



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, March 13, 2025
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 31-1-21

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
First Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC), Chair
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP)*
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)**
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)***

* substitution for Sharif Haji
** substitution for Diana Batten
*** substitution for Chelsae Petrovic

Also in Attendance

Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Law Clerk
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Executive Director of Parliamentary Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Abdul Bhurgri	Research Officer
Rachel McGraw	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Amanda LeBlanc	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services

Hon. Mike Ellis, Minister

Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Deputy Minister

Fiona Lavoy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Correctional Services

Ross Nairne, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategy, Support and Integrated Initiatives

Curtis Zablocki, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Security

Alberta Emergency Management Agency

Stephen Lacroix, Assistant Deputy Minister and Managing Director

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 13, 2025

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

The Chair: All right. I'd 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, 2026.

I ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce your officials when it comes to your turn. My name is Jackie Lovely. I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and chair of this committee.

We'll begin to my right with Myles McDougall.

Mr. McDougall: Myles McDougall, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Wiebe: Ron Wiebe, MLA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Lundy: Good morning, everyone. Brandon Lundy, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mrs. Johnson: Good morning. Jennifer Johnson, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Singh: Good morning, everyone. Peter Singh, MLA, Calgary-East.

Mr. Ellis: Great. Mike Ellis, Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services. I have with me my deputy minister, Rae-Ann Lajeunesse. I have the assistant deputy minister of financial services, Brad Smith, here just off to my left. I have Curtis Zablocki here to my immediate right, assistant deputy minister of public security division. Of course, to my far right here I have Stephen Lacroix; he's the senior assistant deputy minister and managing director of Alberta Emergency Management Agency.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. We'll continue on. Mr. Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Good morning. David Shepherd, MLA for Edmonton-City Centre, shadow minister for Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Ms Goehring: Good morning. Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs, also the deputy chair of this committee.

Welcome, Minister. Sir, nice to see you.

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, MLA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Member Eremenko: Good morning. Janet Eremenko, MLA for Calgary-Currie.

The Chair: We do not have anyone online. Is that right? No remote participation. No? Okay. Good stuff.

Well, I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Mr. Shepherd for Member Batten, Mr. Wiebe for Mrs. Petrovic, hon. Mr. Sabir for Mr. Haji.

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 Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website.

Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services shall be considered for three hours. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates in legislative policy committees. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the meeting blocks of speaking time may be combined but only if the minister and member agree.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the main estimate schedule, and the committee will adjourn.

Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the committee I'll 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 today? We shall have a break.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the direction of the minister, address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to the microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

Pages are 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.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the block of speaking time and the overall three-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

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

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

I would like to pause for a moment. We have a new member who has joined us. Please introduce yourself.

Member Brar: Gurinder Brar, MLA for Calgary-North East.

The Chair: Thank you so much, sir.

I'd like to invite the minister to please proceed. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Ellis: Wonderful. Thank you, Chair. As already introduced, I am the Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, Mike Ellis. I've introduced my folks, of course, from the department that are at the table. Also, in the gallery we're joined by Ross Nairne, assistant deputy minister of strategy, support and integrated initiatives; Fiona Lavoy, assistant deputy minister of correctional services; and Joe Zatylny, assistant deputy minister of Alberta Emergency Management Agency.

Thank you again for having me. The safety and security, of course, of Albertans is fundamental to the province's prosperity, and I've been living and breathing public safety for a long time now. When I was a member of the Calgary Police Service, I

enforced the laws at the community level, and I learned first-hand how to make a difference in people's lives. Now as the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, of course, it's my honour and privilege to enact policies that empower front-line personnel to carry out their duties more effectively to keep Albertans safe.

Budget 2025 shows Alberta's government is following through on many of its commitments to enhance the province's policing model and to increase public confidence and trust in law enforcement; augment and support law enforcement in Alberta, ensuring that they can respond quickly to calls for service; and provide enhanced training, planning, and emergency management support to communities right across the province. Public Safety and Emergency Services' total budget is \$1.35 billion. That's an increase of \$71 million from Budget 2024, the highest it's ever been, showing the government's commitment to keeping Albertans and communities safe while ensuring our province is prepared for and resilient to the impacts of disasters.

In many communities crime and what's been done to address it are always, of course, top of mind, and with an allocation of \$827 million in '25-26, the department's public security division is making sure that law enforcement agencies have the tools that they need.

Now, we all know that officer presence matters, and we are honouring our pledge to continue funding the 100 new officers added in Calgary and Edmonton with \$19.5 million between both cities. We're also empowering Indigenous communities to keep their people safe. With \$13.9 million over three years we will help build new police buildings for three different Indigenous police services serving a total of seven different First Nations. The new and expanding buildings will allow the police services for the Blood Tribe, Tsuut'ina Nation, and five different First Nations surrounding the Lesser Slave Lake area to continue growing with their communities.

Our budget also includes \$380.5 million for the provincial police service agreement, which supports the RCMP detachments right across the province. This is an increase of close to \$3.8 million. We're also absorbing some costs for small, rural municipalities this year, helping them to avoid a minimum of a 39 per cent increase on their bill from the RCMP services.

Now, we're reviewing the police funding model because we want to ensure that everyone is getting value for their money. When someone calls 911, as I've said before, I expect that someone in uniform shows up to that call, and this has unfortunately not always been happening. That's why we have been adding law enforcement capacity to augment and support local police right throughout this province.

For example, in 2025-26 the total budget for the Alberta sheriffs will be about \$156 million. That's an increase of \$19 million. A key portion of this budget is for the new interdiction patrol team, which was established to secure the Alberta-U.S. border. In 2025-26 we're spending a total of close to \$29 million, which includes close to \$19 million in operating costs and \$10 million in capital costs. This shows Alberta's national leadership in responding to border security issues such as the illegal movement of drugs, people, and firearms in both directions and how we are working to improve international relations. Four other new teams of sheriffs are helping police disrupt crime in rural areas by gathering intelligence and evidence and by apprehending wanted fugitives.

Last year we also expanded the safer communities and neighbourhoods teams in Edmonton and Calgary and created two new teams in Red Deer and Lethbridge. This year's budget is supporting all our new and expanded sheriff teams with an additional \$600,000 for vehicle leases, fuel, maintenance, as well as ammunition, body armour, and training. As first announced with

the introduction of the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, we're considering creating a new, independent agency, a police service to assume the police-like duties performed by the Alberta sheriffs, and this new agency would of course operate independently from the government, be subject to a civilian oversight board, and support the RCMP, municipal police services, First Nations police services. Budget 2025 includes \$6 million in 2025-26 to support the implementation team and the initial leadership and planning capacity.

There are many complex challenges that, of course, all of our communities are facing right now. As I've said time and time again, to address these challenges, there must be a paradigm shift in Alberta's approach to policing. No longer will police be seen as an arm of the state but rather an extension and reflection of the community that they serve. To achieve this, we're working to create a policy environment that strengthens the ties between police and the people that they serve. This starts with ensuring that Albertans trust their police and have faith in the work that they do, and that's why we're establishing the police review commission. We're allocating close to \$16 million in 2025-26 to get the new commission up and running and end the practice of police investigating complaints against police. This will put Alberta in the forefront of police oversight not just in Canada but throughout North America.

9:10

The implementation of body-worn cameras is also part of our paradigm shift to reinstall public trust. Budget 2025 provides more than \$13 million in 2025-26 to support the rollout of body-worn cameras for the Alberta sheriffs and police services right across the province. Body-worn cameras will document the actions of law enforcement and the public, supporting transparency and accountability.

While we're all working hard to prevent crime and apprehend those who break the law, keeping inmates in custody and rehabilitating them is equally as important. Budget '25 provides a total budget of \$354 million for the correctional services division. This funding supports staff in Alberta's correctional facilities, allowing them to assess and supervise offenders while in custody and to support inmates, giving them hope in changing their behaviours and attitudes and preparing them for life after being incarcerated. Budget 2025 will also allow us to continue moving forward with a modern ankle bracelet electronic monitoring program, which will provide 24/7 supervision of high-risk and repeat offenders. We're allocating a total of \$5.7 million dollars to this program for 2025-26.

We're also increasing funding for the custody operations branch and the correctional program and services branch by a combined total of about \$1.5 million in '25-26. This funding will support 21 new correctional peace officers who will transport and accompany inmates when they require medical attention outside of the facility. These additional positions will enhance our ability to respond to unplanned medical emergencies, increasing safety for staff and inmates alike. The funding will also support the recruitment of three new staff members for disciplinary hearings in ensuring that matters continue to be adjudicated fairly and effectively when an inmate breaks the rules in a correctional facility.

Budget 2025 gives us the resources that we need to plan ahead and meet the province's public safety challenges, and that includes responding to disasters. Alberta Emergency Management Agency budget will be \$118 million in 2025-26, allowing the province to support enhanced emergency management training and planning for communities across the province. The agency's base budget is increasing by more than \$3 million. This includes a total of \$1 million in permanent grant funding for important emergency

management programs such as the all-hazards incident management teams, Canada Task Force 2, the wildland-urban interface program. Before now funding for these specific programs would be provided on an ad hoc basis rather than being built into long-term budgets.

By providing stable and predictable funding, of course we're making certain that we have the necessary resources to protect Albertans from disasters. In 2025-26 we'll also spend \$2.3 million on the Alberta first responders radio communication system. This will allow us to improve coverage and preserve base station towers, antennas, radios, ensuring that first responders can work together and communicate seamlessly.

Beyond the supply votes reflected in the estimates, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency will also receive an estimated \$7 million in additional funding from the emergency 911 levy.

With a budget of \$1.35 billion we're keeping our promises, too: cracking down on the borders to root out firearms and drug trafficking and support the new fugitive apprehension, investigative, and support neighbourhoods teams; launch the police review commission and the body-worn cameras; and supervise high-risk offenders and ankle bracelets. We're also working to reduce crime by preparing inmates to live better lives as they return to society.

I see I have a few moments left. I want to say thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: Perfectly timed, Minister, right down to this last second. Thank you so much.

We'll now begin with the question-and-answer portion of the meeting. For the first 60 minutes 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, do you prefer blocked or shared time?

Mr. Shepherd: Madam Chair, it's my intent to hopefully have a respectful conversation this morning. I think it's an issue that's very important to Albertans. I have a lot of respect for the minister. I know he knows his file well. In previous years he's been willing to share time. I know many of his colleagues have this year as well, so it's my hope that the minister will give me the opportunity to demonstrate my goodwill in sharing time in our first blocks this morning.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Minister?

Mr. Ellis: Despite what the member might think – I hope he doesn't think this way – I actually like him, and I'm happy to share a respectful conversation with him.

Thank you.

The Chair: Sounds great.

All right. Well, let's proceed, then.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. Well, I'm happy to be able to begin on that excellent note, Madam Speaker – Madam Chair. Let's not, I guess, elevate things too early. Well, certainly, if you care to run for Speaker, I would think you'd be more than capable.

An Hon. Member: That was pretty funny, actually.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Well, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, I do appreciate this opportunity to sit down and talk with him about an issue that is very important to Albertans. I'd like to

begin by talking about where he began. We're talking about Alberta Sheriffs. I know that in line 2.1 of the budget we do have the dollars that are committed to all aspects of supporting Alberta Sheriffs, and looking at outcome 1 in the business plan referring to advancing initiatives that support contemporary and responsive policing, focused on the best interests of Alberta's diverse populations. In order to sort of better understand how these dollars are being allocated and how that objective is going to be achieved, I just have a few baseline questions I'd like to start with with the minister. To begin, can the minister tell us how many individuals are currently employed by the government of Alberta as Alberta sheriffs?

Mr. Ellis: That's a great question. I'll have to ask one of my staff here.

I'm looking at you, Curtis. Sorry. Do you have the numbers?

Mr. Zablocki: Well, we don't have an exact number.

Mr. Ellis: Do you have a dollar amount at least?

Mr. Zablocki: We have a dollar amount.

Mr. Shepherd: Or even just an approximation would be acceptable as well. I'm sure we must have some ballpark figure.

Mr. Ellis: Oh, I'm sorry. My deputy tells me, Member, about 1,400, approximately.

Mr. Shepherd: Fourteen hundred. Thank you to the minister, through you, Madam Chair.

Then as part of that, following on that, to better understand key objective 1.2, page 137 of the business plan, which refers to addressing serious and organized crime through strategies including focused work on border security, rural crime, drug trafficking, hate-motivated crime, and firearms violence, just to better understand how those approximately 1,400 sheriffs are allocated, through you to the minister and his staff, can they identify how many of these sheriffs are assigned to each of the following areas: investigation services, that being the safer communities and neighbourhoods unit and the sheriffs investigative support unit; to court security and prisoner transport; to protection and communications services; to highway patrol; to fish and wildlife enforcement; to the rural Alberta provincial integrated defence response, that being RAPID; to the Fugitive Apprehension Sheriffs Support Team, or FASST; and to the new sheriffs Interdiction Patrol Team?

Mr. Ellis: Great. I know my folks here are going to get those numbers for you as they're looking feverishly for them, but let me just talk at, certainly, the very high level. Of course, we're doing what we can to augment and support the police services right throughout this province. The primary function of the Alberta Sheriffs was court and prisoner security and prisoner transport. As we've seen them evolve, obviously, they've been doing highway patrol. Member, as you've mentioned, there is a section within the Alberta Sheriffs that do the fish and wildlife. Those are the officers that were part of the RAPID, that were supporting the RCMP. And then, of course – members have heard this before – there are over 80,000 outstanding warrants in the province of Alberta, so we, of course, have units that are dedicated for fugitive apprehension. The SCAN teams, as you heard me mention in my notes, are throughout the province. I cannot tell you the number of communities that would like the opportunity to have SCAN teams in the province, so we're rapidly doing the best to get as many SCAN teams associated.

As far as the breakdown of those numbers, I'm sure my folks would be happy to get the breakdown for you, but on a very high

level this is how we're kind of distributing them throughout the province.

Mr. Shepherd: Madam Chair, thank you to the minister through you. It looks like those staff are still working on those numbers. Perhaps while they're working on that, I'll move to a different question. Then we can come back to some other numbers while the staff are working to find that first set.

Looking at line 2.1 in the budget, objective 1.2 in the business plan as well as the minister's frequent references to Alberta's sheriffs taking on more policelike functions, business plan page 135. How much in line 2.1, then, where we're looking at Alberta Sheriffs, is targeted to training sheriffs to take on these expanded functions?

9:20

Mr. Ellis: Well, just remember that those sheriffs at this time are still peace officers. I certainly don't want to get into a law class, unless you want me to, regarding the distinction between peace officers and police officers. Again, as a peace officer and then the director of law enforcement, Mr. Zablocki here off to my right, peace officers have everything from a parking attendant all the way to what you might see as a sheriff who's doing fugitive apprehension or highway patrol. These are functions that they are performing, trying to make sure that they're augmenting and supporting all municipalities throughout the province.

When you go specifically about their training, the only thing I would say is that there is, on a very high level, about a 10 to 15 per cent difference between those highly trained peace officers that you see that are part of the fugitive apprehension, the SCAN teams, the EPU, the highway patrol and then that who is a fully trained and qualified police officer. Again, as we continue to ask these sheriffs to augment and support police services all throughout the province, to ask them to do policelike functions, this is why there's a certain section – and just for the member's awareness, if I'm just going off memory here, I think of that 1,400 there have been about 600 . . .

Is that correct? Right?

Mr. Zablocki: Correct.

Mr. Ellis: Approximately 600 of those 1,400 have been identified as people who would be next in line to transition to police officers although, as the member, I think, has already noted, there will be a training portion to get those folks up to being fully qualified police officers.

Mr. Shepherd: Through you, Madam Chair, thank you to the minister for that explanation. I do look forward to a breakdown on the amount that is set aside for that training. I'm sure there must be a figure in some projection for what that would take. I appreciate that identification as well. We've got about 600 of the 1,400 that have been identified as next in line, so my assumption then, through you, Madam Chair, would be that those individuals have not received that additional training yet. They've been identified as eligible for it. What I'm looking for is the number of what we expect the cost of that training would be.

It would be helpful as well, just looking at that in line 2.1, to provide some context. How much in the forecast total of spending for the previous year was spent on training of that type for the individuals who have already made that transition? The minister identified that there are some high-level officers who he said were within 10 to 15 per cent of being able to act as full police officers. If there was training completed in the last year, how much was spent on how many officers so we can get a better understanding of how

to understand – I guess, how to put it in context, the amount that's projected to be spent on training for the next year.

I will leave it there. If the minister or staff might have that number or any of the previous numbers ready. If not, we can move to some other questions and circle back.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I mean, the only thing regarding the new Alberta independent police service that is in the budget is the \$6 million that has been set aside for, essentially, the new chief and the executive officers in order to start to get and establish we'll call it the executive foundation of the independent police service.

Regarding those other specific officers that have taken on those policelike functions, I mean, these are things that have been going on for, quite frankly, several years. SCAN has been around, I think, ever since I was a police officer, to be honest with you. Fugitive apprehension has only occurred over the last maybe two or three years. You know, to get you the specifics as to what is in the budget regarding their training, I'm sure Curtis can get back to you on that.

The reality is that the highway patrol – again, this goes back to a different level of training. There's court and prisoner security. This is a bit of what sets folks off in a little bit of confusion. The court and prisoner security as well as prisoner transport is the basic level of training for a sheriff in that peace officer status. The additional functions, again many of which have been going on for many years in this province, are just we'll call it additional files, additional departments that are within the Alberta Sheriffs. But as far as the specific training for those folks, I'm sure we can commit to getting you that number.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair to the minister through you.

Just to clarify, are we close to having those numbers now? I see there's a bit less flipping of paper in that. Do the staff have any of the numbers that have been requested at this point?

Mr. Ellis: Well, maybe we'll ask Ross Nairne, who's got something. If you could come to a mic and maybe provide some of that breakdown for the member. Thank you.

Mr. Nairne: Good morning, Madam Chair. Ross Nairne, assistant deputy minister, strategy, support, and integrated initiatives. The sheriffs branch consists of approximately 1,200 peace officers, and it's broken down into court and transport services. The prisoner transport and court security, that's approximately 420 FTEs. Protection and community services, that's about 223. The sheriff highway patrol would be about 279; fish and wildlife services, 164; and operational support services, 64; head office, that would be the chief sheriff and his staff, approximately nine. That doesn't include the 51 FTEs that are in Budget 2025 for the border interdiction team.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the gentleman that spoke, I apologize; I missed the position there. I don't mean to be disrespectful.

That's a number of the things that I asked. I was looking also for the breakdown then on the number of sheriffs that are assigned to RAPID, to FASST, currently on the new Interdiction Patrol Team, and then to SCAN and SISU.

Mr. Nairne: Madam Chair, I don't have the breakdown. RAPID is a program that ADM Curtis Zablocki can go into a bit more detail on.

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. I can add a little bit more information. Curtis Zablocki, ADM in public security division. RAPID is a program

across the province where our sheriffs are trained in additional policelike functions like the ability to respond to domestic disputes, to back up the police of jurisdiction on serious crime calls, those types of things. It is not specific numbers. It's broad across the sheriff highway patrol and the fish and wildlife branch of the ministry. Again, it's utilized to support the police of jurisdiction primarily in rural Alberta, where most of that support is necessary.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. If you don't mind me supplementing this, thank you, Curtis.

RAPID is a program. It was started a number of years ago, I think when you were the deputy commissioner of the RCMP, quite frankly. Again, it's meant to augment and support. All of our fish and wildlife would be part of that particular team and then, I think as you indicated, all the folks within highway patrol would also be a part of that team. It's about being a first responder. As you've heard me say before, you know, when somebody calls 911, if they're the closest to the call, then they're there. But make no mistake; the police of jurisdiction will be the primary on any particular call.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister, Mr. Zablocki, and the other staff for providing some clarity on that.

Just one further question, then. Is that also the case for FASST? Is that also treated as a program where, for lack of a better term, sheriffs simply flow through as needed, or is there a specific set of sheriffs that are assigned to that program?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Yeah. FASST I've been told have 24 members, and there's a north and south team. Again, their objective is to go after folks that, of course, either have outstanding warrants or become we'll call it a high risk to the community for various reasons. They co-ordinate and work with all the police of jurisdiction, everything from Edmonton Police Service all the way up north to Calgary Police Service and, of course, RCMP and any other local police service to tackle that.

Of course, I think you're aware, Member, of our interdiction patrol teams; 51 members are going to be part of that team. I think we have about 20 that have been deployed so far. Is that correct, Curtis?

9:30

Mr. Zablocki: Thirty.

Mr. Ellis: Oh, 30. Thirty have been deployed so far. Yeah.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you to the minister through you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that, for the staff's work to rapidly find those numbers and provide those. It's very helpful. Thank you. I would look forward, then, to the other set of questions I had around the training and budgets and those numbers. We can follow up on those once the staff have those ready.

I will move on to my second portion, then. We've established some of the numbers around Alberta sheriffs. Through you to the minister and his staff: how many vacancies do we currently have for sheriffs in each of these divisions, for whatever reason, such as individuals being on leave of any type or due to the need to, I guess, release an individual to fill a particular or for someone leaving for a different position? In the past year how many new positions were created for sheriffs, and in the past year how many new sheriffs were hired?

To provide some context, I guess, in comparing this year's estimate in line 2.1 with the amounts budgeted and forecast to be spent total for the previous year, if we could get a sense of how

many sheriffs left their positions in the previous year, whether by retirement, termination, or leaving to take another position. I understand those may be numbers the staff may need a moment to find. If that's the case, I have some other things I can ask while they're taking a look at that.

Mr. Ellis: They can try and find some of those numbers for you. Sorry, Member. I think you're referring to 2.1. Is that what you were referring to?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. I have some notes here. There are 80 vacancies that have been filled in '24-25. What the ADM has told me is that they're sitting at about a 10 per cent vacancy rate, though. Is that correct, Curtis?

Mr. Zablocki: Correct.

Mr. Ellis: So a 10 per cent vacancy rate. That is a number, I would say, that is comparatively speaking to many police jurisdictions throughout the province with the exception of Lethbridge, which I'm told by not just the mayor but also the chief down there that they actually are flush with officers, which is fantastic to hear. You talked about Calgary, Edmonton. When you talk about the RCMP, as you've heard me say before, Member, anywhere from 17 to 20 per cent on any given day. The sheriffs, very fortunately, are sitting at roughly about 10 per cent. Why people join and why people leave: of course, I mean, to each their own decision.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. I appreciate the rapid finding of those facts. And thank you to the staff who are providing those to the minister.

Just to clarify the 10 per cent vacancy rate, I know, Minister, you frequently speak of the vacancy rate with the RCMP. My understanding is that vacancy rate is not just empty positions but officers that may be on leave for various reasons. Can you just clarify whether we're comparing apples to apples here? Your 10 per cent vacancy rate for Alberta sheriffs: is that just positions that are not filled at all, or does that also include all sheriffs that may be on leave at this time?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah; it's the total. Ten per cent is an approximate number. Sorry.

Mr. Shepherd: Oh, approximate.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. And that would be approximate for all sheriffs that are also on leave and empty positions inclusive?

Mr. Ellis: But the same with the RCMP. It's an approximate number, as you've heard me say before, 17 to 20 per cent. You see similar numbers in the Calgary Police Service. You see numbers similar in the Edmonton Police Service. Again, the only exception – and again I give credit to the city of Lethbridge, and I give credit to the chief in Lethbridge – is that they're flush with officers. You know, I see the argument you're trying to make, which is that everything is low all over Alberta or maybe to say in Canada, but that's not entirely true. Again, Lethbridge is sitting at zero per cent, and again the Alberta sheriffs are sitting at roughly 10 per cent according to Curtis Zablocki.

Look, we're trying to do the paradigm shift here in Alberta. I don't care what the uniform is. You know, it is an admirable profession. We want people to join. In fact, we are seeing some of

these changes right now in Edmonton, quite frankly, as we see calls to service going up in Edmonton while crime severity indexes are going down. That's good. That means that there's an increase in public trust, and that is what we want to see throughout this province no matter where you live.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. I would absolutely agree. I'm not making any particular argument here. I'm just simply wanting to ensure that we are comparing apples to apples in the numbers that we have, and I'll take the minister's assurance that, in fact, we are.

Again, just questions regarding the amounts being spent on training forecast for this year versus last year: are those numbers that we have, or is that something we will be waiting for later in the discussion?

Mr. Ellis: Still standby.

Mr. Shepherd: Standby. Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Somebody's watching this intently trying to get you these numbers.

Mr. Shepherd: I understand, and I will express my thanks, through you, Madam Chair, to that individual in their office as they frantically shift through their papers. It's appreciated.

Just speaking, then, about fish and wildlife sheriffs. I appreciate the identification that they are specifically some of the officers that are operating, then, as part of the RAPID program. Now, I do know they're also a very important part of protecting our environment and Albertans and that it does take years of specialized training and expertise in order to be able to properly handle human-wildlife conflicts. But we also know those sheriffs are now, as the minister has identified, being asked to respond to a much wider range of offences, including things like impaired driving.

I know that my colleague in Banff-Kananaskis and some others have asked me just to clarify: what percentage of the fish and wildlife officers' time is now being diverted to nonwildlife duties, and in what way is the ministry then ensuring that when we do have these dangerous wildlife situations arise, the officers who do have the specialized training are still available to respond to those?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I mean, that sounds like an operational question. I'm not sure if there's a budget line item here, but let me try and answer this for you. I would just say that it's minimal. When you're a police officer and you're just doing your job and you come across somebody who hypothetically might be impaired, then, obviously, those fish and wildlife, no different than our folks here in highway patrol, have the tools and tool box that are able to address it. Part of that program was to alleviate pressure off of the RCMP and, quite frankly, any police of jurisdiction.

So, really, again, this is all about augmenting and supporting and trying to make sure that – and I'm sure the member would totally agree with me. We don't want to see an impaired driver get away for some technical reason, and I can tell you as somebody who was a certified breath tech for the province of Alberta that time is of the essence in an impaired driving. Once you stop that individual, you do not have two, three hours, four hours to wait by the time that you do the initial testing and get that person in front of what's known as the instrument, which is an Intoxilyzer.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the minister, Madam Chair, through you. I will take what he said, then. He said that the impact is minimal.

Let's move on, then. Let's discuss the border patrol. Looking at page 137 in the business plan, in 2025-26 \$28.6 million allocated to the new sheriffs' Interdiction Patrol Team. I'll just note that at last year's estimates the ADM spoke of a plan to create some of these interdiction teams to begin operating during the previous fiscal year with planned funding of approximately \$2.9 million, so about a tenth of what's now budgeted for this year. I guess my first question to the minister is: can you help quantify what changed in the last year to require such a significant increase in the investment and the specific costs that have increased that bring us to this new total investment of \$28.6 million?

Mr. Ellis: I'm not sure that this is being broadcast on the American broadcasting corporations, but it was President Trump. Let's be clear. This border security was put into my mandate letter. Obviously, it was something that I recognized and, of course, discussed with the Premier about. Our concern, not just here in Alberta but I would hopefully make the argument for some of my friends right across Canada, is that despite what President Trump has indicated, what we're seeing is illegal drugs, illegal human trafficking, and of course illegal guns that are coming across the border from the United States into Canada.

The other thing that I've been very public about – and, again, I respect my friend and member opposite although we may disagree on some other policies. I was not going to allow the decriminalization policy of British Columbia to continue to allow drugs, especially the so-called safe supply drugs, that in fact were recently caught in a bust just in the Medicine Hat area – I think it was about 800 and some-odd pills of hydromorphone that were caught – to flow from British Columbia into Alberta.

9:40

That being said, because of what President Trump had said, we had to pivot, and we had already done the preplanning, when we're talking about the interdiction patrol teams, to make sure that they are trained, to make sure that they are commercial vehicle trained. For the member and everybody else's awareness commercial vehicles tend to be the primary mode of transportation for whether we're talking about the illegal drugs, the illegal guns, or the human trafficking. For example, when you go down to the Coutts border, you will see very clearly a weigh station there that has a remarkable technology that does a bit of an analysis on these commercial vehicles to determine whether or not there are any, you know, secret spaces or anything that's mechanically wrong with the vehicle, and of course we have had successes.

Now, I'm going to talk about that for just one moment here. Do we have a fentanyl issue? Yes. We have an organized crime issue in Canada. Both of those answers are yes. However, we are doing and working very collaboratively with our counterparts across Canada to address both organized crime and the fentanyl issue.

What I have said very publicly as well is that I would also like our friends in the United States to address their border concerns as well. What we have seen over the last year in 2024 is a number, that has been provided to me close to the RCMP, which is close to one tonne. I wish I was exaggerating; you know, when people say "a ton." But we're talking about one tonne of anything from cocaine to crystal meth that has been flowing across the border from the United States into Canada. Most of our illegal guns are flowing from the United States into Canada and, unfortunately, the human trafficking component of that as well. Just to give you a little bit of an update here, since January 20th there's been an enormous amount of success, including the intervention and stopping a woman that was trying to be trafficked from Canada into the United States.

Just for reference, and I think it's very important for this committee, as I said at a press conference, you know, we don't necessarily see we'll call it an immigration issue with people crossing the border from Canada into the United States, despite what the Americans have said very publicly. What we have seen is people trying to walk across the border from the United States into Canada. I can tell you that the collaboration between the CBSA, the national RCMP, and, of course, our Alberta sheriffs has been exceptional, and I can say, as I've said very publicly, that our 298-kilometre border across Montana is secure.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, to the minister, through you.

Following on some of the pieces that he gave us there about the amounts that are coming across the border, of course, given that the objective of spending this \$28.6 million, the U.S. President aside, is to actually combat illegal smuggling of drugs, firearms, and people across the U.S. border, the minister gave us a couple of examples there, but perhaps he can help us understand the metrics he's going to use to gauge the success of this program more holistically. To that end, can he tell us the amount of drugs that has been seized so far moving from Alberta into the U.S. and, separately, from the U.S. into Alberta? We've had the mention of the one tonne. If he can quantify any other amounts that have been seized so far since the introduction of these interdiction teams.

Given its particular significance in the current trade discussions with the U.S. President, how much of what was seized was fentanyl, and by what percentage or other metrics is the minister hoping that this new interdiction team will reduce this flow in each direction? Similarly, how many firearms and how many individuals were intercepted during attempts to smuggle them in each respective direction? What metrics will the minister be using to gauge and judge the interdiction team's success in reducing those amounts?

I understand it may take a moment for the staff to get some of those numbers, but if the minister has a comment.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Just remember that that one tonne I referred to was numbers that were provided by the national RCMP, referring to 2024. This was a collaborative effort between the national RCMP, the DEA, and typically our Alberta law enforcement response teams, or ALERT, as of course we all know it, are intimately involved in that. Since the inclusion of the interdiction patrol teams, as I told you, since January 20, there was the one intervention regarding a young lady that was attempted to be trafficked across the border. There have been, I think, 35 impaired driving calls that they've been able to intercede with. There were four people that attempted to cross the border that they intervened from the United States into Canada, and then there have been some drug seizures, but they have been small amounts if I'm not mistaken.

Sorry. I've got to learn how to read handwriting again, to be honest with you. Yeah. Since January 20 there have been over 3,500 contacts. That's a contact with an individual for various reasons, and of course that has led to a number of these interventions, to these arrests, and, obviously, people that have been crossing the border. I will say that the CBSA, the national RCMP, as well as our Alberta sheriffs and, of course, ADM Zablocki all meet together fairly regularly to make sure that the needs are being met by the province of Alberta in securing that border.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the minister through you, Madam Chair. Just to clarify at this point, has the minister set any specific metrics to determine what would be considered success? I mean, again, we are spending just about \$30 million. We're buying a fair bit of capital equipment. We're making a fairly big commitment

here. I appreciate 3,500 contacts, fairly broad in general. We've seen a few small things. I recognize, again, that we are early in it, so I don't think it's fair to judge, necessarily, by what we've seen, but just to understand: what metrics specifically is the minister going to be looking at to determine whether this nearly \$30 million has been well spent?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I mean, I'd appreciate that we had to pivot really quickly in responding to the threat of tariffs by the United States. One of the things that we tried to do is take it off the table for the Americans, which I have said on Canadian national programs as well as to the Americans themselves, you know, that I do not want the American administration to use fentanyl as an excuse or border security as an excuse. They may have some other issues that are, say, economic related, but, you know, this is why I'll go back to what I was saying, that our border is indeed secure.

When you talk about metrics, well – you know what? – I think I said this at a press conference as well. We put this in place. We are going to assess, and then we're going to even, you know, reassess. We talk about the 3,500 contacts, but let me go back to even when I had the first pill press bill in Canada. I thank the members opposite for allowing me as a private member to do that. But I think, if I recall, what I said at that particular time is that if we saved one life, then it's worth it. I would argue the same thing here. The fact that we stopped one woman from being trafficked across the border: I'm not going to put a price on that. That \$30 million, as far as I'm concerned, is money well spent.

If we can continue to intervene and stop more people from being trafficked across the border from whether it be the United States into Canada or Canada into the United States or save lives and stop these drugs from flowing into Alberta, then I consider that money well spent. But, again, we're going to have to continue to monitor the success of this. A lot of this has to do with the threat of the tariffs and border security. I think border security is important, which is why we recognize this, but if we have to decrease our level of presence regarding the Alberta sheriffs, we may do that or we may have to increase that, but we're going to have to continue to assess the situation as it unfolds.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. I would just observe that there are many areas where I think that kind of reasoning, spending for the reason of prevention – I think there are many lives we could save if we were making investments in housing, in front-line family medicine, many other areas where the government has been much more reluctant than spending \$30 million here. But I will leave that as an aside.

9:50

Further on the border interdiction team, I just want to clarify a few other pieces here and how these dollars are being spent. The sheriffs that have been in place now, that has risen to 30. I believe we were at about 20 in early March. We are now up to 30. Were these sheriffs new hires or existing employees that transferred from other positions to work on this new team? If so, have additional sheriffs been hired at this time to fill those vacated positions? What is the projected timeline then to recruit the remaining members needed to reach the full intended complement of 51?

Mr. Ellis: I'll just be very brief. These were existing members. ADM Zablocki is going to talk in detail to answer your question.

Mr. Zablocki: Thank you, Madam Chair. Exactly as the minister articulated, these are existing members being redeployed, currently from other functions, but there are hiring processes under way to

fully establish the IPT on a more substantive or permanent basis in the border area.

It's also important to note that it's not just the Canada-U.S.A. border at play here. We have concerns around the interprovincial borders and controlled drugs and substances, contraband coming through Alberta from other jurisdictions, for example British Columbia. There is, you know, significant intelligence to suggest that quantities of controlled drugs and substances come from the port areas in British Columbia and are distributed elsewhere in Canada, obviously coming through Alberta at certain times as well. In addition to a focus on the Canada-U.S.A., there will be a focus on interprovincial transport routes as well.

More specific to your question, the training for new recruits hiring is under way to fill supervisory manager positions with the new IPT recruit classes. Advertisements for new sheriffs have gone out. Recruit classes are scheduled for later this spring. The goal is to have the IPT more permanently staffed late summer.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to Mr. Zablocki for that additional information.

I have some questions now around police governance. These are related to lines 2.4, 2.5 in the budget, law enforcement oversight, contract policing, and policing oversight. I know that last week at Alberta Municipalities we had a policing plenary, and I thank the minister for taking the time to speak with municipal officials there. I know they've had many questions. Councillor Dianne Wytjies from Red Deer city council asked the minister at that time about whether the provincial government is providing remuneration for his appointments to their policing committee. At that time the minister was unable to provide the answer but did say that he would look into it. I was wondering if he or his staff have had that chance and would like to ask if there are any amounts in this budget then in any of these line items that would be going towards remunerating ministers' appointments to police commissions or committees across the province.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, and I'd like to thank that councillor.

ADM Zablocki has informed me that the team is still working on it. As you know, we're having to co-ordinate with – what was it? – well over 300 municipalities right across the province of Alberta. So obviously this is a huge undertaking. The comments that were of course made by the councillor we take very seriously. We do know that some of these municipalities – you know, there are big cities, there are mid-sized cities, and then we have very small villages in that, and any sort of additional costs may impact them. Curtis Zablocki's team has agreed to take that away and continue to assess, but that's really the best answer I can give you right now, Member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, to the minister through you.

Just to clarify then: is the minister saying that at this point he does not know whether he is paying any of his appointments that have been made to police commissions? Just to clarify.

Mr. Ellis: There's no decision that has been made regarding that.

Mr. Shepherd: I see. Thank you for that clarification, Minister. It's an item that's under consideration but which you have not decided yet. Thank you. That's helpful.

Further to that, then, second in line with key objective 1.1, "strengthen partnership with police services, municipalities, and Indigenous communities to implement strategies to address crime and social disorder": how many appointments has the minister made to local policing committees and commissions so far?

Mr. Ellis: Nothing to committees yet.

Mr. Shepherd: Nothing to committees. How many to commissions, then, through you, Madam Chair?

Mr. Ellis: Curtis Zablocki can answer that.

Mr. Zablocki: Sure. You know, I can make a comment. I know the minister's office is in the process of ministerial appointments to the provincial police advisory board. That's for communities that are populations of 5,000 or less, right? For the municipal board, so 5,000 to 15,000 populations and 15,000 and above populations, the minister's office needs to wait for the municipalities to make their municipal appointments and then determine if and how many provincial appointments will be allocated to those committees.

Mr. Shepherd: Through you, Madam Chair, to Mr. Zablocki: in terms of those that are existing, then – and we do have several existing police commissions that were in process already – how many appointments has the minister made?

Mr. Ellis: ADM Ross Nairne is going to have to get back to you on those exact numbers.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. Thank you. Additional question to that, then. You know, Minister, I know that on many occasions I've heard you use the phrase: no longer will police be seen as an arm of the state but, rather, an extension and reflection of the community that they serve. But, to be honest, I've had many conversations both with municipal leaders, with folks with the AAPG, and others, and there are some concerns. They're unclear about how the process is being used to choose the appointees that the minister is making. There are some concerns about the lack of an open, public process that would ensure representation from their communities as opposed to what could be interpreted or, depending on your view, perhaps misinterpreted as political intervention representing more of an arm of the state.

Just a few questions on that point. Can the minister share how many of the appointments that have been made through his office have made use of an open competition or public application to select the individuals that have been appointed? And can the minister clarify what criteria he uses to maintain consistency and objectivity in choosing the individuals he appoints? Does he have a specific rubric? Is there an outline of some kind? Does he make a regular practice of consulting with municipal officials or requesting recommendations before he makes his appointments?

Mr. Ellis: Is there a specific budget line item you want to refer to?

Mr. Shepherd: I refer the minister to the business plan, again key objective 1.1, strengthening partnership with police services, municipalities, and Indigenous communities to implement strategies.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. I'm not entirely sure that's within the scope, but let me do my best to try and answer that question. Certainly, we try to meet the needs of all municipalities in the province of Alberta. Is there a specific rubric? No. I will tell you that for me when any name comes before me that is submitted by a community member or sometimes comes through various ways, my condition is that a person, of course, loves their community and supports law enforcement. Ultimately, as a police commission member your job is to support the law enforcement community, making sure that they have the necessary budget in order to protect and serve the community.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. There was another question there that was not answered. I'll just put the question forward again. Of the individuals that had been appointed – I recognize we are waiting for that specific number – how many of those individuals were appointed by making use of an open competition or public application? I recognize that we may need to wait for the staff to be able to provide a specific number, but can the minister recall any instance where he has made use of an open competition or public application?

Mr. Ellis: Going back to your previous question, I apologize. Apparently, there is a rubric that we use in the department and the Premier's office. There is very much a vetting process that goes through the department. I think it's a two-stage, if I'm not mistaken, if I remember now, vetting process. Of course, the Premier's office has something that goes through a vetting process as well. I hope that helps answer your first question.

Sorry. What was your second question?

10:00

Mr. Shepherd: Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: the second – well, the first question before the other question. The other question outstanding was just: how many of the appointments that have been made so far to the current police commissions in the province were done using a public application or open competition process?

Mr. Ellis: I would say that many of these positions, when they become available, are something that is sort of a – how do I describe this? They kind of come up, and they require it to be filled. I'm not entirely sure that there is an open process where we throw it out to anyone, we'll say, to apply.

Certainly, there are community leaders within, you know, a town or city or – even when we talk about the RCMP police governance, we try to reach out to community leaders, local elected officials and try to figure out: who is somebody who would take a keen interest in making sure that they're not just representing their community but making sure that they're supporting the law enforcement within their place of jurisdiction?

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, to the minister through you. On a similar topic, again looking at lines 2.4 and 2.5 in the budget – we were talking about law enforcement oversight, contract policing, and policing oversight – and again referring to key objective 1.1, strengthening that partnership with police services, municipalities, and Indigenous communities. Are there any objective criteria the minister uses to determine when he will add additional members to a local police commission or committee? Are there specific metrics that he considers in determining whether to intervene in the local community?

I believe under the Police Act it indicates something to the effect of: when he feels it is necessary in order to support local policing priorities. Something along those lines. Are there any objective criteria and specific metrics he uses to determine when that is the case?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. ADM Zablocki has indicated that it's proportional. It's a 1 to 3 ratio.

Is that what you said?

Mr. Zablocki: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah, a 1 to 3 ratio.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. Madam Chair, through you to the minister: that is the only time he will add additional members to a commission, when it is not at a ratio of 1 to 3?

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. Could you go back to your original question?

Mr. Shepherd: The original question, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister. Again, noting that the Police Act allows the minister to add additional members to a committee or a commission up to a certain amount and, yes, respecting that it cannot be more than 49 per cent of that, I'm just asking: when he uses that additional power that's been granted to him by the legislation that was passed by his government, does he use any objective criteria to determine when he feels that is necessary for a particular community? Are there specific metrics that he uses to determine when that particular community has that need?

Mr. Ellis: Look, I know which community you are referring to. But I will say this. There is a complaint that has gone in, a very serious complaint that has gone in, that we, of course, take very seriously. I would say that that is, hence, why there's an investigation that I think is about to take place, that has been sparked.

For me it has always been about public trust. Again, I do not care what the uniform is. When somebody needs help, I want to ensure that law enforcement is showing up to those calls. We have seen the positive results in Edmonton, specifically the community which you are referencing. I have said that we have seen the calls go up, but we've seen the crime severity go down.

I have been told by the mayor that ridership is going up, and I'm also told that people are feeling safe on the trains. But we cannot continue to allow a city and a police service and a police commission that appear, according to the complaint that I am getting, to not get along. So if it requires me to appoint somebody, which is, of course, well within the law of the Police Act for me to do, in order to provide some stability to a police commission in a city that – frankly, as an Edmonton representative I think you know how dangerous Edmonton was even a very, very short time ago.

To provide some stability to help improve the public trust within the city of Edmonton: if you're talking about a rationale as to why I would make that decision, that would be why. It is on behalf of the people of Edmonton that I would make that decision to provide stability, to make sure that the citizens of Edmonton are safe. That is all I care about, that the people of Edmonton are safe.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister for that clarification. I'm just going to back up a little bit just to come back to some of the discussion we were having, then, around the border interdiction teams and some of the spending that's taking place there. Within that \$28.6 million – I know we had a little bit of a breakdown there; let's see here – \$19 million of that was for operating, \$10 million for capital costs. That is a helpful breakdown. Of that \$10 million, then, how much is for the 10 weather-resistant drones? Are those all being purchased new, did the department have any of these previously, and do we have an approximate cost on what those will be? How much of that \$10 million would those account for?

Mr. Ellis: ADM Zablocki can answer.

Mr. Zablocki: Madam Chair, I can provide some information on that. Curtis Zablocki, public security division.

In the context of the equipment for the integrated patrol teams and specific to drones, those processes are under way to identify

make, models, and such. The RFP processes are under way to acquire much of that equipment.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to Mr. Zablocki. Are the four patrol dogs already in place? Are those going to be newly acquired, or would they be transferred from other areas of Alberta sheriffs? Do we have a sense of what the spending might be, I guess, for their acquisition and training?

Mr. Ellis: I'll just say that they're newly required. I think everybody in the room would be fully aware that there aren't fully trained dogs just sitting there waiting to be, you know – you get them as a puppy, and then you have to train them, and it takes a bit of time. We're, obviously, working collaboratively with the CBSA, again, the national RCMP. We've also been able to get some assistance from our corrections, who do have fully trained drug dogs, that provide some supports as well.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister and his staff. In terms of this spending, we also know that in terms of the border issues – and the minister did speak a bit about the concerns about commercial traffic, and I had noted that he had commented previously that a lot of the illegal stuff that's coming through is indeed coming through using commercial vehicles. The Premier recently declared the government's intent build three new vehicle inspection stations as part of increasing the highway monitoring for this sort of suspicious activity. Through you to the minister and his staff: is that included in this \$28.6 million or any of the capital here, or would that be something that's being taken on by transportation or another department?

Mr. Ellis: I'm disappointed. I feel like you didn't watch my press conference. Yeah, it would be transportation.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Minister. On that note, then, in the interim it will take some time for those three new inspection stations to be built. If a lot of this illegal stuff is coming through in these means, what steps will you be taking in the interim to try to curtail some of this flow?

Mr. Ellis: You want to answer? Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Zablocki: Sure. Madam Chair, Curtis Zablocki, ADM, public security division. Our motor transport, our commercial vehicle inspectors are part of the deployment to the border area. They have an ongoing presence at the current weigh stations and inspection sites, but they also have mobile capability to move through the area and conduct commercial vehicle inspections through, I'll say, the border area with the United States.

10:10

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister and his staff. In this budget we have allocated \$15.7 million for the Police Review Commission, as noted on page 137 of the business plan, but we do not have any specific performance metrics for that initiative. I'm just wondering if the minister or his staff can provide any information on what particular data they're going to be tracking to measure whether the commission improves outcomes.

Will we be looking at things like wait times, how long it takes for an investigation of a complaint to take place, or do we have a sense of kind of what we'll be looking at to ensure this new approach is going to work more efficiently than what we have currently operating within the individual services, recognizing the cost savings that there may be and, of course, the improvement in ethics

and transparency? I'm just curious if there are any other metrics that are going to be involved.

Mr. Ellis: That's a great question, and the answer to pretty much all of that is yes. Really, the wait times, especially for some of these professional standards in police services, I think it was determined are just, for lack of a better term, way too long. Again, this is meant to be thorough, comprehensive. To your point, it is meant to be transparent. We're trying to make sure that the wait times not only go down for police complaints, but we also want to make sure that wait times go down for ASIRT as well. I think that's vitally important.

I don't know if the deputy minister wants to supplement that a little bit.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that question, Madam Chair. We currently track file intake and closure rates of ASIRT, and police agencies do the same for their complaint processes. As we stand up the commission heading towards December 2025, we will be looking at all that data, and the goal will certainly be to improve on those numbers.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you.

I see we have about three minutes left in this block, so I won't get into anything too complicated at this point, but perhaps I'll just ask a question quickly around emergency management. Page 183 demonstrates that disaster recovery funding has dropped from \$36 million to \$15 million although in recent years we have seen increasing disaster frequency. I'm just wondering if we could get some information. That's about a 58 per cent reduction in funding. I was wondering if you could get a bit of a sense of what the reasoning was behind that decision.

Mr. Ellis: I'm going to pass this to ADM Lacroix. This is his area of expertise.

Mr. Lacroix: Thanks, Madam Chair. I would qualify the diminishing resources as a bit misleading because it is money that is not appropriated in the base funding of the agency. It is money that we draw from the contingency fund against disasters that have occurred. So if we're getting less money, it means that something bad has not occurred in that current year. If you look at '23 over '24, you would realize that the disaster recovery programs that were stood up in '23 were larger than the ones in '24, thus the difference in funding between those two years. Hopefully, this year I draw zero from the contingency fund because nothing major has happened in terms of natural disasters in our beautiful province.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: I would just say this to everybody. It's critical incident dependent and situational dependent. Is that right? Right. As long as we have fewer disasters – I've got to knock on wood here – then that number is going to go down.

Mr. Lacroix: If I may add, actually, Madam Chair, that also affecting that number are the funds. Once those programs are closed and if there are disaster financial assistance arrangements eligible, without getting too geeky there, that's the program that we pull from the federal government. Federal monies also flow into the provincial coffers that also off-set those numbers.

Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you.

Well, at this point, we've got about 30 seconds left, so not much time, I think, to get in any further questions. What I'll say at this

point is that I appreciate the conversation we've been able to have so far.

I will say thank you to both the minister and his staff for their accommodation. I will say thank you again to whomever is there in the background working on getting those numbers for the training dollars. I look forward to those coming perhaps further in the conversation, and I offer them my apologies for making them do that additional work this morning. I am looking forward to some continued conversation, the opportunity to dig into some other issues later as we proceed through these estimates.

Thank you.

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

We'll now move over to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from the members. Would you like to combine your time with the minister today?

Mrs. Petrovic: I'd like to share my time, if you're okay with that.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Of course.

Mrs. Petrovic: Wonderful.

The Chair: All right. We will now move to 20 minutes from the government caucus and the minister. Shared time is 20 minutes during which time – well, you've decided that it's going to go back and forth in a cordial way, so please proceed.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, and good morning. Through the chair I'd just like to thank the ministry for their great efforts in what they're doing and especially in rural Alberta right now. Being from Livingstone-Macleod, I know that it's a vast area, and a lot of the work that you've done has been noted and well received. So, first and foremost, thank you for your team.

That leads me into my first question, which is about community safety. I know this is on the mind for so many Albertans right now, this community safety. I believe, and I believe your ministry also believes, that Albertans deserve to feel safe in their communities, and, indeed, the communities depend on it as well. Budget 2025 recognizes this with outcome 1 on page 137 of the business plan, which reads very straightforwardly that Albertans are safe and secure, and healthy communities rely on strong social, cultural, and economic connections, and residents need to feel safe in order to have these interactions and put roots down. I have two questions in regard to this topic. My first is: looking at page 70 of the fiscal plan, this budget commits \$8 million for better police staffing in Edmonton and Calgary as part of the safe streets action plan. Would the minister explain what impacts this investment is expected to have in these cities?

Mr. Ellis: Great. Well, thank you very much. I think you've heard me say many times before that officer presence matters. Certainly it is a commitment that we made to the people of Edmonton and the people of Calgary, to make sure that we increase officer presence. We, of course, are always trying to think outside of the box.

The soft-on-crime policies that the federal government has imposed on Canada – it's no secret – have been quite unsuccessful and detrimental to the people of Canada, which is why you saw violent repeat criminal offenders being released into the communities. It doesn't matter if we're talking about big urban centres or we're talking about rural Alberta.

I think, as some of you may have heard me say before, the RCMP have confirmed that we have over 4,000 organized crime groups just in the country. That should be a concern. We're not talking about minor organized crime groups; we're talking about serious

cartels that have set up shop. Of course, with the lack of accountability or even the possibility of even going to jail when you're committing very serious offences, you're seeing a lot of these bad people start to take advantage of this system. Hence, why you're seeing people feeling unsafe.

Now, I did talk earlier about that they're starting to yield some positive results in the Edmonton area, but those positive results are because of the 50 new police officers in Edmonton, the 50 in Calgary. We're augmenting and supporting rural Alberta through our sheriffs. Again, we want to let people who commit crime in this province know that if you are going to commit crime, you are going to be arrested. If the system chooses to let you out, we're going to arrest you again up until the point you stop committing crime or you leave this province.

Mrs. Petrovic: Well, thank you for that answer. If I can just ask one more question just to maybe dive into it a little bit further. What metrics will the ministry be using to evaluate the results of increased policing resources through Budget 2025?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I think we're starting to see this, right? I think, as I previously mentioned, you know, the mayor in Edmonton has indicated that ridership has gone up, so that's great. That means where people were scared to use the trains in Edmonton, they're now willing to use the trains in Edmonton, so they're feeling safer. That's a metric that we can use, right?

10:20

We're starting to see the crime severity index within Edmonton start to go down. We're starting to see calls for service going up. Now, just to let everybody know, that's actually a good thing because that means that the public has confidence in the police again to say, "Hey. I have a problem," or "I'm seeing something that's not right, and I'm trusting you to go deal with that problem."

So those are the types of metrics that we're using. We're starting to see increased public confidence. We're starting to see the crime severity index going down. We're starting to get, obviously, the ridership in Edmonton going up, but, more importantly, we're starting to hear from the people of Edmonton, saying: "You know what? I'm feeling safer walking down the street. I'm feeling safer using transit."

Mrs. Petrovic: Wonderful. Thank you again for that.

Moving on, I just wanted to chat a little bit about border security, which we know is a hot topic right now not only in Alberta but across our country. On page 81 of the fiscal plan we see the public security operating expense has increased by \$44 million from the last fiscal year, largely due to efforts to bolster security at the Alberta-U.S. border. This is a topic that has made lots of news lately and has been incredibly relevant to Albertans, particularly for those who live in the southern part of our province. As we know, my riding is one of those areas. We border down in Waterton. Looking at the specifics, page 137 of the business plan notes that \$28.6 million will be allocated to the Sheriffs Interdiction Patrol Team. I'd like to focus on some details in a minute, but to start off, my first question is: could the minister speak broadly to why this increased funding is warranted and how it will make our province safer?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. And yeah, of course, noted; thank you for everything that you do. You do represent a border community. You know, I will say that, having been down at Coutts – I know Coutts is not necessarily in your riding but, of course, it does parallel your riding.

Look, we initially had to respond due to the serious threat of tariffs not just here in Alberta but right across Canada. Although it does appear at times that the administration of the United States seems to have this moving goalpost and moving target, we are certainly doing our best to take their initial complaint extremely seriously. I say “we.” I don’t mean us as a province, but I mean us as a country.

The concerns the Americans have were in regard to fentanyl. These were not unwarranted concerns. As I stated, there are over 4,000 organized crime groups. They wouldn’t be setting up shop here if it was not profitable. This is why they’re setting up shop here. Again, it goes back to the soft-on-crime policies. They just do not work.

For everybody’s awareness, CBSA deals with the entry points, and the national RCMP deal with the space in between those two entry points. Now, I will say this, as I have stated before, that the RCMP, you know, have had difficulties meeting their authorized strength levels, and although they had a presence at the border, I would say that presence previously at the border was not necessarily a strong presence at the border. There was a flow of traffic. There was a flow of traffic, again, through the commercial vehicles, but there was also a flow of traffic that was being walked across the border, traffic meaning drugs.

We also have our concerns at the ports both in British Columbia as well as on the east coast. As the CBSA union has stated, less than 1 per cent – not 1 per cent; less than 1 per cent – of those crates, those containers are actually being checked at the border. That is a concern. The RCMP have confirmed that we have become a net exporter of fentanyl. That’s not something that I have made up. The RCMP have confirmed this.

We are tackling this from a multitude of different angles. For your constituency and constituents, we can say that we’re working with the CBSA and national RCMP, who have added more members, working with our sheriffs so that we can say that our border is secure. We can also say that we are tackling the organized crime, making sure that ALERT is working with the national RCMP, working with American policing agencies to tackle the organized crime component within not just Alberta but, again, I always say, throughout Canada.

Then we also make sure that we’re working with our municipalities throughout the province to tackle this from a social and civil disorder – and I have to thank not just Mayor Sohi but Mayor Gondek as well as all of the midsize mayors who took a Team Canada approach in understanding to have their peace officer programs work collaboratively with the police of jurisdictions in order to tackle a very, very complex problem.

Border security is something that we take very seriously. It is not unwarranted that we have a concern regarding fentanyl, but rest assured that the importance of spending that amount of money to ensure that not only are we protecting Albertans, protecting Canadians, but we are also trying to make sure that we let the Americans know that we take it seriously so that we do not have this 25 per cent tariff. I don’t want them to use that as the excuse as to why they impose that upon Canadians or Albertans.

Mrs. Petrovic: Well, wonderful. You’ve answered, actually, a couple of my questions.

One that I wanted to dive into a little bit further, through the chair to you: would the minister be kind enough to talk about specific measures that these teams will implement to interject with these illegal activities, including surveillance, intelligence gathering, and even their enforcement actions?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. The interdiction, illegal activities – yeah. Look, again, any time we’re dealing with drug dealers, I have to say that, you know, it’s the police that abide by the rules, and it’s the organized crime groups that appear to have no rules. Our interdiction patrol teams are working very closely with the police of jurisdictions, whether it be the RCMP, especially in the south, whether Medicine Hat or Lethbridge, as an example. We do have our safe communities and neighbourhood teams as well that are doing some remarkable work down there in the southern region.

You know, I can tell you sort of just off the top of my head here. I know that we had one bus that was from ALERT. Actually, I think it was in the Medicine Hat region. I don’t know if the intent was for them to cross the border or if their intent was to go further east, but I will say that a large quantity of money was seized. Certainly there were a lot of drugs that were seized. I think it was anything from crystal meth – I think there was some fentanyl seized there as well. But the biggest one that really caught my attention was the fact that there was hydromorphone that was seized, well over 800 pills of hydromorphone.

As many of you know, hydromorphone is the so-called safe supply drug that is handed out freely on the streets of Vancouver. I have said for quite some time that these drugs were being diverted, although I did have assurances from the provincial government in British Columbia that it was minimal to not being diverted. As I have stated before, typically drug dealers tend to redistribute those hydromorphone pills and target young people. I mean our kids in junior highs, high schools, and of course the postsecondaries. That to me is a huge concern.

Look, I know everybody likes to talk about metrics, but it really is about keeping people safe, getting the drugs off the street, and trying to make sure that we have a community where people feel safe. I know in the southern Alberta region, when we were asked some concerns at Coutts there even just regarding safety and, quite frankly, people walking across the border from the U.S. into Canada, there were times when people, I would say, were not necessarily feeling safe and also feeling the impact of people walking across the border.

I appreciate the question. I hope I answered part of it, but these are really tough questions to get answers on.

Mrs. Petrovic: Well, I thank you for these answers.

I just have one last question for you, just because I understand that this is a sizable investment and it’s no small undertaking. What kind of training and technology will be provided for these patrol teams, including specialized equipment, tactical training, and legal authorities?

10:30

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Well, thank you very much. I mean, thank you for watching the press conference. The member opposite I’m not sure watched my press conference, but that’s another story. Just bugging you. Anyway, sorry. We’ve got to have some fun in this, right?

Look, 51 uniformed officers: you know, why was that determined? Well, I asked the experts to my right to be honest with you, whether it be the director of law enforcement, working collaboratively with the sheriffs. As to specifically why the uniformed officers: obviously, you have to trust your staff and the folks within the department and their expertise. Of course, their recommendations make sure that – especially when you’re talking about border security and the concerns regarding organized crime, we have to make sure that they have all the correct tools in the tool box, which is why those officers are equipped with the carbine rifles.

Of course, they have to have the support staff; 10 support staff are all police. You know, we have civilians that are able to help officers out, whether it be dispatch or doing analytical work, which I think is hugely important.

Intel is – you know, hate to get into the policing terminology, but intel drives the tactics that we use in policing.

The four drug dogs, as previously mentioned by my friend in the opposition, are hugely important when it comes to sniffing out the drugs. Again, that's something that we're hoping to have out there sooner rather than later. Again, we're collaboratively working with the CBSA and the national RCMP, utilizing and collaboratively using their resources on this as well.

Of course, the 10 cold-weather surveillance drones: you know, we do have some drones that we've been able to demonstrate within fish and wildlife, and those officers have been down to show us that. I can just say that the technology, the infrared, being able to again work with the CBSA and work with the national RCMP to have that infrared to pick out any sort of heat that might be emanating off a body, I think, is something that is only helpful when we talk about illegal crossings in either direction.

Of course, the four narcotics analyzers to test for the illicit drugs – right? – it's not like what you see in the movies. You don't just dip your finger into it and put it to your mouth. That's not what you do. They have these analyzers, and they're hugely important. I think it always just helps with the investigation, whether or not you're going to lay the charge or how you're going to deal with that person from a law enforcement perspective.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you. Through the chair, thank you, Minister.

If you're okay, I'd like to cede my time over to Member Lundy. I believe he has a very pressing question he'd like answered.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Lundy: Yeah. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. First and foremost, have these dogs received their names, and are you still accepting applications? I've got some good ideas.

Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you . . .

Mr. Ellis: What line item in the budget is that?

Mr. Lundy: Anyone watching on TV could maybe fill me in a little on that.

Minister, I would like to turn to a very serious matter, and that of course is Indigenous policing. We know that social disorder and organized crime are significant concerns for Albertans all across the province. I would note in the ministry's business plan outcome 1, to keep Albertans safe. Under key objective 1.1 we mentioned strengthening partnerships among police services, municipalities, and Indigenous communities. So I would like to dig in a little more about Indigenous policing and how Budget 2025 is working to strengthen those partnerships. Through the chair, would the minister explain what the ministry is doing through Budget 2025 to support First Nations and Indigenous communities regarding policing, recognizing the unique challenges and needs that they may face.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Of course, we support First Nations, Indigenous policing in the province of Alberta. We currently have a few First Nations police services. Tsuut'ina, of course, comes to mind. Blood comes to mind. Lakeshore is also up in northern Alberta; that services about five First Nations communities. All three, of course, indicated to us that they need improvements to their buildings and facilities, so we're making sure we're providing

more than \$30.9 million to support policing in First Nations communities and helping them to get those buildings.

I would just further add that we have a number of First Nations communities throughout the province that are also looking to do their own police services. In the Edmonton region Enoch comes to mind. Siksika Nation is another one that comes to mind. Siksika Nation is probably the first First Nations community in probably about 14 years in Canada that is really moving its way into what we call stage 2 of their development. I can tell you that all of this is very much heavy lifting, but it goes back to, as my friend has stated and I have stated, again, not an arm of the state; an extension and reflection of the community that we serve.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

That concludes the government members' first block of time. Now we move to the second round of questions and responses. The speaking rotation going forward will be the same as in the first round, starting with the Official Opposition, then members of the government caucus. However, the speaking times are now reduced to five minutes for the duration of the meeting. We will begin this rotation with members of the Official Opposition, who will now have five minutes for questions and comments, followed by a response from the minister, who may speak up to five minutes. After both individuals have had an opportunity to speak once, we will then move on to the next caucus in rotation. If the member and the minister agree to share time, we'll proceed with a 10-minute segment, during which time neither the member nor the minister may speak for more than five minutes at a time. Members are reminded that they may not cede any unused portion of their five minutes to another member.

All right. Member and Minister, do you wish to share or have blocked time?

Mr. Shepherd: I would love to share time if the minister is willing.

The Chair: And you're going to continue on with some more questions, Mr. Shepherd?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes.

The Chair: Sure. Please proceed.

Mr. Singh: Madam Chair.

The Chair: Sorry?

Mr. Singh: Are we going to take a five-minute break as discussed earlier in the meeting?

The Chair: Did you want to take the break now? The other group is meeting right now, so it would be more efficient if we wait until after this segment. Mr. Singh, if you would like to use the washroom yourself, please feel free to go any time, but let us not delay. Let us head over to . . .

Mr. Singh: I was thinking about the minister, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You're good. After this segment we'll take the break, but right now the other team from the other estimate session is having their break time, so it would be more efficient if we waited just after this segment.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I just want to say I don't mind sharing time with MLA Shepherd.

My staff have some numbers here for the questions if you'd like to . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Oh. Certainly. Let's start there, yes, by all means.

Mr. Ellis: If we can go to my deputy minister here, she can answer some of your questions.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you. Through Madam Chair, apologies for not introducing myself last time for the record. Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services. To the question about the amount dedicated for sheriffs training and the sheriffs budget, that's approximately \$6 million within the sheriffs budget line, but we also have a training academy in the ministry. The total budget for the training academy is \$7.3 million. Now, that training academy would support some elements of sheriffs training but also do some training for correctional and other community peace officers. So the total answer for the sheriffs is \$6 million proper within their budget and then an additional amount supported in that secondary budget.

Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, to Ms Lajeunesse. I appreciate that additional information.

Pivot to a few questions here about community safety. Looking at line 5.2, community and public safety services, I do see that in this line there's a significant cut, about 38 per cent, from \$14.6 million to \$9.1 million. Now, can the minister explain the reason for this cut and how much applies to each of the elements that are funded here, those being the human trafficking office and victim services?

Mr. Ellis: Oh, the human trafficking. Yeah. I think I know where you're going with that one. Victim services, of course, first of all, that's extremely important. We make sure that we're – again, predictable, sustainable funding for communities right across the province and making sure that all the needs are met. As many folks are aware, I think that we had over 16 municipalities that had no victim services, so again – and I think I always see nodding in the heads when I say this, which is predictable, sustainable funding as opposed to not having that to make sure that the needs are met for people across Alberta.

10:40

When it comes to human trafficking, it's one of those things where we're trying to be good we'll call it financial stewards there. There was, you know, an estimation from the centre to combat human trafficking. I can't remember what the number was, but we'll say that it was a very high number; let me just say that. Then as we consulted with both the co-chairs of the human trafficking organization, as they're continuing to be in development of creating the centre to combat human trafficking, a lot of that money was not necessarily being used at that particular time. At this point here what we have indicated to the centre to combat human trafficking is that it goes on a kind of as needed basis. We made an announcement regarding, I think, five-something million dollars just the other day. They handed out a number of grants to certain organizations that, of course, support victims of human trafficking.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. I appreciate that clarification. I'm sorry; we have much less time in these 10-minute blocks. I do appreciate that clarification.

What I hear the minister saying is that the reduction here is an agreed-upon reduction with the co-chairs of the human trafficking office because they did not require as much. I understand. Thank you, Minister.

Just another question in regard to that. In the business plan outcome 3 there's a list of \$12 million for the victims of crime assistance program and then \$26.8 million for external partner organizations to provide supports and services, but line 5.2, which contains victim services, only contains \$9 million. I just want to understand where these additional dollars being referenced in the business plan are coming from. Are they contained in other line items in this budget, or are they coming from other ministries that are somehow supporting these services, or is this a projection over multiple years?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. We have Ross Nairne, ADM responsible for this particular portfolio, who will be able to answer that question for you.

Mr. Nairne: Thanks, Minister, Madam Chair. Just regarding the victims of crime and public safety fund I draw the member's attention to the consolidated statement of operation. For the victims of crime and public safety fund the amount in budget 2025-26 is estimated at \$38.832 million, which consists of both the victims assistance program as well as the reference figures that go to supporting the RVSSes that provide the victim services and support as well as some of the other grant programs that we provide to various organizations in support of victims across the province.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the gentleman, I appreciate that clarification. Those amounts are coming from the consolidated operations.

We've got about just under five minutes. You know, through you to the minister, we were both at his policing plenary the other week. I know we saw a councillor from Chestermere, the mayor of Vegreville. Both raised with the minister concerns about growing social disorder in their communities and the pressures that they are seeing on their local police enforcement and the costs involved in that. I know the mayor of Vegreville, in fact, referenced that officers in his community are constantly tied up in mental health calls.

Now, the minister responded and sort of spoke about Counselling Alberta. I recognize their services. I don't know that they are the most applicable to the issues that they're dealing with. He also spoke of the compassionate care act. Again, I recognize that that's going to take some considerable investment and some time to stand up.

I know the minister is well aware and has spoken about indeed the impact we've had with the PAC teams, the HELP teams, others within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary; we have the RCMP RPAC teams that are out in the community, I think, that offer much more direct and immediate assistance. I think expanding some of those pieces could be more effective in the short term.

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

Is there anything in this budget that looks towards helping increase those sorts of services? Even as we are looking at increasing the policelike operations of Alberta sheriffs, looking to indeed ensure they have that training, helping to ensure – in our municipalities we are dealing with a wide range of costs that have been downloaded from government on various fronts, cuts to FCSS, you know, even just things like having to now pay for hand counting ballots in the fall. Is the minister looking at any ways to assist with getting more of those social services out into the community, those conversations he's maybe having with his colleagues in cabinet to help ensure that police are able to do their jobs in the community?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I think, if you remember, what I also said is that I am not opposed to PAC teams and HELP teams. I am not opposed to SROs. Unfortunately, the RCMP are not able to meet the authorized strength levels, and right now they are prioritizing calls to service over anything else. I'm also not going to put me call it a crisis response worker or a social worker in a position where they are attending a potentially dangerous call – you remember I said this – as occurred in Saskatchewan, whereby that person can have serious injury or death.

I support these programs, happy to continue to work with the RCMP to figure out a solution to make sure that they not only have the officers that can do those particular calls, but whether it be community and social services or working with Mental Health and Addiction, to also make that they are able to supply folks for the people that need it as well. I think you remember, Member, that in Edmonton I think it was Mental Health and Addiction that worked with the Edmonton Police Service to provide the supports for the HELP teams.

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the minister one last quick question. We'll see if we can get this in. In terms of, I guess, asking community peace officers to take on more responsibilities and the minister's recent request to assign them to police, is the minister looking at the request that has been made, I think by the AAPG and others, to move community peace officers then to be covered under ASIRT? If we're asking them to take on more serious tasks, is he then looking at having them be part of what can be investigated by the serious incident response team?

Mr. Ellis: I'm sure the member is aware that when we passed that legislation, that is part of it. The peace officers will be part of ASIRT investigations.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Then through you to the minister we've got about 10 seconds left, so I will just say thank you again to whomever was working to find those training dollars and that number for me. I appreciate that coming through, and I look forward to the next block of questions.

The Chair: All right. Thank you so much.
It's five-minute break time, everyone.

[The committee adjourned from 10:48 a.m. to 10:53 a.m.]

The Chair: All right, everyone. Thank you so much. We'll resume back to the government side.

Member McDougall, you're up with your questions. Please proceed.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Block or shared time?

Mr. McDougall: Shared time, please.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Yep. Thank you.

Mr. McDougall: I'd like to follow up a little bit on an element of what we were just talking about earlier, and that relates to human trafficking. There's been a lot of attention placed on this issue recently. For me the documentary *Sound of Freedom* a couple of years back raised a lot of attention around, certainly, North America about the issue and some of the things that are taking place. I had

the pleasure of attending a fundraiser in the last couple of weeks for Not in My City, a group supported by Paul Brandt and his wife Liz Brandt, as you may be aware of, raising money for that very, very good charitable organization.

Human trafficking is one of the greatest evils of our time, I would say, worse if it happens in our own communities, just out of sight generally. Key objective 2.4 of the ministry of business plan is highlighting a commitment to protecting vulnerable populations through focused work to support the victims and survivors of human trafficking in the province. I see that through Budget 2025 \$5.2 million is allocated to directing community initiatives to combat human trafficking. I think we just talked about that a couple of minutes ago. Would the minister explain what specific initiatives are being implemented to combat human trafficking, including prevention, intervention, and prosecution efforts?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you. I would agree with you. It is one of the greatest evils of our time. You're just making me think back on my time working on the street and dealing with some of these young people that were extremely vulnerable and especially who is even more vulnerable, all of our friends and especially the women in the First Nations communities that have been extremely impacted by human trafficking.

Again, it becomes a community approach, no different than when we're dealing with, you know, drugs or any sort of societal issue. It becomes: how do we deal with this as a society? First of all, I think we also have to accept that, (a), this is wrong, that a pimp is not a business associate. A pimp is somebody who's living off the avails of others. It can affect men, but I'm going to say primarily women, so just forgive me here for talking about it from, we'll say, a woman's perspective. You know, these women are preyed upon. As eloquently pointed out by Mr. Brandt, who, I would argue, has become very much a subject matter expert in this particular field, when we as law enforcement come across people like this, they tend to say, "No. I'm where I want to be. This is the life I choose to live," when, in fact, that is actually the influence of essentially the oppressor, that person who is the pimp, who has that psychological impact on them.

The perfect example of that is actually here in Edmonton. When we had the encampment issue in Edmonton, where we had, you know, thousands of encampments, there were voices out there that said that this is a homeless issue, whereby the police service was saying that many of these encampments were drug led, run by organized crime. It became very much a collaborative effort between community and social services, the law enforcement community. Long story short, when the bad guys – the drug dealers and all these oppressors – ran away as the cowards that they are, what we were left with was the true victims of drugs, human trafficking, as an example.

The story that was really worth mentioning again was the woman who walked into a navigation centre who was on the missing and murdered women's list for well over 10 years. When the drug dealers walked away and the human traffickers walked away and fled, she realized at that point that there actually might be some help out there. I was very proud that we were able to reunite her with her family, who thought that she was dead.

So I always push back on anyone who says that this is what a person wants, this is the life they choose to lead, because I can tell you that as a police officer, if I was to take her aside, she would say that. It was only when we got those oppressors out of the way that she finally felt, after 10 years, free enough to go and actually get the help that she needs.

There are a multitude of ways of doing this. We made an announcement fairly recently for the centre to combat human

trafficking, \$5.2 million. Mr. Brandt along with his team were able to hand out various grants to great organizations throughout this province that are really supporting women. There are a number of Indigenous-led not-for-profit organizations that are helping these folks as well. So that's just one element of this. I know I'm working with Minister Amery's office – it's not in my budget. I think it's important to note that we're working with Minister Amery's office to also make sure that we have a Crown prosecutor that will be dedicated to these sorts of files because these are extremely complex files.

11:00

Mr. McDougall: How will this initiative provide the comprehensive support to the victims and survivors of human trafficking, including immediate assistance, long-term care, rehabilitation services?

Mr. Ellis: Although many of these young people – I say “young people” because typically they are, but they can be older, of course. Sure, there's an addictions component to it – many of them have various levels of addiction – but we also understand that there are specialized trauma-informed supports for these victims and especially the survivors of human trafficking. This is how we're – we can't just lump, you know, somebody who's been trafficked for X number of years. Although we're doing some great work regarding the recovery-oriented system of care and the stuff regarding people that have addictions issues, this, unfortunately, is – many of these women have been traumatized so badly that we have to take some extra special care in dealing with their trauma. Again, there's a preventative component of this, there's a protection component of this, and then another key pillar here is an empowerment component of this. It's really about giving many of these women their lives back.

In a lot of these cases I will just say that in all my experience regarding people with addictions or anybody that's dealt with trauma, it's really that peer support, right? Peer support is key. It's one thing for me to sit there and say something. Many people will say: “Well, you know, you don't get it. You don't understand. You've never been there.” But when you have many of these wonderful survivors who can be there now as community leaders to really help these girls and, of course, men, but mostly girls, really get their lives back together, that's really what we're trying to do here.

Mr. McDougall: Agreed that, you know, it's a very complex issue with a lot of elements to this, which, I guess, would make it difficult, I can imagine. I guess the question is: how do you track progress? I mean, what are the metrics, or how do you achieve the key objective under 2.4?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I think it's like anything that – we're focused on outcomes, right? What I want to see from not just the centre to combat human trafficking but, hopefully, through the centre of human trafficking to those not-for-profit organizations is for the taxpayer, which I would say in Alberta are extremely compassionate people – they want to make sure that that money actually has an outcome, right? I mean, I can speculate, but the reality is that when I start hearing success stories about how a specific organization is able to help somebody, you know, remove them from the evils of human trafficking and help them to get their life back together, like that young lady that went to the navigation centre, for example, that's how we start to measure the success.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

We'll head back to the Official Opposition. Shared or blocked?

Mr. Shepherd: Shared if we could, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Minister, just checking in.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Yeah.

The Chair: You're good? Okay.
Please go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the minister, I have a couple of things I hope we can touch on in this block, so perhaps we can collaborate to sort of make use of the time so we can fit both pieces in. The first piece: I'd just like to talk a little bit about victim services. I've had the opportunity to talk with municipal officials, some of the front-line workers who are providing support under the new regional model. They have raised some concerns about gaps in services, a loss of front-line staff, some increased red tape under the new regional model. I've heard that the south region at present has no on-call coverage; therefore, no services or supports available evenings and weekends. I've heard that in the east region there are three workers currently covering nine RCMP detachments. Workers have spoken to me with concerns about new restrictions on the kinds of calls they're able to respond to and when.

Through you, Madam Chair, I just want to ask the minister: does he feel the new model has been successful so far, and what metrics is his department tracking to assess the impacts, whether positive or negative, of this change to the new model?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I'm going to get Ross Nairne to come up here as well. Sorry. Yeah. Let me just say this before we start. There have been a lot of anecdotal stories, and when complaints come in, Ross and his department investigate them, and then we find them to be inconsistent with what they'll say the allegation is.

I will say that we have certainly had a lot of positive feedback. You know, the new governance model included 150 paid front-line staff, up to 132. We have the mayor, Megan Hanson, from the town of Sylvan Lake, who has nothing but complimentary things, a letter from the RCMP, again, saying that the model serves as a remedy to some of the challenges experienced in the existing model. So support by the RCMP, support by many communities. In fact, again, you talk about the 16 communities that had no victims' services whatsoever: I mean, again, predictable, sustainable funding.

If somebody indicates, as you have indicated – and I hope you let ADM Nairne know this. If there is a gap, then Ross and his team will obviously address that gap and make sure that is there. But every time Ross has been tasked with doing that, you know, unfortunately, that has been inconsistent to what the allegation is.

Ross, you can go ahead.

Mr. Nairne: Thanks. Thanks, Minister. Madam Chair, just to follow up on the minister's comments, the new four-region RVSS model took effect on the first of October, you know, and I would still say that we're in implementation phase in terms of the last six months. There are staff from the former victims' services units that joined the RVSSs and are doing some of that work. There are growing pains, without a doubt, but there'd be growing pains any time that you take 62 different organizations all doing different things. There was no consistency from a provincial perspective, and what we were trying to do from a department is provide a level of consistency, that an Albertan in the northwest corner or an Albertan in the southeast corner are all getting similar types of services from our victims' services organizations.

Just in terms of the member flagging the after-hours support specifically for the southern Alberta area of the RVSSs, yes, they currently have a challenge around after-hours crisis response in that area. However, they've been working diligently, sir, and they will begin operations of a formal after-hours response as of April 5, to be specific, and that will include everything from phone support all the way through to in-person support.

And to the minister's comment, you know, as issues come up, as concerns come up from communities – and, again, we're trying to provide consistency throughout the province – our staff work with the chief executive officers of all those four independent regions and ensure that we're providing a consistent level of service as best as possible and consistent with what's being looked at by the community.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, to him and the minister for that response. I appreciate that update, and I'm very glad that the southern region is going to have access to those services.

In the second half I was hoping we could talk briefly about correctional facilities, of course, this being budget line item 3.2, custody operations, and again under key objectives 2.1 and 2.3. In October we saw three deaths at the Edmonton Remand Centre in the space of three weeks. That brought the year's total at that time to four. Then in December we saw two more deaths in the space of two days. We don't have a lot of time, but what I will recognize, through you to the minister, is that it seems that this is challenging, for the minister to be able to properly understand where these concerns are and how to handle them, how to address them, when we have the challenge of the fatality inquiry system and the significant delays. My understanding is that on the current list there's a case as old as 2017.

I just wanted to ask the minister: in terms of addressing these sorts of situations, where we have what seems to be a spate of deaths in the space of three months in a single facility, when we have these challenges, these delays in the system, is this a conversation he's having with the Minister of Justice about how we can address some of those? How does the minister ensure that he is able to properly understand what is happening here so we can take some concrete actions? Certainly, I think the loss of a life in a correctional facility is probably one of the most concerning things to see occur. I'm sure the minister finds this concerning and does want to address it. I just want to understand a bit better of how this takes place within the system and what the minister's next steps are going to be.

11:10

Mr. Ellis: We have some wonderful experts here. Sorry; I have to ask this, though. What line item in the budget are you referring to on this one?

Mr. Shepherd: Again, referring to budget line item 3.2, custody operations, key objective 2.1, working with policing, community, ministry, and government partners to improve alignment of mental health, et cetera in community policing and corrections, and then technological improvements in correctional services to enhance service delivery.

Mr. Ellis: Excellent. Thank you. Thank you so much. I would just say that I can't agree with you more. You know, any death is one too many as far as I'm concerned.

I'm going to get my deputy minister and my assistant deputy minister to speak on this, both of whom have extraordinary experience in corrections.

Ms Lajeunesse: Great. Thank you very much. I'll start. In terms of the Edmonton Remand Centre the first point to note: for sure, as the

minister said, any death is one too many. The Edmonton Remand Centre, in particular, is our largest facility by far, so there is a disproportionate number of the total inmate population in that facility.

In addition to the fatality inquiry process that you've referenced, we also conduct a board of inquiry internally, and that happens immediately when we have a serious or sensitive incident in a facility. Within this particular budget you will have heard, with the minister's opening remarks, that we are adding staff to conduct more medical transport from facilities to local hospitals. That will actually help us better respond to emergent situations that might occur in a jail.

I'll call on Fiona Lavoy, the ADM of correctional services, to supplement that.

Ms Lavoy: Hello. Fiona Lavoy. I'm the ADM for correctional services. Just in follow-up, Madam Chair, to the comments made by the deputy minister, yes, we do conduct a board of inquiry, which is a mandated investigation and review of the situation when deaths occur in custody. That's something through our corrections legislation and regulation. There are learnings from those events that we take into consideration on a go-forward basis.

As it was also mentioned, the Edmonton Remand Centre houses approximately half of the provincial population in custody in the province. As was mentioned, it is a bit of a larger percentage of individuals that are in custody that we see at that facility compared to the nine other centres within the province.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the minister and his staff, through you, Madam Chair, for those answers to those questions and for the collaboration.

Making best use of the limited time we have, I'll perhaps put in one last question in the last minute we have here. Looking at all line items in the budget and the total amount of spending, are there any amounts contained in any of these line items for any contracts with the firm Rubicon Strategy?

Mr. Ellis: No.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate it.

Mr. Ellis: We left you 27 seconds.

Mr. Shepherd: Indeed. Through you, Madam Chair, I will commend the minister on his efficiency. No, I certainly do appreciate the collegiality of the conversation we've been able to have so far. I look forward to returning after the government members.

The Chair: You know, it's good to laugh during these sessions, so thank you for the humour of members.

Let's turn it over to the government side. We have Mr. Singh up next. Shared or block time?

Mr. Singh: Shared time if it's okay with the minister.

Mr. Ellis: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. I thank you for coming here today. I also want to express my appreciation to the ministry's work and initiatives on keeping Albertans safe and secure and ensuring Alberta is prepared for and resilient to the impacts of disasters.

My questions are on external partners for victims' services. I would like to highlight key objective 3.2 on page 139 of the business plan. It's all about continuing to work with public safety

and community partners to deliver stable and consistent victims' services across the province.

In support of key objective 3.2 I see that Budget 2025 is committing \$26.8 million to external partner organizations to provide supports and services to victims of crime, including the implementation of the new victim service delivery model. I would like to focus my question on this line of support for victims of crime. Would the minister please explain how these funds will be allocated to these external organizations who provide supports and services to victims of crime?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. I'd like to thank the member for the outstanding work that he does for the people of Calgary-East. Thank you very much for the work that you do. He's always, of course, raising public safety concerns with me, and I thank him for that.

Look, with victims' services, as ADM Nairne had mentioned, we're going to have, you know, some growing pains. But, again, it's about consistency throughout the province. It's about predictable and sustainable funding. You know, many of the communities that we have talked to want to know: "Can we volunteer? Can we fund raise?" Yes. The answer is yes, but we just don't want you to be solely reliant on that sort of way to fund raise for victims' services, right?

Having predictable, sustainable funding – and many, many if not all of the communities throughout Alberta that want to be able, especially the small ones, to help victims of crime, victims of tragedy, you know, people that want to volunteer, people that want to fund raise: absolutely, you can go do that. But that predictable, sustainable funding, the consistency are the sort of stuff that we want. Of course, we want to provide information on the criminal justice system – the rights of victims I think are very important for people to know – to provide information on victims' assistance programs and support victims to mitigate the impact of crime, acting as a link between victims and the criminal justice system.

Many people don't know about the criminal justice system, right? I know you're very proud of your son who is very much getting involved in law enforcement, as an example. You know, he has knowledge that other people don't about the justice system. When somebody is a victim of a crime or a victim of tragedy, making sure that there is that link to help those individuals is critical.

I'll go back to what ADM Nairne said and, in fact, even what I said, that if there is a gap – right? – that doesn't mean that's an entire failure of the system. What we saw in the previous model, having the 16 communities that had no services whatsoever and many others who were on the brink of collapse, if I'm not mistaken, was a failure in the system. So right now: predictable, sustainable funding, people to provide the guides through the system, and then making sure that we are actually getting folks the needs.

Let me be clear here because I think this is very, very important. If you are a part of a small town and you want to volunteer and you want to help fund raise and do extra above and beyond, absolutely, we are all welcome to that.

But they are a critical role. Thank you.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Minister, for the answer here. My next question, through you, Chair, is on disaster management. Outcome 4 on page 139 of the business plan tasked the ministry with ensuring that Alberta is prepared and resilient to the impacts of disasters. Just last year we saw the devastating impact of wildfires across our province, including Jasper. Key objective 4.1 highlights supporting Albertans and their communities to raise their awareness of disaster risk and preventative action.

I will focus my questions on awareness and preventative actions. Would the minister please explain how the ministry will work to raise awareness through Budget 2025? And what are some of the key components strategized by the government on an effective emergency management plan, including risk management, mitigation strategies, response protocols, and recovery plans?

11:20

Mr. Ellis: Thank you for the question. I'm going to go to ADM Lacroix in just one moment.

I can talk at a very high level. You did talk a little bit about Jasper, and one of the things that Alberta Emergency Management does is provide the education and training to municipalities all throughout this province. I look at what occurred in Jasper as – here's where I see this as being a success. The fact that around 25,000 people were able to be evacuated in a co-ordinated effort with not even as much as a traffic accident to me is a success not just to the municipality but to Alberta Emergency Management for making sure that that community had all the tools and resources in the tool box that when the crisis hit, they knew what to do, right? That's part of the success of Alberta management.

I'll let Steve talk about the details.

Mr. Lacroix: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I'll be blunt, as usual. I'm not too worried about awareness. I think Mother Nature has done a pretty good job at making people aware of the risk associated with natural disasters in our beautiful province. Preparedness is where I'm at.

We are developing a number of strategies informed on postincident assessments and collaboration with other ministries. As an example, we're working with Forestry and Parks right now, and they're developing a flood and fire mitigation strategy. That should be coming through this winter, actually, before it's over.

We have a small but mighty preparedness team that surveys Albertans and identifies gaps as to where we need to maybe double down on our efforts, not them being aware of natural disasters but having their own individual plans to take care of themselves in the face of an emergency. We have field officers that visit – the metric there, to MLA Shepherd's point: 90 per cent of municipalities every year; last year we hit 100, actually – and validate their emergency response plans if not help build those emergency response plans, their evacuation plans, their emergency social services plan.

We have another team that deals in hazard identification and risk assessment. That team is moving from building the tool to now implementing the tool, and we have a bit of a road show starting right now. We've already hit two communities, off the top of my head, Lethbridge and Cochrane. That will help communities identify the risk, which is important, but more importantly I think is how to treat that risk and make necessary investments to make their communities more resilient.

I spoke about emergency social services. We have some training now coming online and in person to help communities deal with the large numbers of evacuees that we've had over the last couple of years, something like 23,000 just in the past year. That will help communities hosting those evacuees, who are all facing very challenging times, to deal with them and standard levels provided to them.

We also conduct tabletop exercises. Actually, we're running one next week, a province-wide tabletop exercise on emergency management. We also participate in municipal-led ones.

Lastly, I would say that I would be remiss if I did not thank all the municipalities in Alberta that have stepped up to help their neighbours in need, including ones from other jurisdictions if I go back to 2023 with the Northwest Territories, and have done an

absolutely outstanding job at wrapping their arms around people in distress over the last couple of years.

I think we're fairly well set up for what's coming up this year. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much to the minister and his team.

We'll turn it over to the Official Opposition with Ms Goehring.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister. Hi. How are you?

Mr. Ellis: Good. Yourself?

Ms Goehring: Good.

The Chair: Sorry. Are we doing blocked or shared time?

Mr. Ellis: We'll share it.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I'm asking questions today based on my role as being a liaison for the CAF and for Veterans Affairs. I know that I've worked with some of your people in your ministry over some of the community concerns that have been brought forward from veterans, so that's kind of where my line of questioning is going. I have to say, Minister, that I'm pretty disappointed that out of all of the ministry documents, not just yours but the entire government's documents for this budget, the word "veteran" isn't in here once.

So when I'm thinking about what the support could be for veterans and should be when it comes to government and knowing that you have somewhat overseen this community, I'm curious why there's no mention of veterans in here. I know that there are initiatives that are happening around the province. I know that there have been some attempts at collaboration with the government. Knowing that the veterans community is really struggling right now with homelessness, addictions, mental health and that there have been pleas for government to have a streamline for veterans, I'm curious if there's any sort of budget line or anything in this budget that directly links to supporting veterans.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you. I couldn't agree with you more in regard to support for veterans. I don't want to out my ADM here, but he was a military veteran himself.

Sorry, Steve, you're head of the veterans homeless society?

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. Homes for Heroes.

Mr. Ellis: Homes for Heroes, right?

Although MLA Wright certainly reports to me, I can tell you that we have had discussions. Some might call it a lofty aspiration; I would call it something that I think can be very realistic, and I'll get to that in a moment here. But, you know, one of the things I've tasked MLA Wright with doing – and even taking ADM Lacroix's role as ADM: that has nothing to do with it. But his Homes for Heroes: we know who those – I was going to say officers – soldiers are that need that help. Through Stephen's other role working with MLA Wright, not only do we want to make sure that those folks are identified but also getting the necessary supports that they need. Yeah. Do I have a specific line item budget as it relates to law enforcement or corrections? No, but I don't consider that a bad thing.

This is not about putting handcuffs on anybody, quite frankly, or in a correctional facility. It's about making sure – and I know people are going to say: you're not talking about the budget. Okay, but hang on. This is very important as well, and I don't disagree with you on this, right? What I would like to see is that homelessness for

veterans ends in this province. I see everybody nodding their heads and I think everybody would agree with me on that, right?

I know there were other governments in the past that had lofty goals about ending homelessness in a province or in Canada or whatever the case may be. A lot of variables there. Really, really tough, but with veterans I think that is actually a realistic thing that we can do. So what I have asked MLA Wright to do is, again, in Stephen's other role as a volunteer work with him on that but also work with community and social services, with Mental Health and Addiction so that when those individuals are identified, we want to make sure that they actually have a pathway to getting the help that they need and then when we talk about entering the system, the journey of recovery, and exiting the system, again in Steve's volunteer role, making sure that we have Homes for Heroes for them to exit into.

I apologize for this not being a line item budget, but I think you and I are actually very much in sync on this. Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Minister. When it comes to housing homeless veterans, one of the barriers that we're seeing – I sit on several committees within the veterans community – is mental health and addictions, that a lot of the homes that support people transitioning out of homelessness don't actually want people that have mental health and addictions. When we look at the veterans community, there's a higher rate of PTSD, so there are a significant amount of supports that should be enhanced when we're looking at homelessness. I'm grateful that you're open to looking at that, and I would love to be a part of those conversations.

You mentioned policing and security. That's another question that I have related to the budget. When it comes to veterans, we know that many after exiting the CAF go into those types of careers. So I'm curious if you're open to exploring with postsecondary or other sort of training initiatives that would support that transition. We have Helmets to Hardhats that focuses on trades. Is there any sort of idea that you would like to work on with veterans to help transition them into those security-type careers?

11:30

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I think that was part of the reason why the commissioners were set up. You know, although – sorry. The world is evolving. You had me thinking geopolitically for a second here, but it's been many, many years since a World War, right? But the reality is that the commissioners are certainly an avenue into, kind of, a security. I know, in my own personal experience, I started as a security guard and eventually worked my way up into law enforcement, so there is that sort of pathway.

In regard to other avenues, sure, open to exploring any sort of other opportunities. Look, I think with anything, again, I'm going to talk slightly – when we talk about the recovery-oriented system of care, what we're talking about is entering a system – agree with me – that's helping people with their mental health addictions issue, right? But when we say exiting the system, we're exiting the system where you have a job and you have a place to live. Right? So it's not, "here's your ticket to the homeless shelter; good luck with life," as we see that is where the cycle of abuse falls off the rails.

Through the Homes for Heroes, through any sort of other organization, and I'll just off the top of my head say the commissioners, making sure that once that person has been identified, that they've got help for their severe mental health and addictions issue, and then making sure that we can transition them into that job and into a place to live: that's how you stop that cycle. I'm with you on that.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I think this is all great news to hear. What I'm curious about is: are you open to having a specific line item for funding within your ministry that would actually help to support and be focused on transitioning veterans with the lens of coming from the veterans community? Having those members come forward to say what their needs are to help kind of direct it, sort of like a liaison from that community to have voice at the table. When we were government and I was the government liaison, we had a crossministry working group that included CAF members, regular force and reserve, and members from the veterans community that came together to talk about ways to support government funding and transitioning. Are you open to that?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I mean, I'm open to it being somewhere. I'm trying to, again, figure out – I appreciate the fact that MLA Wright reports to me, but I mean, he could technically report to any minister. I think he reports to me because I'm the Deputy Premier, so I'm not entirely sure of that. Like, I see where you're going with this, and I'm actually not opposed to that. I'm trying to figure out if that would fall under Public Safety and Emergency Services. I'm not entirely sure of that. JET, maybe? You know, I'm not saying it doesn't fit in government. The question would be: where would it fit in government? That's kind of where I'd answer that one, but not opposed to it.

Ms Goehring: Wonderful. Thank you so much. Those are really all my questions.

Mr. Ellis: Look, let me just say this. Otherwise we'll have MLA Shepherd having to kill time and thank everybody in the room here for the next 50 seconds. Sorry. I'm glad we could have a good time.

Look, I just want to say again, just in regard to the veterans community, and, again, when MLA Wright was, we'll say assigned to me, as the Deputy Premier, I take this very seriously. I'm very humbled and honoured to work with military veterans, former law enforcement, community veterans. Their service to this nation I think is second to none. As far as us as a community, regardless of your political stripe, figuring out how to give back to them – you know, I have members of my own family that are veterans. They don't ask for anything. These are very humble people. This is why, unfortunately, when you see them on the streets, they don't really ask for help or want the help. It's almost like you've got to force them to get help because that's that pride that they have in them, but that's because they're honourable people. But addictions can affect anybody.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

We're moving over to the government side. Member Johnson, shared or block time with the minister?

Mrs. Johnson: Shared, please, if the minister is willing.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Yeah. Go ahead.

The Chair: All right.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you to the minister. First, thank you for coming here today, for being so prepared with all of your staff, for the great answers, and for even getting those answers on the fly. I sure appreciate that and all that you do. I'd like to talk a little bit about the readiness and resilience in the event of a disaster and how that fits into the budget.

I had the privilege, the very rare privilege, really, of being on the trauma team for the re-entry of the evacuees after the Fort Mac fires.

I went up there with a nonprofit group and got to go to the high-trauma area. It's life changing. We slept in a homeless shelter for the week as volunteers, and it gave me new eyes to see how important it is that we be ready, that we be resilient for these types of horrific events.

I'd like to talk a little bit more about that. Performance measure 4(b) on page 140 of the business plan surveys the percentage of Albertans who have taken at least three preparedness actions in the past year. According to the document, this measure is based on the results of the preparedness survey of Albertans conducted annually by AEMA. It goes on to say that the measure demonstrates Alberta's readiness and resilience in the event of a disaster. That actual result was 50 per cent in 2024. The target for '25-26 is set at 55 per cent.

First, would the minister explain how Budget 2025 would enable this great target to be reached?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you. I'll go to ADM Lacroix, again, on this one here, but really the continued investment is Be Prepared, right? You heard me talk about this before. Regardless of the community, everybody has the potential to face various disasters. I myself was a first responder in the 2013 flood in Calgary, as an example. You know, there were a couple of events in Calgary, but this is part of the reason why they have themselves their own emergency management system in Calgary. Obviously, smaller communities do not have that same luxury as, say, Calgary and Edmonton.

Part of what Alberta Emergency Management does is make sure that all communities are prepared. You know, I remember the Carstairs area. There was of course the threat of tornadoes, as an example, obviously, forest fires which in the last two years have been top of everybody's mind, making sure that proper evacuation plans, proper plans to make sure that you have the necessary food and water to even last a certain amount of time – maybe I'll just go to Steve just to supplement that a bit, if you don't mind?

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. Thanks, Minister, Madam Chair. I alluded to our Be Prepared team. They're small but mighty. I would say that leveraging the 2023 season, actually, we received some additional funding for additional staff on that team that were onboarded last year, and that gives us the ability to be more deliberate.

I was talking about the surveys before. It also allowed us to interact with a number of organizations that we just simply did not have the time to deal with in the past in a cogent way. We're getting not only into people's homes, of course; we already did that. It allows us to collaborate with educators, which we didn't necessarily do in a deliberate way in the past. No fearmongering there, but we're sowing the seeds there in our young Albertans in terms of their own preparedness and leveraging teachers and schools. Academia is also being targeted as a whole on that front, which I think is a great idea.

The other thing that it's enabled us to do is also target vulnerable populations, racialized communities, in their languages, having the products available – I'm just going off the top of my head – in I think 28 different languages across the province being made available in terms of individuals, family units, communities, having their own preparedness plans to deal with a fire coming through or towards their community, a flood, or you name the natural disaster.

Those are all the types of initiatives that we've rolled out that will continue to roll out in 2025 leveraging the budget that is at debate right now. Thank you.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, through you, Madam Chair, thank you for that answer. It actually covered a couple of other following questions, and maybe you can expand on them a little more, with a more fulsome answer, even. I'm curious about how individuals and families first can take the actions that they can to prepare for disasters. We heard the minister talk about tornadoes. I remember we drove by the Pine Lake tornado literally minutes after it happened, and emergency vehicles were, you know, by the dozens coming in. There are things like tornadoes and the Jasper fire and Fort Mac fires and floods and droughts. What are some of the specific actions individuals and families can take to prepare? I'll expand that into communities as well. I think in the last few years as we've seen some of these disasters coming up, communities are really being proactive to prepare for this. What are some more of these actions that we can support, including public awareness campaigns, like you mentioned, community workshops, and more?

11:40

Mr. Ellis: Let me start, and if I miss anything here – I mean, it really starts with knowing your area – right? – and what your area might be vulnerable to, for example, the floods, the wildfires, severe storms. Then, of course, staying thoroughly informed through emergency alerts, weather warnings. I know you talked specifically about the tornado.

It's climate change Canada, is that correct?

Mr. Lacroix: Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Mr. Ellis: Environment and Climate Change Canada. I mean, they're going to give you the most up-to-date information at that particular moment because, I mean, it's weather, right? It can change any moment and go in multiple different directions.

For individuals and communities, of course, making sure that you're practising an emergency plan, that you've talked about it with your family, as an example, on what to do. They need to decide if they get separated how they're going to stay in touch, maybe meeting points, as an example, just in case they get separated during an emergency. I talked earlier about the emergency kits. You know, you should have at least 72 hours worth of food and water and medication.

One thing that we've learned over the last couple of years, and we make sure that we reach out to the SPCA, is pet supports, right? Sometimes that's a forgotten loved one that we don't want to forget, and so the government works with the SPCA. I know Steve and his team have built up a great relationship to make sure that pets are taken care of as well, as they are part of the family.

Then connecting with neighbours and local resources, I think, is also critical just to make sure nobody is left behind. A lot of times in critical command we call it kind of controlled chaos. In that controlled chaos we have to make sure that – when you're talking to a person of authority, they want to make sure that you not only have yourself but you have your loved ones. That's a critical component of that.

I don't know if there's anything else you want to add, Steve.

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. Thanks, Minister, Madam Chair. I would only add, I guess, something I always use with the team at EMA which is that, you know, training for the Olympics during the Olympics is not a great idea, and complacency will get you hurt. What we incentivize individual Albertans to do in their communities where they reside is to have those plans in place, exercise them, validate them, and you will identify some gaps, probably, within those plans, and then make the necessary arrangements with friends, neighbours, whether it's another

community near you, to make those plans more resilient and, yeah, keep your people safe.

That's all I would say about that. Thank you.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister and his staff as well for those great answers.

In light of the time I will just maybe go on and we can expand again a little bit more. I think you've touched on this question as well, but we'll just go there briefly and expand upon it. What role does education and awareness that we've been talking about play in achieving these targets, the targets of 55 per cent? Through Budget 2025, how is the government working to inform Albertans about disaster risks and preparedness measures?

Mr. Ellis: Look, education and awareness is, of course, critical. I clearly cited the example that we had in the Jasper area. I mean, yes, the local residents with the leadership there to make sure that their residents were prepared and aware, but obviously working with the local law enforcement, the local RCMP of jurisdiction was a critical piece to that. Again, I mean, you know, we have tens of thousands if not more visitors that come to Jasper.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll move back over to the opposition. Please proceed, Member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and yes, if the minister is amenable, I'd be happy to once again go back and forth.

The Chair: Minister, back and forth?

Mr. Ellis: I was hoping Nicole would . . .

Mr. Shepherd: I'm sorry to disappoint the minister, but . . .

Mr. Ellis: No. It's all good. Back and forth is fine.

Mr. Shepherd: Madam Chair, my next question here is connected with a few different items here in the budget and business plan, connected with lines 2.5 and 2.2 in the budget, contract policing and policing oversight and funding for ASIRT, also connected with key objective 1.3, implementing strategies to improve the delivery of policing services in the province to ensure Albertans are safe and police are accountable to the communities they serve, and outcome 1, where the minister speaks of initiatives that best support contemporary, responsive policing focused on the best interests of Alberta's diverse populations.

I will just provide a bit of a warning caveat that I'm going to talk a little bit to sort of set up the context for the question I'm about to ask. If you will indulge me in being able to provide some of that context, I assure you these questions are directly related to the items I noted in the budget and business plan.

Madam Chair, recently we saw a journalist report on notes that he obtained that were taken by the chief of Calgary police about conversations that he had with members of the government cabinet and their staff regarding the CPS's actions in response to student protests at the University of Calgary and an ASIRT investigation into those actions. According to those notes there were attempts to contact the Premier the day of, conversations with her chief of staff, followed by the Minister of Advanced Education calling the chief to express support. The minister here today did speak with the chief

a few days later to inform him that there would be an ASIRT investigation. Shortly after that, the chief reportedly, according to the notes that were taken by the chief, logged a phone call with Marshall Smith, the chief of staff for the Premier. According to Chief Neufeld's notes Smith assured him that ASIRT would not . . .

Mr. Singh: Point of order.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. The point of order is under Standing Order 23(b), the member "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." I think we are not here to discuss media reporting. The committee has convened for the purpose of considering the ministry's '25-26 budget, including estimates, fiscal plan, and business plan. The matter which the hon. member is trying to raise is not within the boundaries of our discussion today.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's not a point of order. In fact, the member prefaced that he will talk about the budget line item and business plan. The member really didn't let him finish his question. On relevance, there is enough in House of Commons rules and procedures that unless you know what the member is asking, you cannot determine relevance. If you cut a member halfway into his question, I don't know how you can make a case that it's not relevant when you didn't hear it. So I would say that it's not a point of order. The member didn't let the member finish his question and get to the end of it. I would urge the member to let members finish the question before there is a point of order.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.

What I'll say about this is that we'll leave it up to the minister's discretion, whether he chooses to answer and how he answers.

Please proceed, Member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

As I was saying, the chief's notes indicate that he received a call from the Premier's chief of staff Marshall Smith, who assured him that: ASIRT won't investigate. That's a direct quote from the notes that were taken by the chief. Again, looking at key objective 1.3, ensuring Albertans are safe and police are accountable to the communities they serve, and looking at the frequent comment that the minister has made that his goal, his objective is a paradigm shift in which police are no longer seen as an arm of the state but a reflection of the communities that they serve, it seems that having a chief of staff for a Premier call to tell the chief whether or not an investigation would take place – that sure seems like the arm of the state.

In regard to this budget and business plan and the minister's stated intentions in this plan to ensure police are accountable to the communities they serve, that their initiatives support and are focused on the best interests of Alberta's diverse populations and ensuring the independence of decisions that are being made regarding the focus and scope of investigations conducted by ASIRT, funded in line 2.2, what are the minister's intentions in terms of his actions in the next year under this business plan, through this budget to ensure that there is not even the appearance of political interference in decisions that are made around the

scope of investigations that have such serious impact on Albertans?

11:50

Mr. Ellis: I can't speak to a conversation that I was not a part of or what may or may not have been said between two other individuals. I think everybody would understand that.

I would just say that we have what is known as the Police Review Commission on a very high level. This Police Review Commission is meant to provide that arm's length and independence that the member is talking about, whether it be through any form of a professional standards complaint process or where ASIRT is investigating. As we all know in this room, ASIRT investigates complaints that, you know, have to do where somebody may have received an injury, directly or indirectly, as a result of a police officer's actions. Yeah. I mean, this is the exact reason why we're doing the Police Review Commission, to make sure that we have that independence.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I hope it would concern the minister. I mean, certainly that chief of staff is no longer here, but if I were the minister of public safety, having a Premier's chief of staff interfere, to comment on what is going to be the scope of the investigation would certainly concern me.

In terms of body-worn cameras, the minister referenced funding for body-worn cameras or support for their implementation with Alberta Sheriffs. Also, just curious about what support there might be for local municipalities. Again, as I referenced earlier, municipal governments have seen an imposition, downloading of a lot of costs from this provincial government, whether that's having to pay for the hand counting of ballots this fall, losses due to the new restrictions on photoradar, several years of reduced grants in lieu that have affected their ability to pay for policing services. They are now facing these increased costs.

The minister was asked about this by a councillor from the city of Camrose, a member of their police commission, at the policing plenary. Didn't directly answer the question. Spoke about the Police Review Commission he's working on establishing and commented that that would save costs for police services in terms of not having to mount their own investigations. I just wanted to clarify with the minister that he is not intending to provide any funding to municipal councils to off-set the costs of body-worn cameras that he's requiring them to buy and, in fact, advising that police services should be able to absorb these costs within their current budgets due to the savings that, he says, he'll be providing to the new Police Review Commission.

Mr. Ellis: ADM Zablocki and his team are reviewing that. I'm aware of that councillor. I talked to her even just the other day. As I said to her and as I will say to you, the Calgary Police Service was able to figure this out without asking for any additional funds. The RCMP, I believe, have received funds – Curtis, correct me if I'm wrong – from the federal government in order to do that.

Is that correct?

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah.

One of the things that I have committed to, to both the AACP and to that particular councillor herself, is that we would absorb the costs of the cloud. That cloud could be quite costly, quite frankly, and I think, on the advice of the folks in the department, if we are

able to negotiate collectively with whoever that service provider is going to be, that would certainly reduce the costs.

What the member is stating is correct. Police services are not going to require their own professional standards sections coming up very shortly. Certainly, that is another opportunity to save additional money that they can reallocate to other areas. You know, let me be clear. I mean, the body-worn cameras, which we are the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement this province-wide, are extremely important not only for the confidence of the people of Alberta but for the officers themselves. In the end, it's really about public trust.

I'll pass it over to the MLA to give the last 15 seconds.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: All right. We'll go back – sorry. Go ahead and finish.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, through you, Chair, to the minister. I absolutely agree. Certainly, the implementation of body-worn cameras is an important step towards police accountability.

I'll just say thank you once again to the minister and his staff for the opportunity to speak today.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Moving over to the government side. Member Lundy.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, as we close our time here, I just want to reiterate thanks to the minister and his team and his staff for all the work they do. I'm fortunate to have Nisku in my riding, and I've had numerous business owners in my office talking about the impact that property crime is having on their businesses. This is certainly an economic issue in addition to a public safety issue. I just want to pass along our thanks and their thanks for taking these issues very seriously and helping them.

The Chair: Sorry, Member. I don't mean to interrupt, but is this shared time? I forgot to ask. Shared or block?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. That's fine.

The Chair: Shared?

Mr. Lundy: Shared. Thank you, Chair.

I would like to ask about the electronic bracelet monitoring program. I think this is an important program particularly in reference to violent repeat offenders. This is on page 137 of the business plan. I believe the investment is \$5.7 million under Budget 2025. I think it's important for the province to see what we can do on violent repeat offenders. I think it's fair to say that some of us feel that the federal government is failing us on this issue. The catch-and-release program has been highlighted; certainly, a huge emphasis on the release part of that. My question, through the chair to the minister: would the minister explain how the electronic bracelet monitoring program offers more effective supervision and monitoring?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Thank you very much. I think, as you previously mentioned, you know, the soft on crime policies, Bill C-75, the catch-and-release program: that has been not just a disaster for Albertans but a disaster for Canadians. We in Alberta had to try and think outside of the box in order to provide a tool in the tool box for the judiciary, for lawyers, as an example, whether it be a Crown prosecutor or even a defence attorney. You're correct. We've allocated about \$5.7 million. It's being run out of our corrections facilities. I think I'll get ADM Lavoy to speak on it a little bit more in detail. Really, it's about providing that 24/7 monitoring. Right now through the catch-and-release program we're seeing very much a disaster of people not abiding by the rules set by the courts, so this is going to be a tool in the tool box, and we're really excited about that.

Maybe my ADM wouldn't mind just talking a little bit more about the details from the corrections perspective and how they're implementing that program.

Ms Lavoy: Hello. Fiona Lavoy, ADM for correctional services. Yes. The electronic monitoring program is operational. It started in January of this fiscal year, so it's quite new. The judiciary has been very engaged and involved, and we have just under 20 individuals at present under the program. Similar to other jurisdictions that have implemented it, it's anticipated that it will continue to rise in the near future, but it certainly has provided an additional tool for the courts to order 24/7 monitoring of individuals. It is, as was mentioned, an ankle bracelet that is affixed to the individual, and it is monitored. It is tamper-proof, shockproof, and all of those elements are taken into consideration in how the individual is monitored. We monitor them out of our area.

Mr. Lundy: Great. Well, thank you for that additional information.

Through the chair, quickly, who monitors offenders once they're released on this program?

Mr. Ellis: It's probation through corrections.

Mr. Lundy: Well, that's certainly an exciting development. I was happy to see this in the budget, at least something the province can do to address these violent repeat offenders. Again, we certainly are not seeing action from the federal government on this one, so thank you, Minister.

The Chair: All right. 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 are scheduled to meet Tuesday, March 18, at 9 a.m. to consider the main estimates of the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

