



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

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

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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

Curtis Zablocki, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Security

Alberta Emergency Management Agency

Stephen Lacroix, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister and Managing Director

Fiona Lavoy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Correctional Services

7 p.m.

Wednesday, March 17, 2026

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

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

The Chair: Good evening, everyone. 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, 2027.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, when we come to you, if you would kindly introduce those at the table with you, that would be great. My name is Jackie Lovely. I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and chair of the committee. We'll begin to my right with Mr. Singh.

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

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

Mrs. Sawyer: Good evening, everyone. MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Tara Sawyer.

Mrs. Johnson: Good evening. MLA Jennifer Johnson, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Rowswell: Hi. Garth Rowswell, MLA Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. Good evening. Mike Ellis. I'm the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services. To my immediate left, I have Justin Krikler, my Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services. To his left we have Brad Smith, the assistant deputy minister of financial services and senior financial officer. To my immediate right I have Curtis Zablocki, assistant deputy minister of public security division, and to his right we have Ross Nairne, assistant deputy minister of strategy, support, and integrated initiatives.

Thank you.

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

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

Ms Goehring: Nicole Goehring, MLA, Edmonton-Castle Downs, His Majesty's Loyal Opposition liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces, and the deputy chair of this committee.

Ms Hayter: Julia Hayter. I'm the MLA for Calgary-Edgemont.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, everyone.

A few housekeeping items for the record. Mr. Rowswell is subbing for Mr. Getson. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio and visual streaming transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. We don't have anyone participating remotely with us this evening. Please, members, 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 committee. 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 will 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 allotted time in the main estimates schedule, and the committee will adjourn. Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the meeting I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint. Does anyone object to having a break today? Okay. We will go ahead with a short 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 arrive 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 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 answers without interruption during estimates debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, please, everyone, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

I'd now invite the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to begin with your remarks. Sir, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Ellis: Wonderful. Well, thank you very much, Chair. Of course, very proud to sit with my team here, as I mentioned: Justin Krikler, Brad Smith, Curtis Zablocki, and Ross Nairne. I also want to make sure everybody's aware of who's also in the gallery: Stephen Lacroix, senior assistant deputy minister and managing director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency; Fiona Lavoy, assistant deputy minister of correctional services; and Joe Zatylny, assistant deputy minister and deputy managing director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency.

Keeping Albertans safe and secure is essential to our province's prosperity and, of course, sits at the heart of Public Safety and Emergency Services' work. The ministry has a labour-intensive front line, with responsibility for corrections and sheriffs and emergency management and other direct public safety functions. In support of this mandate, the ministry's budget for 2026 is \$1.5 billion. Public Safety and Emergency Services is among the largest ministries in the Alberta public service by workforce, and staffing costs account for more than 40 per cent of the ministry's operating expense. As a result, compensation adjustments stemming from the most recent round of collective bargaining are a significant driver of the year-over-year increases. The ministry's operating expense has increased by \$146 million from Budget 2025 to Budget 2026, and \$66 million of this total is related to compensation increases. These investments support the people delivering front-line public

safety services, and of course as minister I'm implementing policies that help Alberta's front-line public safety workers better connect with the communities that they serve.

My many years with the Calgary Police Service showed me a lot how a community-focused approach to policing can make a real difference within a community. Police and other public safety professionals must be seen as a trusted partner and a leader within their communities, and Public Safety and Emergency Services is focused on strengthening those connections across policing, emergency response, and corrections to build a safer and more resilient community. Budget 2026 demonstrates how we are following through on our commitments to improve the province's policing framework to better align police activities with Albertans' priorities and establish a new forensic DNA lab to help streamline investigations, enhance our province's emergency response team and systems, and safely supervise and manage offenders both in custody and in the community.

Now, with nearly \$875 million allocated in 2026-27, the ministry's public security division is ensuring that law enforcement agencies have the tools and resources that they need. Every community in Alberta is unique and has unique law enforcement needs, including the province's First Nations communities. Budget 2026 invests close to \$28.9 million to support policing in these communities, including \$24.6 million for First Nations police services. We're also following through on our commitment from Budget 2025 to invest almost \$14 million over three years to support the construction of the new buildings for each of the three First Nations police services in Alberta.

Allocated to the sheriffs interdiction patrol team is \$14.9 million, to strengthen actions against illegal smuggling of drugs and firearms and people across the Alberta-United States border. In 2026-27 Alberta will invest an unprecedented amount into the provincial police service agreement, which supports RCMP detachments across the province. We will make additional investments via the police funding model, that we'll determine in collaboration with the RCMP.

Alberta's government is also modernizing the police funding model to ensure essential front-line policing services remain cost-effective and sustainable for rural and small communities now and, of course, into the future. Since 2020 the police funding model has allowed more than 285 police officers and 244 civilian support positions to be added to the RCMP detachments, and we're also working to add law enforcement capacity through the new Alberta Sheriffs Police Service, or ASPS, which will complement the RCMP municipal police services and First Nations police services already working across the province.

The ASPS is still being implemented as an independent police service overseen by a civilian oversight board, and Budget 2026 provides an additional \$36.9 million in '26-27, \$51.2 million in '27-28, and \$64.4 million in '28-29 to continue the ASPS implementation, including recruitment activities, training, critical equipment purchases, and, of course, collective bargaining adjustments. This funding will help to establish a flexible, resilient policing service that can adapt to community needs and fill gaps, particularly in rural areas. Chief Parhar has already been appointed as the first chief of the ASPS and continues to work on building the executive team, strengthening relationships, and developing key recruitment training and operational processes and policies.

Another measure to ensure Albertans can trust law enforcement and have faith in the work that they do is the Police Review Commission, an independent civilian body. The commission, which officially launched in December 2025, is a province-wide agency responsible for assessing, investigating, and hearing serious and sensitive matters involving police. By centralizing police

oversight under one agency, we're delivering a more consistent, impartial, and accessible complaint and investigation process for Albertans, and we're allocating close to \$26.4 million in '26-27 and \$26.7 million in '27-28 for the Police Review Commission, putting Alberta at the forefront of police oversight in North America.

7:10

Another important new initiative to support law enforcement is the forensic DNA lab, as I previously mentioned. In Budget '26 Alberta's government has committed a total of \$8.9 million in funding for the next four years to establish this lab. An Alberta lab will speed up investigations, prosecutions, cost less, and serve local law enforcement more effectively.

While preventing crime and holding offenders accountable is critical, safely managing those in custody and supporting their rehabilitation is equally as important. Budget 2026 provides \$405 million for the correctional services division to support this work. Budget 2026 also allows us to continue moving forward with the modern ankle bracelet electronic monitoring program, which helps keep our community safe by providing 24/7 supervision of high-risk and repeat offenders. We're allocating an additional \$4.1 million over the next three years to expand the program, and the new funding will allow participating victims to receive alerts if an offender approaches a restricted proximity zone, ultimately supporting real-time awareness for those vulnerable people.

Budget 2026 provides resources that we're going to need to plan ahead and respond to natural disasters and other emergencies. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency's budget for '26-27 will be \$125 million. AEMA works year-round with communities across the province to strengthen emergency planning, build preparedness, and improve local response capacity. Over the past year AEMA has expanded the number of provincial wildland-urban interface teams from two to eight, significantly increasing Alberta's readiness and response capacity for wildland-urban interface emergencies. The AEMA continues to support training for regional all-hazard incident management teams, which work alongside local officials and integrate into broader provincial co-ordination efforts through the provincial emergency co-ordination centre. Together these efforts provide specialized expertise and surge capacity when communities need it the most.

In conclusion, with a total budget of \$1.5 billion, Public Safety and Emergency Services is delivering on our commitment to Albertans by making law enforcement more responsive to community needs across the province, safely supervising offenders and supporting rehabilitation, strengthening Alberta's ability to prepare for and respond to wildfires, floods, and other emergencies. Budget 2026 will help keep Albertans safe and secure at home, at work, and, of course, in their communities.

With that, Madam Chair, I will hand the mic back to you. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now begin 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.

Do you wish to have shared time or block time with the minister this evening?

Mr. Shepherd: If the minister is amenable, I would love to share time.

The Chair: Minister, what's your preference?

Mr. Ellis: I was going to go first, but yeah I would like to share time with the member opposite.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you so much, and thank you to the minister and his staff for being here this evening. I appreciate the opportunity, so let's get to it.

Let's start with a few questions then about one of the chief initiatives that we've heard the minister talking about, the Alberta Sheriff's Police Service. If I heard the minister correctly in his opening there, he talked about an increase of \$36.9 million. I appreciate that clarification. We have a couple of different numbers that show up. Line 2.1 of the estimates, Alberta Sheriff's Police Service funding shows an increase of just under \$33 million. Strategic plan talked about a \$22 million increase. Business plan talked about \$36.9 million, which is a number I just heard from the minister. Just to start, if you could just clarify. As I said, line 2.1 seems to have an increase of about \$33 million. Can you just clarify where the additional \$3.9 million approximately is going there?

Mr. Ellis: Sure, great question, you know, one I don't want to say that I anticipated, but I did anticipate this question. I know that my deputy minister has some details for you that I think are appropriate. I would just say that the bulk of that, I think, as also indicated in my remarks, has to do with those HR kind of cost differences between that peace officer or police officer. We anticipated that, but for specifics I know the deputy minister has some specifics there for you.

Mr. Krikler: Thank you. I'll just list off sort of what the base budget was for Budget '25 and then let you know how we got to \$200 million. Does that sound reasonable?

Mr. Shepherd: That would be fine. Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Krikler: In Budget '25 the sheriffs were allocated \$156 million. I'm going to speak in round numbers if that's reasonable, Madam Chair. The minister mentioned that there was an in-year settlement of collective bargaining with the AUPE. The anticipated costs associated with that to fund the sheriffs baseline in Budget '26 is \$13.8 million. In addition to that, there is an investment in body-worn camera, which is part of the overall law enforcement approach across the province, for approximately \$5.8 million. There's also a transfer of \$3.2 million for the team that's working on the transition. Then the new funding into the environment is \$22 million. That's all.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. I appreciate that. Thank you to the minister and to the deputy minister for that.

The fiscal plan states that the ASPS is intended, as the minister said, to augment and support police throughout Alberta and complement existing services. Certainly, in the minister's presser, when he was talking about Bill 15, he stated that the bill and the ASPS are indeed about facilitating some faster response times, better collaboration, and, most importantly, more boots on the ground. That's the main justification, then, for the dollars that we see in line 4.2. As I look through the legislation and the budget documents, it does not appear, from what I can see, that there's going to be a significant net increase in boots on the ground in the next year.

Schedule 22 in the table section of the fiscal plan indicates the intent to hire only an additional 41 full-time equivalents for the ASPS. I assume those are, in fact, front-line Alberta sheriffs because the total there is just over 1,200. It seems to correspond

with the total number of sheriffs the minister has referred to previously. I just wanted to ask the minister if he could clarify how many of the 41 FTEs that are identified in schedule 22 will in fact be net-new ASPS officers versus full-time employees that are being transferred from the sheriffs to the ASPS? Can he identify how many sheriffs he anticipates the ASPS will have the funding and capacity to transition in the next fiscal year?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I think, as I have mentioned over the last short little while, we've identified approximately 600 folks who were doing policelike functions within the Alberta sheriffs. Of course, those include folks that work in SCAN and folks that are doing highway patrol and folks that do our fugitive apprehension, just to name a few. Surveillance is another. Those are folks that have that enhanced training. Those folks – and I'll get to those 41 in a second – will be transitioned through their training over the next three years. That's basically approximately 200 a year for the next three years. That's how we come up to the near 600, and then the other officers that we mentioned here are going to be the net new. It's actually 30 officers. Those are net new. There'll be 30 officers that'll be police officers, and then we have 11 civilian officers because, as I think you're fully aware, the police officers need support as well.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you to the minister for that very clear and succinct answer. I appreciate the efficient flow.

Again through you, Madam Chair, to the minister. Speaking, then, of those 600 officers that are already fulfilling policelike functions that he intends to transition at a rate you're saying of about 200 per year, we do recognize that, of course, those sheriffs are currently doing other work within Alberta sheriffs. Indeed, we know that we had some vacancies within the Alberta sheriffs in the last year through a FOIP that was released. I believe we know that, for example, in the Alberta sheriffs highway patrol alone we had about 64 hard vacancies – those are positions that had no one hired to fill them – another 19 soft vacancies, so a vacancy rate of around 22 and a half per cent. Could the minister, I guess, just sort of clarify, then, what are the current vacancy rates in the following areas of the Alberta sheriffs: in protection, in communication and investigative services, in court security, in fish and wildlife enforcement, in operational support, in sheriffs highway patrol, in sheriffs head office?

7:20

Mr. Ellis: The vacancies are one of those things that for any organization is a bit of a tough one. Certainly, it doesn't matter if we're talking about the RCMP or Edmonton or Calgary. These are numbers that are very fluid and seem to fluctuate sometimes on a daily basis. I'm looking at the former deputy commissioner of the RCMP. They tend to fluctuate. I can tell you, as the numbers provided here, that right now we're sitting at a hard vacancy rate of 8 per cent and a soft vacancy rate of 6 per cent. Again, those are numbers that, I've been advised, sometimes tend to fluctuate between the 12 and 14 per cent number.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the minister for that answer.

Just to clarify again. We know, for example, that the 200 sheriffs he intends to transfer in the next year will be coming from, I guess, some particular areas where those sheriffs are more likely to have been fulfilling policelike functions, areas like the sheriffs highway patrol, for example. Just recognizing again that there have been some vacancies, is it the minister's opinion that all of the areas from which you'll be transferring these officers currently have enough staff to adequately cover the core duties that are required to serve Albertans without reliance on other policing services? For example,

I know I have heard anecdotally of situations where RCMP and others have had to take over prisoner transfers, that sort of thing, because sheriffs were not available. In the minister's opinion, again: does he feel that he has adequate coverage, that transferring these 200 sheriffs will not have a negative impact on the other core duties?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. The primary core duties – I'm certainly happy to get into the history of this as well – are court and prison security and, of course, prisoner transport. As police organizations around Alberta have continued to rely and sometimes, you know, rely a lot – I'm not talking about any one specific agency. I'm talking about all police agencies and communities around Alberta tend to rely on a lot of the work of the folks in the SCAN team and surveillance team and fugitive apprehension team. We can list a whole bunch of very recent cases where they've been, again, augmenting and supporting and contributing and being partners in joint operations with law enforcement, quite frankly, all around Alberta.

When we're talking about the transition, these are what police organizations prepare for. They prepare for times when people rotate through holiday times and training exercises, as an example. You're not going to see a – you know, these are things that are planned for, to have a certain segment in groups so that you're not providing so much pressure on the organization.

I will just talk in a bit of a hypothetical. If we're doing folks who are performing the policelike functions, you would take maybe two hypothetically from the SCAN team, two from highway patrol, two from fugitive apprehension, you know, just as an example, and then put them through the training process, which is going to be approximately six weeks, so that they, at the end of it, become the police officers. It's not taking an entire section and putting them through the training. To your point, we don't want to disadvantage anybody in any of the duties and especially the core duties that they are performing right now.

I would say that right now some of the struggles that the sheriffs have been having have been some of those core duties, when we talk about court and prisoner security and prisoner transport, but that's, again, because of pressure that has been asked by folks in rural Alberta, as an example, to have, you know, the highway patrols in the area. In Leduc, as an example, there was – God forbid – a shooting that occurred just the other day. The first one out was the sheriff, right? They worked collaboratively with the police of jurisdiction and were able to handle that scene appropriately.

Look, policing is a very dynamic job. It's a very tough job. But I can tell you and assure you that, according to Chief Parhar, we're not going to disadvantage anybody in their duties, especially their core duties as it pertains to court and prisoner security and prisoner transport.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you again to the minister.

Through you, Madam Chair, then, is it the minister's intention – again, he's given me the totals here. He intends to hire 30 new experienced officers and then 11 civilian officers. That's the 41. Is the minister not intending to backfill any of the positions from which he is transferring sheriffs out of things like highway patrol or other positions into the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service to instead be fulfilling these sort of policelike functions?

Mr. Ellis: Again, we're going to be transitioning the folks that are performing the police duties into police officers. As I previously mentioned, over a period of three years there are approximately 200 people that are performing the policelike functions that are going to be going through a bit of a transition. Again, not to disadvantage any of the core duties. Then also, the net new are just going to really

be performing some of those jobs that are going to be the police officer job roles. The positions regarding the peace officer roles are still going to be performed by the people doing court and prisoner security and prisoner transport.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. What I'm hearing from the minister, then, is: no, there is not an intention to hire any additional Alberta sheriffs at this time. I'll move on.

Looking at line 2.1, Alberta Sheriffs Police Service funding. Now, my understanding is that this covers all the expenses that would be related to providing the services that were formerly listed as delivered under the ASPSP. Recognizing that, then, in transitioning these sheriffs – again, I appreciate the minister giving the numbers, so 200 sheriffs in the next year. I have some rough numbers based sort of on publicly available data in terms of what the cost of that transition might be.

Now, these are based on the full 600, so I guess we would divide these by a third. You know, around \$29 million for increased salaries if officers are being paid about approximate with the first-class constable with the RCMP; around 5 and a half million for training; around \$8 million for gear, uniforms, and service weapons; roughly \$1.8 million for body-worn cameras. Altogether that would be about \$44.3 million, which is certainly higher than the increase allotted for the ASPSP, but again, we would be dividing that by three. I just wanted to clarify with the minister. You know, since the intent is to get these boots on the ground as quickly as possible, can you clarify how much he's in fact budgeting in each of those areas for the transition of these 200 officers? That would be salaries, training, the individual gear, and the body-worn cameras.

Mr. Ellis: I know you and I have had this conversation before, and I have to say that we have the \$156 million that is currently in place for the Alberta sheriffs. Like, there is a training facility. There is a recruiting facility. There are all these items that are part of a police service that fell under the Alberta sheriffs branch. Kudos to the many, many governments going back to the 1980s that kind of built that template of infrastructure. I can tell you that for training operations: that number is just slightly over \$3 million. That is what has been budgeted for the training for the Alberta sheriffs.

I know that, Brad, you wanted to supplement a little bit more detail for the member.

Mr. Smith: Sure. Through the chair, Minister, the deputy minister previously mentioned the \$22 million of new funding. In addition to the \$3 million for training, Member, there are the compensation costs for those new FTEs that the minister alluded to of \$2.6 million, the new officers at a police officer rate, \$5.4 million, there's a salary differential that needs to be calculated between a peace officer and a police officer of about \$3 million, and then within that in addition to training operations there's a host of recruitment activities, operational start-up costs, ASPSP branding, ASPSP motor vehicles, decaling, et cetera, and shared services agreements that the entity needs to enter into to get started.

Mr. Shepherd: Through you to Mr. Smith: is there a cost, then, for that last category where you talked about sort of the redecating and all the other pieces?

Mr. Smith: Yes. The ASPSP rebranding is estimated at just over \$775,000; for the ASPSP vehicles, about \$1.2 million; the shared services agreements, about \$2.2 million.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you.

Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, then. I guess the minister sort of answered this question, so I'll just verify. His intention, then, is to transfer the 600 sheriffs that are currently doing policelike duties over the next three years, so basically the projected timeline to train and transition the 200, then, would be the course of the next 12 months. That's correct?

Mr. Ellis: I don't want to presuppose the House.

Mr. Shepherd: Of course. Should Bill 15 pass.

Mr. Ellis: Should Bill 15 pass. However, yes. The ultimate plan would be for the first batch of 200 to start working their way through the system to get them trained up to be police officers.

7:30

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

Additionally, I would assume that the current sheriffs when they're in the transition and the training will indeed be compensated. Could the minister just share what rate that the sheriffs will be paid during their transition training? Is that a regular salary or a reduced rate? For the new recruits, what compensation will be offered to them during their training period?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I think the deputy minister brings up a good point. I mean, it's going to be subject to the collective bargaining agreement and what that is going to say. I don't want to say anything out of turn. I think, as you're fully aware, Bill 15 kind of lifts and shifts the AUPE to be the union for those who are nonpolice officers, but the actual police association has not been formed yet. It's not management's job to form an association or a union. The only thing I can tell you – I think it's under the Police Act, but forgive me; I think I just might have heard it from somebody. You have to have five police officers in order to form an association, and once those five officers form an association, then we can have those collective bargaining discussions.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. Then would the intent be, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, to have, I guess, the first officers in the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service be some of these experienced police officers that are being recruited in order to be able to have that core five to be able to form the association if you have to form the association before you can determine whether you can in fact compensate officers who are being transitioned?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I mean, that's what makes sense. That's a decision that's going to obviously be made by Chief Parhar, but I would say, certainly if he was to ask me what my recommendation is, that my recommendation would be to hire the core, you know, minimum five police officers to at least have the ability to form that association so that they can then work with all the other members who are going to be coming through the system.

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

One final question on that, then. The training dollars that have currently been set aside, the figure that was quoted there: does that include anticipated amounts for compensating sheriffs during the training, or would that be included in the salary portion that was quoted?

Mr. Ellis: Just the training.

Mr. Shepherd: Just training. Thank you.

Moving on, then. Oh, one final question, I guess, just when we're talking about the funding envelope here. What amounts are budgeted for communications and advertising for recruitment? Pardon me; we did get some of that earlier, but I just wanted to also clarify: will any dollars in line 2.1 be used to advertise the ASPS to a municipality as an alternative to the RCMP given the Premier's commitment to offering municipalities the option of having an Alberta sheriffs detachment and given that the minister has indeed spoken of at least two communities that he believes would be interested in doing so?

Mr. Ellis: We're not using this money to market to municipalities. A lot of this has been going on regarding word of mouth. A lot of folks in Alberta in municipalities, especially those that are under 5,000, have been deeply concerned about the increased cost to policing. They've been reaching out to me and my office and my MLA colleagues to figure out, you know, what might be an alternative that might be cheaper for them while providing equal or better service.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. Indeed, I've been having some of those conversations with some of the municipal leaders as well, and we'll get to that in some future questions.

Just another round of questions regarding the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service. At estimates for Executive Council this afternoon the Premier provided some new information about the ASPS when she stated that, "When that is fully stood up, one of the arms that we'll be developing is an intelligence arm so we are developing the capacity to be able to do that." By that, she's referring to the same kind of analysis and intelligence work currently handled by CSIS and the RCMP. So just a few questions for the minister. How much, if any, of the funds in line 2.1 or any other budget line are dedicated to developing this new intelligence arm of the ASPS?

Mr. Ellis: None.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you.

Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, then: what is the current projected timeline to stand up this new arm of the ASPS?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I don't even have a police officer yet. I mean, like, sure. You know, aspirationally – and I appreciate what the Premier is talking about – is making sure that we have information and intelligence like any police organization. It doesn't matter if we're talking Calgary, Edmonton, the RCMP. I'm not sure I necessarily agree with the correlation to CSIS. I would probably push back a little bit on that. But if you're talking about any policing organization, we always have police information systems and we always have intelligence. We always may want to make sure that the RCMP are speaking to Calgary, who are speaking to Edmonton, who are speaking to Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and all police services. There is a role to play for an intelligence section within any police service, but there's certainly – that is just common practice.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you through you, Madam Chair, to the minister. I appreciate the minister's clarification. Indeed, this was brought up when the Premier was speaking in the context of the referendum coming up this fall, and we know that even within the minister's own business plan key objective 1.5 talks about mitigation strategies to protect Alberta's democratic processes. The Premier was bringing this up in the context of the referendum this fall, hence my questions about the timeline, because the Premier

seemed to suggest this was something that might be helpful. It does not sound like it would in fact be at this time.

On that, then, you know, looking at key objective 1.5, implementing security risk assessment and mitigation strategies to protect Alberta's democratic processes – and just for the benefit of any government members who might be considering a point of order, I'll just note that the democratic processes would include that provincial referendum this fall. My question. Experts are warning that should the government's significant efforts pave the path for Alberta separatists to force a question on that referendum this fall, there's a very high likelihood of foreign actors attempting to interfere. Indeed, Patrick Lennox, the former director of intelligence for the RCMP in Alberta, says that we're not ready at all and that, in his view, we currently have no capacity whatsoever to push back against misinformation and disinformation from foreign actors, particularly the U.S., interference that he, in fact, believes is already taking place.

Mr. Singh: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.
Please proceed.

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." The committee has convened for the purpose of considering the ministry's 2026-27 budget, including estimates, fiscal plan, and business plan. The matter that has been raised by the member is not within the boundaries of the said topic. [interjection] The issue on the referendum . . .

The Chair: Please stop just a moment.

Hon. member, please just let him say what he needs to say, and then we'll have some defence from your side, and then we'll continue. Please just let's hear him out and keep this all civil.

Mr. Singh: The issue on the referendum portion mentioned by the member is not related to the matter that has been under consideration by the committee, and that is why this is a point of order, Madam Chair, 23(b).

Mr. Sabir: Madam Chair, it's not a point of order. It's a complete waste of time. The member was reading some prewritten note that was sent to him that if his ear hears something referendum, he should raise a point of order and read this page into the record. That's shameful. He should have listened to the member. He cited key objective 1.5, which says "implement security risk assessment and mitigation strategies to protect Alberta's democratic processes." That includes referendums. Through you, Chair . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, just one moment, please. Pause for one moment. May I just first of all say this. Insulting language to a member during points of order is not appreciated during this meeting or at any time. It's unparliamentary, so please choose your words more carefully. We're not going to have that type of meeting today.

Mr. Sabir: Madam Chair, I have not used any insulting language.

The Chair: I heard it, and please don't challenge me during this. I won't accept it.

Mr. Sabir: Key objective 1.5, "implement security risk assessment and mitigation strategies to protect Alberta's democratic processes." That's what the member was asking about earlier. The head of the Executive Council said that the sheriffs will be ready to

protect that process. Questions are well within the scope of these estimates and how the public money will be spent that's going to this sheriff police, so it's not a point of order at all.

The Chair: I'll say this, members. Please mind your language during this meeting. We'll not have any disrespectful dialogue back and forth between the table. We're here to get through budget estimates. We'd all like to hear the questions. We'd all like to hear the answers. Let's please do this in a respectful way.

If you would kindly carry on, Member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, for finding that this is not, in fact, a point of order.

Again, we're also talking about line 2.2 in the estimates, the provincial security intelligence office. Now, as I was saying, until today it was my understanding that the responsibility for defending against foreign interference in this potential separatist question in this upcoming referendum . . .

7:40

The Chair: Hon. member. Hon. member, please. Let's stay on track. We're here for budget estimates.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I want to caution you, Member, please. Let's stick to questions. Please refer to page numbers. Let us please continue on with budget estimate questions.

Mr. Shepherd: As I said, Madam Chair, referring to line 2.2 in the estimates, the provincial security intelligence office, and key objective 1.5, which includes democratic processes, all referendum questions which are currently extant or may be coming in the fall referendum.

It's my understanding the responsibility for defending against foreign interference in such questions would fall to the provincial security intelligence office, again, line 2.2 in the estimates. Again, the Premier this afternoon stated that indeed the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service, that intelligence arm, might be part of that and that she also intends to rely on "Deputy Minister of Executive Council Dale McFee to assist on this." Now, given that the Premier has said that she takes this threat very seriously and indeed we've seen the government act very forcefully in some areas where there's been no evidence of threat such as banning vote tabulators, forcing and adding citizen markers to drivers' licences, I would hope she's asked the minister to step up to his responsibilities in the face of a much more credible threat of foreign interference.

Then the questions for the minister: can he clarify who will in fact be in charge of fulfilling key objective 1.5 and ensuring there is no foreign interference in the referendum this fall? What analysis has been done so far by the PSIO, Deputy Minister McFee, or any other department or agency to assess the risk of foreign interference in the upcoming referendum vote? Does the minister have any strategy or plan to increase the funding or hire more staff for the PSIO to counter the very real threat of foreign interference in such a crucial vote?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I would just say that we have to be very cautious due to the sensitivity of what the member is raising right now. When we talk about police agencies, when we talk about the intelligence component of it: that has not changed. Whether you're going to be the new police service, whether you're part of the RCMP, EPS, CPS, again, they all have their own intelligence sections. Now, I'm going to get my director of law enforcement, because he oversees the PSIO, to speak here momentarily.

I want to thank the member for raising the PSIO. They do have a role to play. I'm just not entirely sure people understand that, again, this is an organization of peace officers, so they're very limited on what they can and cannot do. I can tell you that right now they will conduct threat assessments. As an example, if it's brought to their attention that there might be a threat to somebody in this building, then they will go and do that threat assessment. But that threat assessment is working in collaboration with police agencies such as the RCMP and CPS and EPS. When we're talking about national security, that is a role for the federal RCMP to deal with any sort of foreign interference, if that is certainly what the member opposite might be insinuating. I hope there is not any foreign interference on anything, quite frankly.

I'm going to ask the assistant deputy minister to talk. Not only was he the deputy commissioner within the RCMP and probably has some insight, but also he looks after the PSIO and can probably explain what their duties are.

Thank you.

Mr. Zablocki: Thank you, Minister.

Through the chair, if I could, please, I'll just supplement a bit of the minister's information that he recently shared. Yes, of course, the PSIO, the provincial security intelligence office, falls within our ministry. One major component of the PSIO is the intelligence bureau. Just to share a little bit of information on the functionality of that specific bureau, it does collect, correlate, evaluate, and disseminate information, including information in relation to potential foreign actor interference. There are resources in place currently within the ministry that look at that particular aspect. As the minister commented as well, the bureau has strong relationships with existing police services across the province, not just across the province but across the country, too. Our folks within the intelligence bureau have been known to assist other agencies in this capacity, in this regard. The sharing of information, critical information is always very relevant, very important, in particular in the context of foreign actor interference, which is a concern, I would suggest, in today's time.

Thank you for that.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you, then, just to the minister and the deputy minister, thanking them both for their answers.

Just to clarify again, at this point there is no specific strategy or plan in place regarding the fall referendum in terms of the challenges that we may face from foreign interference?

Mr. Ellis: Well, that's not entirely accurate either. I mean, the PSIO will be constantly evaluating and re-evaluating. Of course, it's like any sort of law enforcement organization. If there is a concern or perceptual concern of a threat, again, they will be looking into that, and then, as the assistant deputy minister mentioned, they'll be working with organizations, quite frankly, right across this country, whether it be the national arm of the RCMP, the local RCMP, working with the Edmonton Police Service, Calgary Police Service, and, quite frankly, any police organization. Even if that threat is coming from a different province, as an example, they'll be working closely with them.

In fact, the PSIO as well as folks in the Alberta sheriffs and our RCMP have – you know, when we talk about some of the drugs and guns that are coming across the border, as I've been saying for several years now, from the United States, they work very closely with the ATF, as an example, and some of the American organizations to make sure that we stop the flow of drugs and guns

that are coming across the border into Canada. This is, again, part of good law enforcement.

Again, we've always asked these peace officers to do more with less. You know, as we start to transition folks into an actual police service, I hope that from an intelligence perspective that only grows and that they continue their collaborative working relationship with all law enforcement agencies right across this country.

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

I'd like to ask a few questions around the police funding model. As the minister noted, indeed, we're hearing from a number of municipal leaders from across the province with their concerns about the increases under the minister's police funding model. Of course, we're looking at line 2.6, the policing support grant, and key objective 1.2 in the business plan, continuing to implement strategies to improve the delivery of policing services, et cetera.

Indeed, I had the chance to talk with a number of municipal leaders at the hospitality suite for Rural Municipalities of Alberta last night, and we know that in early February the minister sent municipalities an estimate of their 2026-27 estimated share of provincial policing costs. We've been tracking news and public reports and indeed spoke with a number of municipal leaders. We know we've seen some significant increases. You know, Mayerthorpe: theirs is going up by four times. Jasper, nearly two and a half times; Lethbridge county, three times; Cypress county, three times; Claresholm, almost three times; Coalghurst, more than double. Sturgeon's is doubling, and they say that the amount they're going to end up paying is the total amount that they're currently taking through their agricultural assessment. Ponoka says that theirs is doubling as well, the total amount of their agricultural assessment plus about half of their residential.

Now, in question period today the minister said that that the cost of the RCMP policing contract itself has increased by about 57 per cent, if I heard him correctly. My question through you to the minister: can he explain why, if the base cost has risen by 57 per cent, his police funding model is hitting municipalities with increases of three to six times that amount?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you to the member. I hope he gives me a little bit of latitude here. I'd like to just explain kind of, like, where we were, where we are, and, of course, maybe where we hope to be. Prior to 2019 municipalities that were under 5,000 were the only jurisdiction, quite frankly, in all of Canada that paid nothing for policing. The reliance was really on those municipalities that were above 5,000 regarding the calls to service.

Now, there were a lot of complaints that I heard. I was in the member's shoes as the critic and went around talking to folks within rural Alberta, and the narrative was very clear, which was: hey, if we can pay a little bit and get some better service, we're willing to do that. Okay. So Minister Schweitzer in 2019 was the minister responsible for public safety and the Sol Gen office at that particular time. He went to the RCMP and said, "Hey, I have some money" – I think it was roughly \$235 million at that particular time – and said, "I would like 500 officers." RCMP came back and said, "Well, I don't know if we can give you 500 officers, but we can give you 285 officers and 244 civilian officers, and then we can kind of stage that over the next five years." Now, as the member has heard me say before, nobody anticipated the authorized strength-level concerns, not just in Alberta but right throughout Canada. Nobody anticipated that.

7:50

Then we fast-forward to 2024. I get handed a piece of paper. That piece of paper ultimately talks about an increase of costs of roughly 32-ish per cent, at which point, I said: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. That's going to cause a lot of harm to folks within rural Alberta." So that's where, Member, you probably heard me say that for a one-year period we were going to cover the \$27 million, which were the increased costs of law enforcement solely by the RCMP.

Now, after that one year, we went through, I think, through an extensive consultation process with folks within rural Alberta. There were some police funding model modifiers, a 5 per cent vacancy as an example; population density subsidy; weighted occurrences; but let's just take that aside for a second.

As that one year kind of elapses, all of a sudden I get told: we're ready to go. Then that's where I get told by my assistant deputy minister that that will be increased costs of 57 per cent, at which point – again, I'm with you – I said: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. That's a lot of money, especially for my rural friends here in some of these small communities that are under 5,000." Like that's not something that is really possible for them to continue to handle those significant increased costs. That's why, Member, you probably are aware that under that police funding model, over the next five years we're phasing this in, over a period of five years for that 22 per cent all the way up to that 30 per cent, and that subsidy is to the tune of \$85 million that we are subsidizing both the RCMP and municipalities because of the increased costs.

Now, I can tell you that all of these costs are strictly from the RCMP. That's just the cost of doing business. That's the bill. Look at me as, kind of – we'll call it the banker, in the sense that I get a bill and I let the municipalities know what that bill is. But I'm just as upset, we'll say, over these increased costs. This is why I spent yesterday meeting with 14 municipalities, talking to them as to what their options might be, how to work with them in order to try to alleviate some of that pressure when it comes to law enforcement, and especially for some of those smaller communities where a lot of folks, quite frankly, are on fixed incomes and cannot afford the significant increase in their property taxes as it relates to strictly the cost of the policing by the RCMP.

That being said, we're alleviating a lot of this pressure, trying to provide supports to folks in rural Alberta. I'm with you, but these are not costs that are strictly coming from me. These are costs in a bill that we have no control over that we're getting from the RCMP.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, to the minister for the bit of history there and then sort of breaking it down. Just a simple question. What I'm hearing from the minister now is that in all of these increases for the municipalities, every dollar is simply related directly to the increase in the cost from the RCMP, and there are no additional amounts being downloaded or added by the province.

Mr. Ellis: Simple answer is yes.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. Through you, Madam Chair, as the minister just noted, he is in a very unique position as the sole broker for police services for municipalities with a population under 5,000. That is, if they want to contract services with the RCMP, they do so through him. He receives that bill, and then he bills the municipality. If he does proceed with his government's promise to give municipalities the choice of contracting from the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service, that will also be through him. The minister will set the price for each of those services. He will build the municipalities according to those services and the amount of subsidy that the provincial government chooses to provide for each.

So just a simple question to the minister: will he commit that he will not favour one service over the other; that is, that he will not use his power and authority to set the costs for municipalities and the level of government subsidy to give one service an unfair advantage over the other by artificially lowering or increasing their respective costs?

Mr. Ellis: Well, point of clarification. It won't be through me. It will be through the civilian oversight board, which will be operating the independent police service. If a municipality wishes to contract with a different contract service provider, that's a discussion and decision that will be between the civilian oversight board and, quite frankly, the new chief; not through me.

Mr. Shepherd: Madam Chair, through you to the minister. Nonetheless, all of the funding for the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service will come from the minister. He will be setting their pay. He'll be setting all the elements. The minister has direct control over every piece that will determine what cost the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service and, if it's the independent civilian board, may be able to allow the cost to be set at. Again, my question to the minister is: will he commit that he will not use the powers that he has and the funding that he controls to artificially lower or increase costs in either case, whether for the contract services he is responsible for handling the billing for through the RCMP or for the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service through the independent civilian agency?

Mr. Ellis: I'm not favouring anybody. As I've stated before, I just want people within rural Alberta to get good-quality service, whether it be through the RCMP or the Alberta sheriffs or, quite frankly, any other of the models that I have provided as options. When somebody calls 911, I need somebody to go to that call. A perfect example of that was in Leduc the other day.

Look, I have nothing but utmost respect for all police services in this province. I do not favour one over the other. As I have stated many, many times before, I think a lot of folks maybe care about the badge more so than some of us who've been policing before. What we care about is providing good-quality service to the people of Alberta however that looks. I think I've said this before to that member, and I think I said this before to my members on the UCP side. You know, we're providing the options. The choice will be up to the municipality to decide what is going to be the service that is going to best suit their needs.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. Under key objective 1.2 in the ministry's business plan, again, "Continue to implement strategies to improve delivery of policing services," et cetera. You know, municipal leaders have also raised some concerns about how long the minister took to provide the information on the new police funding model. They didn't get a breakdown of the percentage increases over the next five years until late December. That was weeks after they'd already voted on their '25-26 budgets. They didn't receive the actual information on the actual cost until early February. That's nearly two months after they had to finalize their budgets.

Now, I know the minister has expressed his own frustration that the government of Canada is apparently taking some time to provide specific details on the RCMP funding model for 2032, so I'm sure you can appreciate the concerns and the feelings of the municipal leaders. That being the case, I imagine he may suggest that the changes that were brought in, the increase from the RCMP, may have slowed him down, but of course we have those numbers now this year. Can he commit that, in order to meet this key objective 1.2, he will do better by municipalities and provide them with their cost estimates for policing for the next fiscal year ahead

of their budget deliberations in November and December of this year?

Mr. Ellis: I mean, now that the police funding model is in place – certainly, you know the team to my left and to my right and behind me – I’ll commit that the team will absolutely do their best to meet those key objectives. Nobody wants to disadvantage the municipality. We have full understanding that they have budgets they need to do as well. I will say that I have outstanding people that are in the bureaucracy of public safety, and they do their best every single day. We try to make sure that we’re meeting the needs of those people that are in the municipalities, especially in rural Alberta.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. A couple of questions, then, around Indigenous policing. Under Outcome 1 of the business plan, the minister notes \$28.9 million for the expansion of First Nations police services, and line 2.5 of the estimates lists just under \$25 million for the same. We know there’s \$1 and a half million that’s been allotted for a new police detachment for the Tsuut’ina First Nation. I think the minister referenced two other nations on which he may be helping cover some capital costs. Can the minister provide a breakdown of how the remaining \$27.4 million is being distributed, to which communities, and for which purposes?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. While these guys find the numbers for you, let me just talk about the self-administered policing and specifically the three police services that you’re talking about. Tsuut’ina was one of them. The money that was being used for there is for their satellite office. Tsuut’ina is a land that is adjacent to Calgary, but it actually extends quite a bit to the west, and there’s an area called Redwood Meadows. In Redwood Meadows they wanted to put a satellite office, so working in collaboration with the federal government, we wanted to make sure that there was a satellite office. Again, good response for policing when it comes to calls to service, so that’s excellent.

Second was the Blood reserve. Again, we’ll get you the specific numbers on that. Their police station was quite old, and they were looking at getting – if I’m not mistaken, they were doing a new one, not just a remodel of it. I was down there for the announcement, again working with the federal government on that.

Then the third one is Lakeshore, which is up in the north and to the west of Edmonton there. They were a remarkable police service involving, I believe, five First Nations, and they were expanding and doing a bit of a remodel of their existing police service. I’ll make sure these guys get the specific numbers for you.

Absolutely supportive of not just First Nations policing but that self-administered model, which is why we’re in the Edmonton area supporting Enoch as they look at transitioning to their own police service as well as Siksika, which are the two main ones that are moving forward.

If you have some numbers there, that’s great.

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. Absolutely, Madam Chair. If I could just share a little bit more information for the room, please. As the minister referenced, in Budget 2026 we’re investing close to \$28.9 million to support policing in First Nations communities, and that includes \$24.6 million for First Nations police services specifically. And we’re following through on our commitment from Budget 2025, again as the minister referenced, to invest almost 14 million new dollars over three years to support the construction of police-related buildings for each of the three First Nations services within the province.

I’ll just back up a bit. In 2025 Alberta committed a total of \$31 million to support policing in First Nations communities. This is slightly higher than the \$28.9 million committed in Budget ’26 because capital funding was a bit stronger in ’25-26. This year-over-year change reflects the timing and progression of infrastructure projects for those three First Nation police services that the minister made reference to as well. So \$30 million committed by Alberta is 48 per cent, and that’s the province’s cost share in relation to the 52 per cent from Canada, and that’s through the federal First Nations and Inuit policing program. One million dollars for Indigenous policing initiatives that are entirely funded by Alberta such as crime prevention co-ordinators that exist on the Tsuut’ina First Nation, a very valuable resource in that context as well.

Again, in ’25-26 Alberta provided additional funding, I mentioned, for those new buildings. I can share some numbers if the committee is interested in hearing some of those numbers in relation to the capital builds, more specifically. Happy to do that. Perhaps I’ll stop there.

Mr. Shepherd: If you want to share just the totals for each project, that would be sufficient.

Mr. Ellis: Member, I know it’s not my role to ask questions, but do you know the cost-share split between First Nations? It’s different than . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Okay.

Mr. Zablocki: Great. Thanks. I’ll carry on. Specifically for the Blood Tribe Police Service there was \$5.5 million committed total, \$4.8 million in ’25-26 and \$707,000 in 2026-27, and that’s in regard to a new police building, which they were badly in need of, that particular nation.

8:00

For the Lakeshore Regional Police Service, their need was in the context of an enhanced police facility. The government had invested previously in a new building at Driftpile for the Lakeshore police service, and they subsequently outgrew that specific facility. There was \$6.9 million allocated for the Lakeshore regional police in that context: \$1.8 million in ’25-26, \$3.6 million in ’26-27, and in ’27-28 it’s anticipated that they’ll receive another \$1.5 million.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, through you to the minister and the deputy minister for those numbers. Regarding Indigenous policing, the minister’s initial mandate letter in 2023 instructed him to deliver on “modernizing and reforming Indigenous policing programs to address chronic underfunding and gaps.” That instruction disappeared from the updated mandate letter that he got in 2025, which did not make any mention of Indigenous communities. I know the minister has spoken of his commitments. I just wanted to ask: what supports is the minister providing to Indigenous communities such as, say, the Stoney Nakoda, who I know are actively working to do the same as the other nations he’s mentioned and stand up their own policing services?

You know, just wondering if the minister believes it’s a responsibility of the federal government to act first. If so, can he outline how he’s actively advocating for them to do so? If I just may say that, after all, we know this is a government that’s not shy about making its demands of the federal government or asserting its abilities to act on its own in a pretty wide variety of policy areas. How is the minister proactively working to ensure that Indigenous

communities are supported and empowered to also establish their own tribal police?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I'd like to thank the member. They're going to put you over on the UCP side if you keep asking these questions.

Look, I have been one of the loudest voices in Canada when it comes to self-administered policing and making sure that First Nations are being supported. As I have stated, not just in a very public setting but also at federal-provincial-territorial meetings, the First Nations, Indigenous, Inuit policing program is a discriminatory program. It's a program that does not allow First Nations people to get paid the same as other police services or have a similar pension. I have raised this multiple times. I will give some credit to Minister Anandasangaree. I believe that he has heard me. We are working very much together to figure out how we can fix that gap.

I do not do this. I do not sit there and say: hey, this is a federal government problem. It's not a federal government problem. It's an us problem as Canadians. I am happy to work, again, with the federal minister to make sure that we're meeting the needs of the folks in the First Nations communities. Not too, too long ago, I would say, I think, just before Christmas, Minister Anandasangaree came down. I took him to Tsuut'ina Nation, where we met with the police service. We talked about some of the issues that you brought up to figure out how we can fill those particular gaps. As the member is also aware of, when I had the police transition grant that was made available, it was also for First Nations to be made available. I don't have the specific number in front of me, but I will say that many First Nations took us up on that grant to figure out what is going to be the best option suiting their communities.

Stoney Nakoda: I could not agree with you more. I think they have an excellent opportunity as well as other First Nations within this province. Under the leadership of my assistant deputy minister we're happy to continue to work with all First Nations to make sure that their police needs are being met. If that is self-administered policing or if that is any other option, we're happy to work with them.

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

A couple questions on emergency services. Can the minister identify which line in the budget estimates contains dollars allocated for the hazard assistance and resilience program, or HARP? It was formerly known as the disaster recovery program. Would that be line 4.4, recovery operations? So which line, and how much is being budgeted for HARP this year?

Mr. Ellis: We're going to bring Stephen Lacroix. He is the expert in this field. He's going to give you the answer there.

Mr. Lacroix: Madam Chair, Stephen Lacroix, the managing director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Through the chair to the member. I can tell you how much we incurred in damages last year, which will inform what we're spending this year on last year's program, but I can't predict the future and tell you how much we're actually going to draw from the contingency for potential natural disasters. With a bit of luck we'll pull zero, actually, if Mother Nature co-operates.

Last year, mostly generated by the events that took place at Chipewyan Lake but we have another seven communities, we stood up four bundled, if I can call them that, hazard assistance resiliency programs to the tune of \$39.5 million if my memory serves me right. We spent \$4.1 million of that money in year, so next year we are left with an amount of roughly \$35 million that we will spend on the 25 HARP programs, if that makes sense.

8:10

Mr. Shepherd: All right. If I understand correctly, Madam Chair, through you to the assistant deputy minister, it's basically on a contingency basis. So as needs rise, they will be drawn from the \$35 million that's remaining.

Mr. Lacroix: Yes. Madam Chair, through you to the member, as the eight impacted communities submit their project lists and substantiation, we will flow the money through them. Have the ability to flow up to 50 per cent of any hazard assistance resiliency program to each of those communities as we speak now, and as those projects come in, we will flow more money to them. Also, I guess, to be clear, there's a built-in contingency in there, so I don't have to have the minister go back to Treasury Board to seek additional expenditure authority.

Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you through you, Madam Chair, to Mr. Lacroix.

One final question, then, in the remaining about three minutes that we've got here. Currently in order to be eligible for the provincial emergency funding, a municipality must undergo a seven-day continuous evacuation period. However, we are seeing rising incidences of wildfires and other natural disasters. Municipalities are experiencing multiple shorter evacuations – two to three days, for example – over the course of a season, which can have an equal or greater cumulative impact for the residents that are caught up in it, but they are not then eligible for the supports compared to a single, longer evacuation. Is the minister open to considering using alternative eligibility metrics such as, say, cumulative days within a 180-day period that would allow support for communities and residents that face, instead of one longer period, multiple shorter evacuations?

Mr. Ellis: I'll get Stephen to supplement there. I know he's an expert in this field.

Obviously, Minister Nixon in ALSS deals with those payments.

I'll ask Stephen to go into detail.

Mr. Lacroix: Absolutely, Minister. Madam Chair, I'm still Stephen Lacroix, the managing director of AEMA. The minister stole the words out of my mouth. It's a question probably better addressed to Minister Nixon.

I can't speak to the policy in place this year – ALSS hasn't shared that with us yet – but in previous years there were provisions made to have those days be considered as cumulative. You would add across the hazard season, so from March 1 till Halloween, October 31, those days, and when you crossed the threshold at seven days, the emergency evacuation payments, that are \$1,250 per adult and \$500 per child, were issued to those evacuees.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Well, thank you, Madam Chair, through you to Mr. Lacroix.

We've got about a minute left. I don't think it's really going to allow for much of a question or certainly any substantive answers, so at this point I'll simply say thank you to the minister and his team for, I think, a good first round of questions. I particularly appreciate that the minister has been willing to go back and forth this year. I think that allowed us . . .

Mr. Ellis: I went back and forth last year.

Mr. Shepherd: . . . to get to a lot more material and get some good information on the record.

With that, I will cede the remaining 30 seconds or so of my time.

The Chair: All right. We're going to move over to the government side. Please proceed, Member.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I may, through you to the minister. First of all, I do want to start with thanking you and your ministry for what you're doing. Your lived experiences certainly play a key role in how you guys are just so effective. And thank you for explaining the funding model. There's a lot of misunderstanding, and to give municipalities that context: I really appreciate it. I know, when we met yesterday with one of the municipalities from my area, how much that was appreciated. So I did want to thank you for that.

The Chair: I'm just checking in. Will this be block or shared time between the two?

Mrs. Sawyer: Well, apologies, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ellis: We'll do shared time. That's fine.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Minister. My feelings might have been hurt if you said block after they got shared.

Mr. Ellis: I thought about it.

Mrs. Sawyer: You should have for my first go-around. Just watch my face turn red.

Mr. Lundy: Keep her in line.

Mrs. Sawyer: Keep me in line. You can try.

The other point I wanted to make before I get into mine. Obviously, being a rural MLA, this is top of mind. I hear it all the time. I know you're very much aware of some of the frustrations within rural municipalities on timely response and just presence. Them having the ability to have options that you're presenting to them is so important, so thank you for that.

I'm going to get right into it. I know some things were covered. With respect to the municipal transitions to independent police service, I'll start there. As I said, communities across Alberta, especially rural and small municipalities, have been clear about wanting policing that reflects local priorities and accountability. Public Safety and Emergency Services, PSES, has positioned municipalities for success by strengthening oversight capacity and providing clear pathways to explore independent policing options. This is also supported by the Premier's mandate letter, to support municipalities interested in developing alternate public safety models.

The 2026-27 estimates on page 200 shows item 2.4, contract policing and policing oversight, at \$433 million, which includes the PPSA management and civilian oversight functions that directly impact transition readiness, fiscal transparency, community-driven choices, and oversight capacity. To the minister through the chair: which components of item 2.4 on page 200 of the 2026-2027 estimates are dedicated to fund transition supports in '26-27? What is the plan for engagement and technical assistance so municipalities receive timely support through '26-27? And just finally, what key performance indicators will track safety and service outcomes before, during, and after any of the transitions to independent policing?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. The new police service within Alberta is actually the Grande Prairie Police Service. I know a lot of people think it's going to be the Alberta sheriffs, but it's actually the Grande Prairie Police Service. You know, fantastic work that was done by Mayor Jackie Clayton, her entire council

along with Dwayne Lakusta, who's the new chief of police there. They are working collaboratively with the RCMP, where we are certainly anticipating a transition to fully transition away from the RCMP into the new GPPS I'm going to say in the fall of later on this year. At least that's what is potentially scheduled. I'd like to thank the RCMP for working very closely with GPPS. There was some transition funding that was provided in previous budgets for the Grande Prairie Police Service to support them in their transition. There's nothing that has been provided this year for this budget.

I can tell you that I've had some very good conversations with Minister Anandasangaree in the federal government, who, like myself – I certainly respect municipalities within the province of Alberta and their choice of what they wish to do regarding policing, just as he respects all provinces and their choice that they may wish to do regarding policing within all the provinces. We are having active discussions right now regarding those municipalities who have entered into or are looking at entering into expressions of interest in contracting out the Alberta sheriffs as a new contract service provider or, as previously indicated, some of our First Nations communities who are looking to transition into their own self-administered policing and getting the federal government and working collaboratively with them to help us with what those transition costs might look like.

You know, I can't say this enough, to thank the minister in being so co-operative and trying to make sure that regardless of the municipality, regardless of where you are in Alberta, no matter how small you might be or how big you might be or some of our First Nations communities, if you're looking at changing into transitioning to a new police service – the commitment that I have from Minister Anandasangaree is that he'll be working with us to figure out what kind of transitional supports he'll be able to help us with in order to support those communities who are looking at a different contract service provider.

Mrs. Sawyer: Through the chair, thank you, Minister. Yeah. Certainly, I know a lot of people are watching what's going on in Grande Prairie with great interest.

Going into the policing priority framework. Albertans expect policing resources to track with their real-world priorities. PSES has laid the groundwork for a province-wide policing priority framework, a mandate letter commitment so services can align activity with what matters most to communities. This work is anchored in business plan outcome 1, page 143, objective 1.1: serious and organized crime, rural crime, firearms violence, and disorder. It's resourced in estimates item 5.1 under strategic policy and planning at \$3.73 million on page 200, funding the policy development, legislative planning, and intergovernmental coordination required to design and roll out the framework.

8:20

Through the chair to the minister: how will the framework impose annual key performance indicators on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, municipal services, and sheriffs to ensure province-wide alignment? Will there be any mechanisms for feedback that will allow communities to track how their priorities shape annual policing plans?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you. You know, I would say that any police service in the province of Alberta or, quite frankly, Canada or North America always has key performance indicators. Doesn't matter how big or small the operation is. When I was a constable or even when I was a sergeant, when we had an operation, we would always have key performance indicators. Was the operation we were doing a success? What we were measuring it by? Was it by the amount of

arrests? Was it tackling social and civil disorder? I mean, there were various key performance indicators to know whether that was a success.

You know, one example of that is when I was policing in downtown Calgary. We certainly had some concerns regarding violent crime. This was back in the mid-2000s. In Calgary we were probably getting stabbings and shootings on almost a weekly basis, and it became a serious concern for the people of Calgary. I formulated an operation called operation bounce, where I worked collaboratively – now, this might be standard practice for folks nowadays, but it's something that was new at that particular time. I engaged the Alberta gaming and liquor commission. We had fire, we had city licensing, we made sure we had EMS on standby, and we went in to the downtown area of Calgary. We worked, through intelligence, with those who were causing some of the problems in the downtown area.

The operation was such a success that we actually had no stabbings or shootings during the entire operation – that was a key performance indicator – which ultimately led the police service to take that operation and formulate into a unit what ultimately became the gang suppression unit within the Calgary Police Service, for which a new unit would have more performance indicators.

You know, I'd love to ask my friend here, who is with the RCMP, to talk about key performance indicators as well and some of the great stuff that they're doing there.

Mr. Zablocki: Thank you, Minister. If I could, Madam Chair, through you, just supplement the minister's comments. Within our law enforcement oversight branch, so that falls within my portfolio, in the public security division of the ministry, we have the police performance management system. These are really our policing standards that we require for all police services in the province to follow, right? We want policing to be adequate and effective, and we develop standards for police services to be compliant with. Again, my law enforcement oversight branch within the ministry looks after that particular aspect.

We do audits every four years in the context of compliance with these provincial policing standards. We look at the standards and the performance metrics, and the metrics demonstrate alignment with community needs and provincial expectations. Some of the KPIs that we have as outputs here are such as community consultation, compliance integration of community-identified needs into police service planning, for example. The requirement of the existence of multiyear business plans is critical for police services. Diversity-focused recruiting plans are also very, very important as the services go forward. Of course, they evaluate their performance against community priorities as well.

One thing to note, too: the sheriffs at this point are not included in policing standards. They will be in the future, of course, but at this point they're not part of those particular requirements.

You know, as things evolve in our communities and across our province, we're always attuned to the need to perhaps incorporate additional standards for our policing services. One thing that we had a conversation around recently was school shootings, and our police services prepared for those in response to those types of often tragic events in our schools. So those conversations are occurring regularly. Our standards are I'll say a living document and, again, audited every four years to ensure that compliance is in place across all the services in the province.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Curtis.

Let me just supplement that because I think it's very important. When the sheriffs do hopefully transition into police, to Curtis's

point, I mean, they will have to have key performance indicators, they'll have to have standards, and it goes back to the proper oversight that is required. If you're performing policelike functions but you don't have these key performance indicators or you don't have the proper oversight, that's a problem. We need to have proper civilian oversight, and we need to have these proper key performance indicators so that we know that the organization is able to provide the services that the people of Alberta are asking us for.

Mr. Zablocki: I might just add as well, too, that as recently as last week myself and one of my colleagues were in Grande Prairie examining the progress on the future Grande Prairie Police Service. That new police service, any new police service has to meet the same standards and requirements. Of course, provincially we kind of hold the trigger on when that service is ready to become operational, to be put into service in the respective communities. Again, as was noted earlier, the Grande Prairie service is progressing very favourably with their development.

Mrs. Sawyer: Through the chair, thank you very much for that explanation. I really appreciate it. I think it's really important for everyone to understand exactly how everything is run and how it's being very carefully monitored to serve the citizens. I do want to say that I think there seems to be this misunderstanding when we talk about potentially other options that that is us criticizing the present officers. It's not about the men and women in the uniform, whom we greatly respect, but it is about filling needs and giving options because we're not all, in each municipality – especially it's rural. It's not a one size fits all, and we're recognizing that.

I'll ask about police support grants, if I may, through the chair. Because municipalities that operate their own police service rely on predictable provincial support to maintain front-line capacity, PSES has stabilized municipal policing affordability while pushing toward results-based funding. Item 2.6 on page 200 of the estimates shows a modest decrease from \$119.05 million to \$115.87 million, ensuring that grant funding is tied to outcomes that will demonstrate value to taxpayers and residents. Through the chair to the minister: what program design changes explain the \$3.18 million reduction, and what is the average impact by a recipient municipality in '26-27? How will the ministry link item 2.6 to local outcome reporting consistent with outcome 1 on page 143 of the business plan? Will the ministry publish a grant outcomes dashboard in '26-27? If yes, could you elaborate on the details, and if not, could you explain why?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. I mean, certainly we have something which is known as the police support grant program, and it provides \$92 million on an annual basis to eligible municipalities. Those are for those municipalities that are over 5,000, everything from Calgary to Edmonton to midsize to many of the communities; Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, just to name a few as an example. The remaining funding, approximately \$22 million, provides initiative-specific grant funding to municipalities.

Of course, for '26-27 eligible municipalities are going to continue to receive the PSG funding. The change in the budgeted amount is attributed to the expiration of programs such as the Indigenous and municipal policing transition study grant, and that's really where that came from. We had provided \$3 million in that municipal police transition grant. A number of municipalities had taken us up on that. They were \$30,000 grants, and a study was done. Various outcomes as far as, you know, what is going to meet the policing needs of those particular municipalities and the First Nations communities. So that's where that small \$3 million comes from.

8:30

That grant is no longer available, but when you talk about the police support grants, those go out to municipalities to make sure that, again, we continue to support all our communities and law enforcement within – let me be clear. It goes to our municipalities, but it's to support our law enforcement all throughout the province.

Mrs. Sawyer: Through the chair, thank you, Minister.

I'm going to do a really quick three-sixty because I see the time, and the next question I had I wouldn't have got through in time to allow you to answer. Since I happen to really like true crime podcasts, this one on provincial DNA laboratories: I'm going to get this one in if I could. PSES has made strong progress on the design and partnership work needed to establish Alberta's new provincial DNA laboratory, a key mandate letter commitment. This initiative will provide law enforcement agencies faster, more reliable forensic analysis. The business plan, page 143 allocates \$5.4 million in '26-27 towards this work, complementing existing biology casework functions funded through item 2.4 on page 200. Can the minister outline the major milestones Albertans will see this year such as facility development, accreditation steps, and partnerships? How will this investment improve turnaround times and support front-line investigations across the province?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. I'm really, actually, happy to talk about the Alberta DNA lab that we're looking to put here in Alberta. You know, this goes back to my time even when I was a constable. There has been a reliance and to a certain degree an overreliance on the national DNA lab whereby there have been some concerns regarding costs. There have been some concerns regarding turnaround times. Certainly, I'm happy to provide this committee some of the numbers that we have which helped form our decision to go forward with this.

The RCMP national lab: the cost per case is \$2,167. If I compare that to DNA labs in eastern Canada, in Ontario, for example, it's \$782, the cost per case, and in Quebec it's \$688, the cost per case. So I think it's fairly evident that when you're talking about that disparity in the costs, that impacts policing when it comes to costs. We talk about our friends in rural, as an example. This is another way that we can alleviate some of that pressure, again, when a police officer asks for a DNA request and that gets sent off. If I was to send it to the RCMP national lab, that's a cost of \$2,167. Obviously, we'd be looking at numbers that would be comparable to what we have in Ontario and Quebec.

The Chair: That's our time.

Back to the Official Opposition. Oh, no; let's break. Five minutes, everyone.

[The committee adjourned from 8:34 p.m. to 8:39 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. Well, now we move to the second round of questions and responses. The caucus rotation going forward will be the same as in the first round, starting with the Official Opposition, followed by members of the government side. However, the speaking times are now reduced to five minutes for the duration of the meeting. We'll begin this rotation with a member of the Official Opposition, who will have up to five minutes for questions and comments, followed by a response from the minister, who may speak for up to five minutes. After both individuals have an opportunity to speak once, we'll 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 neither the member nor the minister may speak for more than five minutes at a

time. Members are reminded that they may not share any unused portion of their five minutes with another member.

Member and Minister, do you agree to share time, or would you prefer blocked?

Mr. Shepherd: Shared.

Mr. Ellis: Shared. Yeah.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you again to the minister and his team. A couple questions here looking at the business plan, key objective 1.1, again, in partnership with public safety stakeholders advancing initiatives to address crime and social disorder, and looking at line 2.3, law enforcement oversight. Over the last six years we've seen some significant growth of social disorder, lack of adequate social or other resources to mitigate those impacts from it, so more and more businesses, residential properties, and others are turning to private security to provide a better sense of safety for employees, customers, and residents. Now, the responsibility for regulating and supporting that industry falls under this ministry, including licensing, setting standards for companies and guards, and approving providers of the Alberta basic security training course and overseeing the delivery of that training.

My understanding, again, is that funding for all of those pieces would be in line 2.3, law enforcement oversight. Can the minister confirm how much of the amount in line 2.3, how much of that funding, and how many of the staff in that department are specifically focused on support and oversight of the security industry?

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. Certainly, I'll have the team bring up those numbers, but I can tell you that security guards, of course, play a vital role in protecting Alberta's communities. You know, I'm glad the member brought up the training. Students have to complete a full 40-hour Alberta basic security guard training program, achieve at least 80 per cent on the exam delivered by accredited trainers. I don't want to presuppose, but I'm not entirely sure every province has that sort of level of training. Certainly, if I need to be corrected on that. But I have been impressed over the years with the security guard program and the level of training.

I think it's like anything in law enforcement. We always say, you know, there are things we can do better. I don't disagree with that, and certainly I think that's why my assistant deputy minister – I think he's going to have more to say on this. We recognize, of course, that security professionals face increasingly complex risks on the job, and that's why we're updating the Alberta basic security guard training program. I think it's supposed to be anticipated for later on this year that it's going come out, but maybe I'll just go to my ADM. I think he'll be able to expand on that a bit more.

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. Thank you, Minister. Through the chair if I could, please, happy to supplement here. The minister mentioned a review of the program. That review is currently under way, and it's anticipated that sometime this spring or summer we will receive the review report with recommendations. There's been extensive consultation with the industry in the context of the review that's currently under way. It's an effort to modernize the program, so I think what we're going see as an outcome, at the end of the day here, is an update of the Alberta security training modules. This will include updates in the area of domestic violence, mental health, racial discrimination. Trauma-informed practices as well are very important to ensure that the security personnel have that training and engage in the context of their roles in a very trauma-informed manner.

There are some administrative changes that are likely as a result of the outcome, including enhanced exam integrity, verification of exams tracking, and so on and so forth. There'll be some timelines set to provide for security trainers and such to update their content. That'll be important going forward as well. Compliance and new supervisory and business requirements will be assessed through audits of the program, again, another important piece.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Through you, do we have the numbers that we spoke of?

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. They're committed to getting you those numbers.

Mr. Shepherd: They'll get me them. Thank you.

What I will say, then, through you, Madam Chair, is that there are a couple of gentlemen in the gallery, I think, that would have some thoughts on the extent of the consultation that's taken place with the security industry in terms of this, but I am glad to hear that it's being prioritized at this point.

I think for several years members of the industry have been raising some real concerns about the age and inadequacy of the Alberta basic security training course. Of course, as you know, it was last updated in 2014 and, as you say, things are much more complex in the security landscape. When I'm speaking to leaders in the industry, they're very concerned about seeing higher levels of injury and death of guards due to both a higher level of danger in the work and a growth in unqualified and inadequately trained guards in the field. As the minister may have heard, what the industry wants to see is that significant update – I'm glad to hear that's taking place – much greater scrutiny of training providers who deliver the course to ensure that trainees are actually completing the coursework and not cheating on the exams, and then increased enforcement of standards in both training and in the field, including more dedicated investigators.

8:45

Again, what I'm hearing from the industry and it is in their view that until recently their concerns were ignored. It's only after, you know, they began to organize their own association in town halls to meet with some of the ministry officials and pressure them to act that they're beginning to see some progress. Now, to be clear, I think members of the security industry, the owners, are happy to contribute their knowledge and expertise to help ensure a safe and well-regulated industry for everyone. I hope the minister would agree that they should have been able to do so as part of a proactive process led by the ministry, rather than having to spend their own time, energy, and resources to get this progress.

I just want to ask: will the minister commit to using the resources that are available there – the funding and the staff in the SSIA law enforcement standards and audits division – to launch a full and proper formal consultation with members of the security industry, including the gentlemen that are visiting us here in the gallery today, to fully understand their concerns and collaborate with them to address them?

Mr. Ellis: Are you asking above and beyond what has happened . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: . . . and despite the report that's going to be coming out, really, in the next couple of months? You want me to put aside the report? Is that your position?

Mr. Shepherd: Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, not at all. I'm quite happy to hear the progress that's being made with the report, but, again, what I'm hearing from the members of the

industry is that they are not feeling that they were terribly consulted in any of the progress that's happened up to date. Indeed, we know that members in the industry have been meeting with staff from the department. I believe, you know, 50 or 60 company owners met with senior staff from the department just within the last month. That, of course, is not a formalized process. What I'm asking the minister is if he will commit that this will actually be done in a way that actually incorporates, in a formal process, the feedback from the industry.

Mr. Ellis: Well, look. We'll commit to any process where stakeholder engagement is important. Of course, we want to hear what the industry is saying. I think that it's like anything; we want to determine what our best practice is. I know in law enforcement, as I always say to all the police services, everyone thinks they're the best. None of them are. However, there are really great things being done by great people, and we have to figure out what are those best practices so that we can incorporate that into what we are doing as far as standards or as far as policies and procedures, and this would be no different. So, yes, we will commit to consultation, but I think maybe we are in agreement. No, I'm not going to slow down the update to this anticipated curriculum. It's going to be coming out soon.

Mr. Shepherd: Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: what mechanisms or what steps is the minister going to take to allow industry, I guess, to be able to provide feedback on these updates to the curriculum and the training programs before they are officially implemented?

Mr. Ellis: Well, certainly we will make sure that folks within the ministry that will fall under the assistant deputy minister's leadership – that the members of the industry will be able to contact folks within the ministry to express their concerns and certainly advocate for changes that may or may not be required, that may need to be assessed or not assessed. We're open to, certainly, having those conversations.

Mr. Shepherd: Is the minister willing, I guess, once there is a completed draft of the new curriculum, to release that for the industry to be able to review and provide comment?

Mr. Ellis: I don't think there's anything to hide there. I'm happy to do that. If you don't mind, I'd like to read it first.

Mr. Shepherd: Of course.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Well, thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: As I said, once it's completed and, of course, the minister has had the chance to review it himself. I appreciate that.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. We'll add that provision, but, yes.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.
We have about 30 seconds left. I'll cede the remaining time.

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. members.
We'll move over to the government side. Please proceed.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you very much. There are three areas that I'll be asking about today: human trafficking, Indigenous policing services, and custody operations. Member Shepherd has already asked some questions about the Indigenous policing services. Some of the questions I've got are a bit different, so I'll save that until the last one just in case we run out of time.

We'll start with human trafficking. PSES has expanded investments in the organizations and policing units that combat human trafficking, including additional funding for Internet and child exploitation, or ICE, teams and strengthening survivor pathways, directly delivering the mandate letter. The business plan on page 143 dedicates \$5.5 million in 2026-27 across prevention, enforcement, and supports. Three sets of questions: how will the \$5.5 million be allocated among prevention, ICE operations, specialized investigations, victims' services, and long-term recovery? How will the partnership with community organizations and social agencies be structured to ensure seamless case management? And what culturally informed, trauma-informed supports will be prioritized for youth and Indigenous survivors?

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Well, thank you very much, and I'm glad you brought up ICE. I think there's a lot of mischaracterization for certain folks within this province that seem to think that this has to do with immigration. It actually has to do with what's known as the integrated child exploitation team, which has been a mainstay within ALERT for the last, well, quite frankly, as long as I can remember back when I was a young constable, and the great work that they do in going after folks who are child predators.

Again, it goes back to collaborative and joint-forces efforts between all law enforcement within this province, including the RCMP and the Alberta sheriffs as well as Edmonton, Calgary, and all other police services. I can tell you that by using intelligence systems and working collaboratively with policing organizations not just in North America but, quite frankly, all over the world, they have been able to take down some of the most heinous child predators that, sadly, are sometimes even located right here in Alberta, so kudos to the great men and women who are doing an outstanding job. I was a cop for a long time. I can't imagine some of the horrors that these poor men and women have to see. We talk about people that might have PTSD or people that might – I'm talking about the officers. We have to make sure that they're taken care of as well.

Now, that being said, I also want to expand on the great work being done by our Alberta Centre to End Trafficking in Persons. I can tell you that, you know, one of my visions for the Alberta centre was that they become a bit of an expert and a role model for not just the folks here in Alberta but for folks right across Canada. I would say that they're certainly well on their way to doing that sort of great work. Certainly, there is a grant money that we do provide them.

I can tell you that when a human trafficking case does come to light, you know, police services, all of them, tend to know that, because of the uniqueness and the delicateness of dealing with somebody who is a victim of human trafficking, any officer knows or should know – I would say should know; for sure the police organizations know this – that they should be able to contact the centre to provide them strategic advice on how to make sure they delicately handle those people who are victims of human trafficking.

Now, I don't know, guys, if you've got some numbers you want to be able to provide the member, but between the ICE team that's located in ALERT, the joint-forces effort that is being done, and then the work being done by the Alberta Centre to End Trafficking in Persons, I can tell you that Alberta has really become a leader in this field. Sorry; do you have any additional money, Ross?

Mr. Nairne: We have the numbers.

Mr. Ellis: Oh, sorry. Ross, would you mind adding some of the context there? Thank you.

Mr. Nairne: Do you want me to talk about human trafficking, Minister, or just more about the grants?

Mr. Ellis: Well, would you mind talking about some of the grants that we give them?

Mr. Nairne: Oh, sure. Yeah.

8:55

In partnership with the Alberta Centre to End Trafficking in Persons the department works fairly closely to ensure that the \$5.5 million allocated, both previously but also in Budget 2026, you know, provides support for victims of human trafficking. To the minister's point, the AC was established based on the recommendations of the Reading Stone report, which wanted a very focused centre to co-ordinate trafficking issues within the province.

One of the items that came out of that was the combatting trafficking in persons grant program, which supports nonprofit organizations and Indigenous communities working front line in the prevention, protection, and empowerment of victims and survivors of human trafficking and plays a key role in establishing that network of support and services for victims and survivors that police, including the ICE teams, can rely on to support victims. That \$5.5 million for CTIP does not form ALERT's ICE team's core funding, but it does establish a number of full-time safety network co-ordinators within the province, both in the north and the south.

I guess maybe a comment. You know, human trafficking is very complex. I think the work that the AC has been doing, conducting engagement sessions around the province, most recently here in Edmonton, and bringing together community stakeholders to really focus and discuss the importance of how community-based response is required for the complexities of the crime.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. If you don't mind, I think it's important for everyone to be aware of the seriousness of child exploitation and that, you know, really, everyone has a role in trying to make sure that we do what we can to protect kids. Right now I can tell you from just stats that we have from the ICE team, that in '24-25, which is not that long ago, we're talking about 5,871 case file intakes. I mean, that's, quite frankly, outrageous. That's a 54 per cent increase over '23-24. Again, it's, quite frankly, outrageous to see that. As a society, of course, that loves all of our children, we have to make sure that we are not just doing something – again, you've heard me say this before – but we can always do better. I think that we do need to do better – to continue to protect kids from being exploited.

I can tell you that 135 suspects have been charged in '24-25, 577 charges laid, 178 children have been rescued, which is a great stat to know. But it is very scary to know that we had 178 kids that we know about, people that required being rescued. All of that to say that there's a lot of work that has been done, a lot of work that needs to get done. I would say that we have to continue to – you know, as I have said and the Premier has said quite often – do whatever it takes to keep the people safe. I don't think there's anybody in this room that would disagree that we have to do whatever it takes to keep our children safe.

Mr. Rowswell: You indicated that the numbers were going up, and then it sounds like there's been some success in arresting and convicting people. Like, what do you think the factors are for that increase? Is it, you know, a dramatic increase? Do you have a feel for that?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I'd only be speculating, but 54 per cent, I would consider, is a dramatic increase in that. You know, could it be the fact that technology has come to the point where we as law enforcement – I guess I'm not a police officer anymore; I've got to remember that – where law enforcement within Alberta are able to figure out who are the offenders? I would say that some of the technology that law enforcement has been able to utilize has been helpful to identify those types of offenders. The reality is that there's such a plethora of inappropriate stuff that is on the Internet right now, and I just think that we as a society need to do better to protect our children.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you very much for that answer.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll head back to the Official Opposition. Please proceed, Member.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, I'm interested in going back and forth, if that's something that you're open to.

Mr. Ellis: Yes.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much. I would like to start, regarding page 198 of the government estimates, specifically around 3, correctional services. I have the Edmonton Remand and the Edmonton Young Offender Centre in my community.

Mr. Ellis: Oh, nice. I didn't know that.

Ms Goehring: Yeah. So I'm curious. You know, I looked through the budget, and I looked through the statements and the overseeing that's related to corrections, and there's talk about training and policy requirements and that kind of thing, but in your opening remarks you mentioned safety for those that are in custody. Last year, if you remember in estimates, we were talking about the five deaths that happened at the Edmonton Remand Centre in a very short period of time, and there was a commitment for a board of inquiry and a review of the situation because deaths are occurring in custody. I'm curious what the status of those reports are and, if they haven't been completed, when we can anticipate seeing them.

Mr. Ellis: Well, I might have to rely on these folks to know when exactly that's going to occur. I know that – actually do you think Fiona has . . .

Mr. Krikler: Yeah.

Mr. Ellis: Okay, yeah. Maybe we'll get the assistant deputy minister in charge of corrections. Maybe she can provide you that information, and then I can supplement after that. Go ahead, Fiona.

Ms Lavoy: Thank you. My name is Fiona Lavoy, and I'm the assistant deputy minister for the correctional services division. Madam Chair, through you to the member, certainly any time that there is an adverse occurrence of something within a custody facility, there is a regular set of processes and procedures that occurs. The one that you mentioned is a board of inquiry, and that is a process in which an investigation occurs in relation to the learnings of what transpired and what learnings can be derived from that for us to assess any needs within, whether it be training or discrete matters and whatnot. Those inquiries happen, and those feed into a broader process, which is a fatality inquiry process. That

is a court process that occurs when there is a fatality that occurs within a custody environment, and the timelines for when those occur are within the provincial court process. The timelines vary in when that occurs and what the results of those recommendations are.

Mr. Ellis: Do you mind if I supplement? If you don't mind. Thank you. I mean, I think we're in total agreement here. Like, we don't want to see any death while somebody is in custody, which is another reason why I created the therapeutic living units, which are in our correctional facilities within Alberta. Happy to expand on that if you so choose. Certainly, in 2020 and 2021 we had 11, 12; 2025, I think you mentioned five. I mean, they've gone down.

I would say that – if you remember I was the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, and when I had originally gone into some of these correctional facilities, I had observed. I'm not saying that this is a – like, I'm not investigating this, but one thing I'd noticed is that there was a drug called Suboxone. Suboxone, which is an evidence-based medication, was being distributed and used as a form of currency within the correctional facilities, and certainly, theoretically enough, if you put it under your tongue and you took it aside and you got enough of it, you could try to OD. Now, I can tell you – I do have confirmation from Mental Health and Addictions – that Suboxone is no longer being delivered.

Sublocade is, and Sublocade is great. It's evidence-based medication that kind of goes under your belly, so it's something that cannot be used. But certainly trying to remove any of those potential options or mechanisms that somebody could use to hurt themselves, we've been trying to do. Again, I don't want to see any deaths, but the numbers, the fact they're going down, are trending in the right direction.

Thank you.

9:05

Ms Goehring: Yeah. Thank you, Minister. The five that I was referencing was just from October of '25 to December. Specifically, there was a veteran that was killed while in custody at the Edmonton Remand, and so I know the family is desperately waiting for the results of that. So thank you. I didn't hear a date, but we look forward to seeing that and what recommendations come out of that.

Page 145, outcome 3. This is related to performance measures regarding the community emergency management plan. Your ministry is responsible for emergency preparedness. I'm curious about any contingency plans in this area specifically as it relates to the Canadian Armed Forces. I know that the CAF has been asking governments to look at climate action and things that help mitigate some of the natural disasters that are happening, and I know that there's been reliance on the CAF to come in and supplement. I'm curious if there's a plan in the budget that specifically outlines how we will not be relying on the CAF to assist in natural disasters domestically.

Mr. Ellis: Well, I mean, I'll try to answer, but we'll get Steve. I mean, Steve was in the army. I think we're in agreement here. Like, we don't want to rely on the Canadian Armed Forces, and we've actually been leading the way. I know that the federal government has been, for lack of a better word, using me to certainly have some of those consultations and discussions with colleagues from right across Canada. There is a prevailing thought and narrative out there that the first responder needs to be the Canadian Armed Forces. No. Let me be clear on that. In the times that we've had to do that, I can tell you in consultation with ADM Lacroix and even in consultation

with my friends in the federal government at that particular time, we were only doing that as an absolute last resort.

I'd love Steve – this is his expertise. Go ahead, Steve.

Mr. Lacroix: Thank you, Madam Chair. Steve Lacroix, managing director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. To the member, it's an interesting space that we're navigating right now. As Minister Ellis mentioned, there is a signal from the federal government to, I will say, wean off provinces and territories from tapping the easy button by calling on the Canadian Armed Forces to respond. In the defence of the federal government, they've invested \$166.9 million for a thing called the humanitarian workforce, which is an amalgamation of five organizations: the Red Cross kind of leading the way, St. John Ambulance, Salvation Army, SARVAC, and Team Rubicon, another group formed from veterans. They would respond in lieu of the Canadian Armed Forces, where it makes sense.

There are certain things that only the Canadian Armed Forces can do. We're somewhat fortunate in Alberta that we don't have that many isolated fly-in, fly-out communities as Manitoba, as an example, but we do have some, so strategic airlift will definitely probably still reside there. Now, as Minister Ellis mentioned, each time we've called upon the military through a request for assistance, there have been some serious considerations as to if the appropriate effect we were seeking was to be delivered by the military. Ultimately, when that decision is made, we make a request, and then Ottawa has the ability to say yes or no.

But back to my point about the complexity we face. Right now the Canadian army is transforming. Well, you know where I came from, so it was very easy to deal with the commander of 3rd Canadian Division, the position I used to hold, and also the commander of joint task force prairies. That role will change with that commander becoming responsible for essentially expeditionary operations, and that role will fall onto the commander in Montreal. I will personally lose that direct connection, and we've yet to figure out, because it's not for us to figure out, how Ottawa is going to address that through the use of their Canadian joint operation centre.

Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much. Last year in estimates we were talking about finding a specific line item that would support and transition veterans through housing and health supports. At the time, Minister, you said you were open to considering this. I can see that consideration hasn't been implemented, unless there's a line item in here that speaks to that.

I know that there was a commitment that veterans would receive eight beds for those that were struggling with homelessness. When the minister of community services was asked about that, he identified the navigation centre. I can tell you that that is not accurate. The navigation centre does not provide eight beds for veterans, and the veteran community has identified that those do not exist. I also can say that I went to the navigation centre in the beginning of February and asked them what services that they were providing specifically to veterans, because the minister had indicated that they were, and they said that they are not. They don't work with veterans; they don't identify veterans.

The Chair: All right. We need to move back over to the government side. Sorry.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I would hate to presume, but back and forth, Minister?

Mr. Ellis: Sure.

Mr. Lundy: Sounds great. Thank you very much, through the chair. Of course, thank you so much to you and your officials and your ministry staff for joining us tonight.

I will say that, like I'm sure all of my colleagues, I pay attention to what folks come into my constituency office and want to talk to me about, and public safety is certainly near the top of the list. I have people come in and, you know, unfortunately, maybe sometimes they've been victimized. I've noticed increasingly, with Nisku being in my riding, property crime and theft being a huge issue for these work sites and these business owners in my riding. I just felt it important I put that forward. Again, I would comment that, you know, sometimes they'll come in, and it ends up they actually have an RCMP question or maybe a preventative crime question, so it just underscores the complexity of what you and your team have to deal with. When I'm chatting with these folks, I always repeat your line, which is that people don't care about the colour of the uniform. I certainly appreciate you when you get to make that comment, and it really hits home.

Through the chair, I do want to transition to some specific questions, here. Minister, I noticed you mentioned therapeutic living units very briefly. I'd love to give you a chance to expand on these units a little bit again. I personally have never got a chance to tour a facility that has these units or visited these units, but I can see the impact that they make just by hearing the other ministers or folks who have got a chance to see it. The previous two ministers of Mental Health and Addiction have clearly been impacted, when they get emotional talking about these units. I'll reserve comment on whether Minister Wilson is emotional all the time.

Through the chair, I will ask specifically here to the minister in front of us about these units. Of course, this is performance measure 1(b) on page 144 of the business plan. These reference specific targets of 85, 87, and 89 per cent over '26-29 to keep the focus on clinical appropriateness rather than the throughput and integration with transition supports to make sure these are a notable success. Again through the chair to the minister: what evidence or data shows that reduced incidence and improved transitions are happening for these therapeutic living unit participants, and how will outcomes be measured – an example is maybe some treatment completion, housing, employment, reoffending, et cetera – and published?

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. I am actually very excited to talk about the therapeutic living units. It was an idea that I conceived of, quite frankly, when I worked as an arrest processing unit officer, when I was in the Calgary Police Service. I knew when I was dealing with people who were coming off crystal meth and crack binges that, you know, when I had to present them in front of a justice of the peace and I was reading them their charges, 99 per cent of the time most people were like: "Oh, my God. What did I do?" And I knew that there was a moment that those folks wanted to get help and wanted recovery and wanted the ability to not live that particular life anymore.

You know, for those people that were in our correctional facilities on that two years less a day: did they have to sit there in pain and suffering with their addiction or their mental health concerns and then be handed an LRT ticket and shown where the homeless shelter was? That was the policy, quite frankly. Then the cycle of abuse would continue and continue and continue.

9:15

As a result of that, I created this program. I crusaded this facility. I had an opportunity to go there a couple of times. I'll talk about the one in Calgary that I went to. I walked in there, and I've been to a

lot of prisons and jails in my life. I've never walked into a facility where I saw 20 grown men smiling and laughing. I was kind of blown away by this when I was looking at this.

I had an opportunity to sit in a healing circle. For those of you who do not know, any form of recovery is really based on or has its foundations in Indigenous teachings when we talk about recovery and we talk about healing lodges, as an example. We were sitting around a healing circle, and I had an opportunity once the group kind of realized not that I was the minister but, really, that I was kind of the founder and conceived the idea of this entire program.

There was a young man. I say young; he was in about his mid-thirties. He was from the Hobbema area. He was in jail, and his plan was really to, you know, wear this as a badge of honour and go back and continue gangbanging and to continue with that cycle of abuse. He broke down into tears. He said to me: "Minister, I've been in and out of custody since I've been 14 years old. I believed that nobody ever cared about me in my life until this program came along. Sir, I am going to back to Hobbema, but I am going to help people get out of the gang lifestyle. I am going to help people get off of drugs and alcohol."

I can tell you that I followed up with this gentleman a year later as I went to another healing circle. One of the co-ordinators of the facility told me that this man was true to his word. I won't out the postsecondary, but he's at a postsecondary university whereby he is on his way to becoming a social worker and returning to the community to help his community. In fact, I've been so inspired by this that I'm trying to find this young man because I think that there's a role to play for him in PSES to help kids who might be involved in the gang lifestyle and drugs and alcohol.

That is one anecdotal story, but that, to me, is the most impactful story of how successful the therapeutic living units are. From what I have heard from some of the physicians that are there, you're talking about in and around, give or take, a 90 per cent success rate with people stopping that cycle of abuse. This has been a role model not just for here in Alberta but one that is trying to be emulated, quite frankly, all around the world.

Mr. Lundy: Well, through the chair, thank you very much, Minister. I'm not surprised to hear another strong testimonial about the power of these units and, frankly, you know, the power of recovery and rehabilitation. Thank you for expanding on that a little bit for us.

I would like to maybe ask a couple questions about community corrections and electronic monitoring. I believe this is item 3.3 on page 200 of the estimates. It talks about \$66.41 million, and the business plan on page 143 provides \$6.6 million to enhance the electronic monitoring. Unfortunately, this is often required when we're looking at violent repeat offenders. This is, of course, very concerning across Alberta and, frankly, across Canada. I'll reserve judgment. I'll let Albertans judge for themselves how they feel the federal government might be doing on their bail system or keeping our streets safe.

I know I can talk to you about this specific line item that I just referenced and the importance of our electronic monitoring. Through the chair, of course, to the minister, these investments I referenced: can you advise how many additional electronic monitoring units and monitoring full-time equivalents will be deployed? What breach detection and response benchmarks will PSES target? What is the expected impact on reoffending versus traditional supervision, and how will this be reported?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I certainly wish we had more than a minute to discuss this because this is extremely important. We've had such a great pickup on this particular program, which is why we've had to

increase the funding to this program. Very simply, you know, 12 additional FTEs, up to 800 devices, but again, as I think I mentioned in my remarks, we're looking at expanding this program to help those from a proximity locator situation. That's typically folks who are victims of domestic violence or otherwise but typically folks of domestic violence. Certainly, there have been a number of cases whereby for a domestic offender that piece of paper really didn't mean much to them, so we have to think outside of the box, and if the system is not keeping that domestic offender in jail, then, again, we have to think outside of the box. We're using electronic monitoring to make sure that we're doing our best to protect victims of domestic violence.

I'll keep talking for 12 seconds here. Look, this is a program, again, that is one that – I know we've added some money to it already, but it's only getting bigger, and it's only getting better.

The Chair: Sorry, Minister.

Over to the Official Opposition.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister and ministry staff for all your work. I'm hoping we can do block time because – surprise – I might have a lot of questions for you . . .

Mr. Ellis: Oh, sure.

Ms Hayter: . . . and I'm just hoping that whatever is not answered I can get in writing afterwards.

Mr. Ellis: What if I said no? Sure. Sorry. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Ms Hayter: I've been told I get to do block time if I'd like it.

Victim services: on page 141 of the business plan it refers to supports for those affected by domestic violence and human trafficking. What specific amount in this budget is dedicated to preventing domestic violence and ensuring women and victims of domestic violence can access safety, victim support, and court support before violence escalates? Since domestic and gender-based violence are public safety issues, why is the only metric assessed in the ministry's business plan the application processing time for victim services? Why doesn't the ministry report on the impact of the services? Is there any other metric the ministry collects data on regarding domestic violence?

Research shows that domestic violence is often repetitive and predictable, and it's not random. The ministry's 2026 business plan provides crime prevention grant funding and leads supports for victims of police-reported intimate partner violence. What does the ministry fund to intervene earlier, before violence escalates? What considerations are taken for what are not captured by the annual report metrics of intimate partner violence, unreported violence, barriers to reporting, coercive control, or women who never engage with the police at all? Given these limitations, what is the primary outcome indicator for the GBV strategy? If most intimate partner violence is never reported to the police, why is the police-reported IPV being used as a primary outcome indicator for government performance?

What other metrics are used to measure where the women can actually access safety and supports, including court support, victim supports, emergency travel, relocation help, or trauma-informed follow-up? What is being done to enhance regional supports for victims of intimate partner and domestic violence, especially for Indigenous women, rural women, women with disabilities, and women who do not trust the justice system?

Through the chair, line 5.2, page 200 of estimates, reveals an increase of \$2.7 million compared to the 2025-2026 estimate. How

much of the total funding goes directly to front-line victim service units? What is the impact on the increase of front-line services? Which programs or initiatives will receive funding this year? For victims of crime assistance programs and victims of crime and public safety funding, how much additional funding is allocated to these?

Under your grants in the business plan on page 143 a key objective for this ministry is allocating \$5.5 million to grants and initiatives to combat human trafficking. How much of this funding directly supports survivors through shelter beds, mental health supports, counselling, case management, long-term housing, rapid exit services? How much is allocated to enforcement, co-ordination with nonprofit and cultural groups, and administration for data and research?

On page 6 of the '24-25 annual report it indicates that there's \$2.5 million to the Alberta Centre to End Trafficking in Persons. Can the minister break down where this funding is allocated and where in the budget it comes from? Emergency housing is the biggest barrier traffic victims face. The combatting trafficking in persons grant fund will add 19 rapid exits and transitional beds across Alberta. How many beds existed before this expansion? How did the ministry determine the 19 beds would be enough?

The ministry says that the new regional victim service model improves access and consistency, but front-line organizations are reporting less local connection, weaker co-ordination, and more inconsistent court supports. Alberta shelters responded to 53,391 calls to help in '23-24 and turned away more than 31,000 people because of the lack of space or resources. What is public safety doing to ensure women who cannot access shelters will still be able to access immediate victim support, court support, and safety planning? If shelters are increasingly filling court gaps, what is public safety doing to ensure women are not losing services because of ministry silos? What evidence does the minister have that women experiencing domestic violence are actually safer and better supported under the new model? What specific measures does the ministry track to know whether women in rural communities can access court support and victim services in a timely and safe way?

9:25

On page 28 of the business plan there is the joint commission with the Alberta 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence. With the implementation of this, what is the formal co-ordination with your ministry? Of the \$15.7 million, how much of this is allocated to your ministry?

The Chair: Pardon me, Member. You get five minutes, and you've just reached it now.

We'll go to the minister for his response.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you. I don't want to take away from my ADM here, who has the specifics for you, but I do want to touch on a couple of things that you mentioned here. Certainly, not to rehash everything, but victim services is meant to, of course, provide predictable, sustainable funding and make sure that – there were communities in Alberta that had no victim services, so we've stabilized that to provide that predictable, sustainable funding. In fact, we're talking about people who are employees of the government there, and certainly what I've been getting is, actually, a lot of positive feedback when it comes to the way this is starting to play out. I will add that any complaint against victim services is always taken seriously, and it goes through ADM Nairne, who, obviously, conducts an investigation.

I also want to talk about Clare's law. Clare's law is something this government brought in. Again, it's another great piece of

legislation that has been able to help a lot of people. As we know, we had a piece of legislation on that where we had to kind of streamline this because, quite frankly, we've had a lot of pickups, so that's very helpful. I had an opportunity to meet with FearIsNotLove not that long ago, and I certainly appreciate from them to me the support that we have been doing to help those who are survivors and victims of domestic violence.

Then, as I had mentioned earlier on today, in all police organizations, or should I say most police organizations because some are small, domestic conflict is one of the most unpredictable things that a police officer can deal with because you don't know. As you previously mentioned in your questions, some of this is unreported, and a lot of this might be in the home or underground. You know, this is why, certainly, when I was a judicial interim release hearing officer, I would always ask the victim, who was typically a woman – I would always say, "Do you fear for your life?" and if the answer was yes, I sought that person's detention and custody, and I think that's something that, quite frankly, a lot of maybe some of our lawyer friends probably should consider as a way of dealing with folks with domestic violence.

The centre to combat human trafficking, again, is another very important organization, and I'm going to go to ADM Nairne to talk about some of the great funding that we're providing.

Mr. Nairne: Thanks, Minister, Chair. Thanks for the question. Gender-based violence is a very complex issue, and it's one of the reasons why the government brought out the 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence about six months ago. Gender-based violence stems from intimate partner violence all the way through to hate crimes and human trafficking, family violence, sexual violence. It's a very complex issue. As the strategy indicates, it touches 16 different ministries, and as laid out in the strategy, there are over 670 unique services and initiatives done by the government to help prevent and address gender-based violence, and that's offered through 300 different organizations all the way through Alberta by those ministries. It stems from prevention, early intervention, crisis intervention, and rebuilding lives.

Public Safety and Emergency Services plays a very key role, particularly in the crisis intervention side of that spectrum. Within the victim services organization there's a number of different grants that are provided to provide support to families of domestic violence through organizations such as Homefront Society down in southern Alberta, enCompass in northern Alberta, and also support from a number of other organizations province-wide. There are also specialized court and justice navigation grants that provide support for victims of crime as they move through the Alberta justice system. I think as well there's also child counselling that's provided to children of both sexual violence but also physical and mental abuse that may occur in the home or in the community.

You mentioned the human trafficking grants and these \$5.5 million that are going out in 2026 to help support – to answer one of your many questions, the comment about the 19 beds, as CTIP went out, we did fund 19 beds.

The Chair: That's the time.

We'll move now over to the government side.

Mrs. Johnson: Is shared time okay with the minister?

Mr. Ellis: Sure.

Mrs. Johnson: All right. I have so many questions, and I want to get right into it. Thank you, first, to the minister and his team for being here this evening. This is a great segue into the question that I have for you. I want to come back to the trafficking because I think

we can't spend enough time on this issue, first. Second, I know the minister and I have had great conversations about this with our common friend Paul Brandt. I've done a lot of work with this, as you know, and I hope to be bringing some more information out on this very soon, as you know. So I'd like to come back to it and expand upon it a little more.

We've talked a lot about trafficking tonight, unfortunately. I wish we could not have to. We've just mentioned, again, the combatting trafficking in persons grant, which is \$5.5 million dedicated to human trafficking initiatives in the 2026-27 business plan on page 143. Human trafficking is a clandestine crime that requires specialized community-led intervention to support survivors and dismantle the networks that exploit the vulnerable. What are the eligibility criteria for the restored grant, and will it prioritize wraparound services like safe housing and trauma-informed mental health support for these survivors?

Mr. Ellis: Well, the simple answer is yes. I'm going to get Ross to kind of expand on a lot of that.

Again, I need to talk about what maybe a lot of folks in Canada or, say, Alberta don't want to talk about, and that is human trafficking. You're right. That's why Mr. Brandt has certainly been a leader in the world, quite frankly, in raising the awareness. You know, a lot of cases for victims of human trafficking – again, it's commonly a female who is the victim – think that they're in a relationship with that offender, so there is that domestic sort of relationship. And there are a lot of complexities, everything from the trauma to the mental health issues to sometimes in – well, in many cases the addictions, because the offender wants to keep that person on drugs, which is another part of coercive control.

I think it's important to talk about coercive control. It's something that certainly we've been advocating with the federal government on to make sure that there are stronger laws federally when it comes to coercive control. You know, many times I as a law enforcement officer maybe going to a situation where I may have some suspicion, but when I'm talking to the victim, the victim would very commonly say: "I'm all right. I'm where I want to be. This is what I have chosen." Really, what is happening is that it's a form of abuse, and it's a form of coercive control.

That's why in our navigation centre, that we started up here, specifically, in Edmonton, and of course we've done one in Calgary – again, one of these things that wants to be emulated in other jurisdictions. You know, we had that young lady who, once the coercive control, organized crime bad guys got out of the way, was able to go into the navigation centre and say, "I hear that there's a place for somebody to help us," at which point we learned that she was on the missing persons Indigenous women list, and we were able to reunite her with her family. That's a success story, but I just want to emphasize the coercive control.

Maybe, Ross, can you expand a little bit on the question?

9:35

Mr. Nairne: Sure. Thanks, Minister.

It's likely that in the future CTIP funding will focus on funding programs that support additional safe housing for survivors. Mental health supports for survivors were also prioritized in previous grant funding that was awarded, and it is likely that this will continue as well. I mentioned in my previous comments that we work very closely with the AC, and the AC is doing a number of engagement sessions to get an overall lay of the land of all the organizations that are participating in ending this tragic crime.

One of the problems identified in the gender-based violence strategy was that there are a lot of programs and initiatives focused on prevention, not so much on the crisis intervention and also the

ongoing supports, particularly for human trafficking. As the minister mentioned, this horrible crime a lot of times is perpetrated against women by those that they love or think that they love, and you know, as sad as it sounds, they don't know that they're being trafficked. They think they're trying to support their partner, their boyfriend in doing something that will help.

To get people out of those traumatic circumstances, where somebody who you love is forcing you to do something you don't want to do and falling into that pattern, huge psychological trauma occurs for that person. It's not just a matter of my colleague to the left, you know, his colleagues with the police investigating and prosecuting that person. You also have the survivor of human trafficking that has gone through a horrible experience. Potentially they have addiction issues. Potentially they have charges that have been pressed against them, or they they've done jail time for the things that they were involved in. They need to be able to have supports to get out of that lifestyle, see what normalcy looks like, and begin planning their future and working towards having a stable upbringing.

The worst thing that could happen to somebody that escapes human trafficking is that they get sucked back into that crime because they don't have the supports that are available to them, so a lot of the work that the Alberta Centre to End Trafficking in Persons with ourselves is looking at is how better to provide those type of supports as we move forward.

Sorry, Chair, did I . . .

The Chair: You get a maximum of five minutes, and you've surpassed that.

Mrs. Johnson: Okay. I can jump in.

You've kind of segued into the next part of this, and you've partly answered it. How are you going to measure the success of this grant? I think you sort of touched on it. Is it the number of individuals that are going to be rescued through this? Is it the quality of life that we're going to measure and how they can be integrated into society after? If you could touch on that, how will the success be measured from this grant?

Mr. Ellis: Well, look, here's what I would say. You know, these sort of things are challenging to measure, I would say, and I don't think anyone in this room would disagree. Every life is equally as important. For me, it's about making sure that we have the system and the process that's in place to make sure that those who are victims or those who are even perceived as victims are getting the necessary mental health, addiction supports, law enforcement supports so that we can tackle this from a multitude of different angles. As I quite often say, there's no single solution to a very complex problem. Even when we're dealing with drugs and organized crime, it's a multipronged approach, again, and we have to make sure we tackle it and treat it as such.

Ross, I don't know if you can supplement that in any way.

Mr. Nairne: Oh, thanks, Minister.

Again, I go back to the 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence, 670 different initiatives all trying to combat everything from sexual violence all the way through to human trafficking. There's a recognition that part of that action plan, that strategy is to establish common targets and performance measures for all provincially funded gender-based violence actions. That's not to say that the combatting trafficking in person grants don't have specific measures, but they're very specific to the grant, you know, number of people involved, number of stakeholders engaged with, depending on what the grant is designed to do. I think that works for that specific grant, but from a broader systems perspective we

have to look at it all the way through prevention, all the way through to supports to get the person back into society successfully. I'd admit that there's some work to do, but it's not just a pieces issue; it's a whole-of-government issue that needs to address it.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you very much.

Through you, Madam Chair, we've just got a few seconds. Let's go to something a little lighter, and it's Alberta first responders radio communications system. Page 145 of the business plan commits \$2.3 million for the AFRRCS coverage. Minister, through you, Chair, could you walk us through the concrete improvements Albertans will see this year: where coverage gaps are being closed, how capacity is increasing, and what that means for wildfires and floods?

Mr. Ellis: Well, look, I'll just say this in the last few seconds that we have. The AFRRCS system and the support we have for the AFRRCS system: I think people need to understand that there's nothing like this in the world.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Over to the Official Opposition.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Referencing key objectives 1.2 and 1.4 in the business plan, just a couple of questions regarding policing committees. Both the RMA and the Alberta Association of Police Governance have been flagging concerns they've heard from municipalities about the challenges with meeting the requirement to stand up a policing committee due to the costs that are associated with compensating committee members and associated administrative and capacity impacts. They are saying that, indeed, they're seeing increasing policing costs through the PFM; it's leaving many smaller municipalities even less likely to be able to have the financial capacity to form and support a policing committee. In May last year the RMA called on the minister to develop a dedicated funding mechanism to help support municipal formation of policing committees. I don't see anything about that in this year's budget estimates or in the business plan. Is this something the minister is open to considering or doing?

Mr. Ellis: Quite simply, just talking to my ADM here, the police support grants that we provide all those municipalities above 5,000: certainly they have the ability to use some of that money if they wish for what you mentioned.

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

I understand the AAPG has also been advocating regarding a number of issues that also make it difficult for them to recruit new members for their committees and leading, unfortunately, to burnout for some of the current members. They note that there are hundreds of members still waiting to have their mandatory police clearance checks completed. That delays the volunteer onboarding, causes some of their candidates to withdraw.

There's, in their view, a lack of clarity regarding the requirements for and the operation of those committees. They are asking for a ministry contact or support team to help answer questions and for guidance, noting that it would be helpful to have multiple knowledgeable staff rather than a single contact to provide practical feedback. They note that smaller communities are lacking capacity and expertise in terms of the civil board governance, and they need support and training to learn more about the basics of their work, so things like bylaw drafting, formal meeting procedures like *Robert's Rules*, how to handle conflicts with city councils, and FOIP compliance. They note the provincial training models that are

available are decent, but it's mostly just online courses with no hands-on practice or interaction. They're asking for more interactive or virtual in-person training, maybe some Q and A sessions where they can dig a bit deeper.

To the minister, I guess, through you, Madam Chair: are these things that he is willing to work on, that he's willing to commit to trying to develop to better support these – I mean, policing committees are incredibly important as part of, I think, maintaining transparency and accountability, but clearly there's more help needed. Is the minister willing to help provide that?

Mr. Ellis: I don't want to get lost in what you said earlier here. You talked about police checks. Are they having challenges getting police checks?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. In my meeting with the AAPG in early February they noted that they were still facing some challenges with getting the police checks done.

Mr. Ellis: You know what? I mean, look, Curtis, I don't want to parrot what you just said. You might as well just say it. I think it was reasonable what you said.

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you, Minister.

Through the chair, if I could respond with some information there. In the context of the security checks, yes, with specifically policing committees the ministry has offered to do, I'll say, the first tranche of security checks to help get the committees up and running. Subsequent security clearances and checks will be the responsibility of the respective municipalities. We've, I'll say, graciously offered to do the first round. We are through a number. We have more to do, I think to your point, but that is certainly in the works.

9:45

I know, Member, that you also made a comment around training as well, so specific to training: our team is working on a revised and improved training program. It will be online, but we have also offered municipalities to have a bit of a hybrid approach where we will do some in-person training with AAPG members, committee members, police committee members, police commission members as well. Those things are in the works. I will add, as well, that we do provide a funding grant to the AAPG of approximately \$100,000 annually to support the great work that they do.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister and the deputy minister. I appreciate to hear that there's some progress happening on that there.

Just a few questions, then, around the Police Review Commission. Line 6.2, Case Management and Resolutions: we've got a forecast spend for last year of about \$9 million. At that point they hadn't yet started taking on complaints. They started doing that on December 1, so that total amount is just slightly less than the full estimate for '26-27 of \$10,682,000. Can the minister or his staff just clarify how that \$9 million that was forecast for '25-26 has been or is being spent?

Mr. Ellis: I'm going to get the deputy minister, but thank you for bringing it up, Member. The Police Review Commission: what I have heard has been a lot of very positive feedback. Again, that arm's length from law enforcement. It's being run by a gentleman by the name of Mike Ewenson, who's certainly a very well-established lawyer in the province of Alberta, and I'm very proud of the work and how he's been developing the system, but I'll have my deputy minister explain a bit further.

Mr. Krikler: Madam Chair, the money that was spent to date has been in capacity building for the Police Review Commission. The Police Review Commission will have, at full strength, 146 full-time employees. They currently sit – well, their trajectory is to be at 130 by April 1, so they've been building up capacity. In any event, of December 1 being when they started to take complaint files or contact files, they were hiring staff to ensure that they were ready, building out rules and procedure, and taking physical space to make sure that they had the requisite, sort of, facilities that they would need.

I can give you a little bit of a highlight on the work they've done so far.

Mr. Shepherd: No. That's all right.

Well, thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. We've got about three minutes, so maybe we can just get into the second part of the question. Can you provide a bit of detail on how the estimate for this year was calculated? I'm guessing there may have been an estimate of the number of complaints the PRC would need to handle. What you're telling me is the \$9 million last year was for the capacity building. We have just over that now in terms of \$10,682,000 this year, so I'm just trying to get a sense: is that based on the anticipation of the number of cases? That's a significant amount of work, taking on all the complaints that were previously handled by the independent police services. Is there a sense of an estimate of how many cases you think you're anticipating handling, or how you sort of calculated the \$10 million and change that is being allocated for this year?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Well, thank you very much. It's a very good question. You know, obviously none of us have a crystal ball to know whether a complaint is going to come in. However, what the team had done is looked at the complaints that have come in in essentially all the police services within the province of Alberta, and that kind of helped to extrapolate what they could predict, what might be coming as far as complaints to help establish the Police Review Commission. I know the deputy minister has some numbers on this.

Mr. Krikler: Yes. The anticipated number of complaint files that were going to come in were approximately 5,000. This came from the work that was done in preparation for the go-live date. So far they've received, as of last week, almost 900 files from December 1 to date, so I think that the trajectory is reasonably accurate. There's been a lot of interaction with that commission from members of the public.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you.

In the final minute: I know one of the biggest concerns that we hear from folks when it comes to these sorts of reviews, for example with ASIRT, is the amount of time it takes for these cases to follow through, so I am pleased to see that there is some increase in the funding for ASIRT this year and will hopefully assist them in being able to turn around cases in as timely way as they can, and I know they all endeavour to do so, all of the good folks there. Is it your belief that with the PRC the funding that's provided for them will allow them to at least maintain the same speed and turnaround that independent police services were?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. As the assistant deputy minister indicates, there's a regulation that specifies the time it has to be turned around, so I believe that we're going to be meeting all of those metrics. Certainly, the deputy minister has been in direct contact with Mike Ewenson, and certainly he believes he has the necessary funds in order to get this thing fully operational.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: Please go ahead with your introduction, Member.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, thanks very much. I've been enjoying listening, but I'm also wanting to be on the record. Sarah Hoffman, Edmonton-Glenora. Thank you.

The Chair: Appreciate you joining us this evening, Member. We still have 12 seconds left.

Mr. Shepherd: I will cede the 12 seconds.

The Chair: Ah, thank you so much, hon. member.

We'll turn the time back over to the government caucus. Mr. Singh, I see you've got your light on. Please proceed with your question.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. I'll take it is shared time, back and forth?

Mr. Ellis: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Singh: Okay. I just want to express my gratitude to you, Minister, and the team for coming here and keeping Albertans safe and secure. This is the last set of questions here. My questions are on emergency management planning.

Minister, with wildfire and disaster season approaching, Albertans are increasingly focused on how well communities across the province are prepared to prevent, withstand, and recover from emergencies. Your ministry's business plan clearly outlines a proactive and strategic approach for emergency management, including enhanced public awareness initiatives, stronger training, certification programs, and an improved co-ordination system led through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency.

For example, I see the business plan on page 145 emphasizes strengthening Alberta's resilience through prevention, preparedness and modernization efforts and highlights investments such as \$4.2 million to the expansion of the wildland urban interface program and \$2.9 million to improve search and rescue delivery. With the strong foundation in place and continued investment in emergency readiness, can the minister please outline the key components the government incorporates into the effective emergency management plan such as comprehensive risk assessment, mitigation strategies, co-ordinated response protocols, and detailed recovery planning, and how these components align with the priorities outlined in the business plan, page 145? How frequently should these emergency management plans be reviewed and updated to ensure they remain responsive?

Evolving risk and changing climate realities and the shifting needs of Alberta communities, particularly considering ministry's ongoing modernization initiatives, are referenced in the business plan on page 145. Can you highlight what training supports and resources are currently available to municipalities and communities, including those provided through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency such as field officer visits, community emergency management plan reviews, and expanded training and certification supports as referenced on page 6 of the business plan?

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Member Singh. Here's what I will say. I'll get ADM Lacroix to get in a little more of the details that you're looking for here, but on a very high level I think it's very important to understand that we have to continue to support our local municipalities.

There is a prevailing thought process, one that I don't necessarily agree with, which would be similar to what the American version is, which is FEMA, where everybody is kind of being deployed out of Washington, D.C. I don't understand that because, obviously, when they have disasters on the west coast, being deployed from the east coast doesn't necessarily make sense. Even if you look at it from having resources deployed out of Ottawa or resources deployed out of, you know, Saskatchewan or Manitoba, again, it doesn't necessarily make sense.

9:55

In the event of a catastrophe and emergency, such as a wildfire, making sure that the local people have the resources that they need in order to effectively deal with the emergency and the crisis is how we have been, I would say, as successful as we have been. Having Alberta emergency management augment and support all of our local municipalities, again, continues with that success, which is why we have been recognized as probably one of the top, well, if not the top, emergency management agencies in Canada, but for some of the details I'll go to Stephen Lacroix there, please.

Mr. Lacroix: Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, through you to the member: you might have heard me say that training for the Olympics during the Olympics is probably not a great idea. Therefore, we have a number of plans in place that are actually regulated under the Emergency Management Act through the local authorities emergency management regulation. The last iteration of that piece of legislation in 2025 gives local authorities, Métis settlements as well, up until 2027 to have disaster risk reduction strategies in place, to have evacuation plans in place, to have emergency management plans in place, and rest assured that, actually, most of them already do, to be quite frank.

On top of that we have an Alberta emergency plan that is reviewed every five years, and in 2026, actually, we're starting the overhaul of that particular plan. On top of that, our field officers visit every local authority every year and review and help construct, if they don't exist, all those plans that I talked about with local authorities.

In terms of training, we provide a lot of it, actually, to all our municipalities. In the past year, just going off the top of my head, 14,000 people took training provided by the agency, mostly when it comes to incident command system, which is kind of the doctrine

we employ to manage incidents in that very decentralized system that Minister Ellis talked about. We have also trained up to 500 people that participate in a construct that we call the all-hazard incident management teams. These are municipal volunteers that we can use to augment local authorities undergoing significant disasters. Actually, we've exported that capacity, as an example, to Yellowknife in 2023, so a lot of training by a lot of people being made available.

I'd say that to inform that planning exercise we have what I would qualify as probably one of the best tools out there that we refer to as the hazard identification risk assessment tool. We've trained a number of people across the province. That involves local authorities. We can go to industry level, we can go to individual levels, and there's a bit of a travelling roadshow ongoing right now where we've visited communities, helped them run their problem set as it pertains to natural disasters through this evidence-based tool, informed and consulted with academia, and the outcome of that is a detailed risk list, if you will, with risk treatment solutions that they can apply to their problem set. You go back to, then, developing a plan that addresses that, and it enables people like you and at the local level, elected officials, to make evidence-based decision-making when it comes to developing the necessary plans to withstand what Mother Nature will throw at them every year, unfortunately.

Thank you.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Minister, for your answer here. I will just touch a little bit on the safer communities and neighbourhoods. I think, Minister, Alberta's safer communities and neighbourhoods, SCAN, unit continues to play a critical role in addressing properties here in Calgary and all of Alberta, and the community safety targeted crime reduction improved . . .

The Chair: That's our time. All right. The committee time has elapsed here for the consideration of the ministry's estimates. I'd like to remind committee members that we're scheduled to meet tomorrow, March 18, 9 a.m., to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Hospital and Surgical Health Services. Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

