costs are and how they will benefit public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I'm sure somebody will provide me some further notes on that, but I'll just say that our folks in the correctional facilities are under enormous pressure. I don't think people can really fathom what it is like to be working in a correctional facility, where at times there's no sunlight and, you know, you're kind of dealing with the same people on a daily basis and the routine can be quite challenging, we'll say, for some of our folks that work there.

Just a thank you to my staff here for providing me an answer here for the more specific part of the question you asked me: a \$31.4 million increase in funding primarily due to a \$22.5 million increase in the SWB, so \$18 million for staffing pressures, right?

When I talked about challenges, I'm talking about the fact that there are a lot of folks that, because of those challenges, go on stress leave – right? – and all that does is put more pressure on the system. It causes more overtime. It causes, you know, even more pressure on the system. And then medical escorts: that's another thing. It usually takes, I think, a couple of officers in order to do those medical escorts, and that can take a long time, right? By the time you drive to the hospital, get through usually the emergency area – and then, obviously, maybe the person has to stay in the hospital, or maybe the person is then released. But, again, this is all, you know, human beings that have to provide these services, so that can take an extended period of time as well in corrections.

So \$1.7 million for the youth justice program. Yeah. I mean, look, there's a lot of great work that has been done in the youth justice program. Let me just say this. I mean, the Youth Criminal Justice Act is actually written in a way that, you know, we do not actually detain children unless, of course, there are extremely exigent circumstances. Again, you heard me talk about the administration of justice falling into disrepute, so again there is a lot of context surrounding that and a lot of subjectivity by the justice of the peace or the judge, for instance. But the youth justice programs provide great mentorship, great accountability. I do specifically know an officer that provides support in a volunteer capacity for the youth justice program and the remarkable work that he has done for the kids to help turn those lives around for those children. That's an important program as well.

And \$2.8 million for a budget transfer from Mental Health and Addiction: that's for the therapeutic living communities. Again, I cannot stress this enough. Those therapeutic living communities, in my opinion, are a game changer. In the past what happened was that the person leaves that correctional facility, they're sent to the nearest LRT station, and then they're back on the recidivism path. The fact that somebody can actually get treatment for their illness and exit the system in a better place than that from which they started is an absolute game changer. Red Deer is going to be the first one. That is going to be opening up very soon, and we are hoping to continue to expand that.

Thank you.

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we're scheduled to meet tomorrow morning, March 16, 2023, at 9 to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Children's Services.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

