

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Thursday, November 5, 2026
3 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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* substitution for Amanda Chapman
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Kevin Brezinski	Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner
Gordon McClure	Chief Electoral Officer
Diane McLeod	Information and Privacy Commissioner
Shawn McLeod	Ethics Commissioner
Terri Pelton	Child and Youth Advocate
Phillip D. Peters, KC	Auditor General

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Participant

Bolu Idowu	Executive Director, Strategic Support

Elections Alberta Participants

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Steve Kaye	Acting Deputy Chief Electoral Office and Chief Administrative Officer
Jennifer Maskoske	Director, Election Operations
Swetha Rachel	Director, Digital Solutions and Modernization

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3 p.m. Thursday, November 5, 2026

[Mr. Lunty in the chair]

The Chair: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order. I'd like to welcome members, staff, and guests to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

My name is Brandon Lunty, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont and chair of this committee. I'd ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then we will hear from those joining us remotely. I'll begin to my right.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Jennifer Johnson, MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka.

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

Mr. Dyck: Nolan Dyck, MLA for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Sinclair: Scott Sinclair, MLA for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Wright: Peggy Wright, MLA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Shepherd: Good afternoon. David Shepherd, Edmonton-City Centre.

Ms Gray: Good afternoon, everyone. Christina Gray, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Pancholi: Good afternoon. Rakhi Pancholi, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Tischer: Good afternoon. Lyndsay Tischer, human resources, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Koenig: Good afternoon. Trafton Koenig, office of Parliamentary Counsel.

Ms Robert: Good afternoon. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Ms Rempel: Good afternoon. Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

And those joining us online.

Mrs. Petrovic: Hi. Chelsae Petrovic, MLA for Livingstone-Macleod.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

For the record I would like to note the following substitutions. Ms Pancholi will be substituting for Member Miyashiro. The hon. Ms Gray will be substituting for Ms Chapman.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by Legislative Assembly Office staff. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Members participating remotely should ensure they are prepared to speak or vote when called upon, and videoconference participants are encouraged to have their cameras on, if possible, when speaking. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

With that, I can move us forward to our agenda. A draft agenda was distributed for this meeting. Would anyone like to propose additions or amendments? Seeing none, would a member like to move a motion to approve the agenda? I see MLA Dyck. Moved by MLA Dyck that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the proposed agenda as distributed for its November 5, 2026, meeting. Any discussion? All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Turning to approval of minutes from the previous meeting, we also have a set of minutes from our last meeting. Are there any errors or omissions? Seeing none, would a member move a motion to approve the minutes? MLA Dyck is on a roll. Moved by MLA Dyck that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on May 11, 2026. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Turning to our next agenda item. Agenda item 4, supplemental funding requests. This committee has received supplemental funding requests from three offices. The officers have been invited to join us today and provide opening remarks regarding their requests, and then there will be time for questions from committee members. Please ensure that you ask for any clarification you need in order to be able to make a decision regarding these requests.

We will begin under 4(a) with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. At this point I would like to welcome our guests from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to the meeting. The committee has received a request for supplementary funding from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for 2026-2027. I will now turn the floor over to Ms Pelton for opening remarks of up to five minutes, and then we will have an opportunity for committee members to ask questions.

Ms Pelton, if you could begin by introducing your colleagues joining you at the table today.

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

Ms Pelton: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairperson Lunty and committee members. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. I'm here with Bolu Idowu, our executive director of strategic support.

My office is currently facing significant financial pressures due to increased demand for our legal representation for children and youth program, also known as LRCY, as well as the introduction of the maternity and parental top-up plan. Without additional funding these pressures will affect our ability to maintain current service levels for children and youth.

Our LRCY program ensures that the voice of the young person is heard when important decisions are made in child intervention matters. An example of this is when government is requesting to have a child remain permanently in care, a decision which has life-altering consequences for both the young person and their family. Since its inception in 2006 the program has helped over 37,000 young people who otherwise would not have had their own lawyer representing their rights, interests, and viewpoints when these matters are decided.

Expenditures in the LRCY program are directly tied to the number of referrals we receive from the ministry, families, and other parties. We also receive court-ordered appointments, and in these instances the associated costs are outside of our control. We've always done our best to contain costs within this program. Our lawyer compensation rate of $125 per hour has not increased since 2008. During the pandemic, when there was a backlog in access to the courts, our program costs were consistently lower than budget. Now that courts have resumed normal service levels, our program costs have increased significantly. Within the first six months of the previous fiscal year we made 610 new lawyer appointments for 994 children. During the same period this year we made 708 appointments for 1,063 children, representing a 16 per

cent increase in new appointments. Due to their complexity it is common for court matters to take more than a year to reach completion. The number of court matters carried over from previous fiscal years has increased by 12 per cent, further compounding our cost pressures.

The maternity and parental top-up plan introduced in April 2026 for all Alberta public service employees has also had a substantial impact on our budget. As this benefit was implemented after we presented to you our 2026-2027 budget estimates, these costs were not included in our original submission. Together these pressures have created a significant budget shortfall that cannot be fully addressed through internal cost-saving measures. The combined impact is estimated at approximately $634,000. Of that amount, the office has absorbed about $84,000 through cost-saving measures. We are unable to absorb the remaining costs without affecting service delivery.

Accordingly, I am respectfully requesting an additional $550,000 for the 2026-2027 fiscal year to ensure we can continue meeting our statutory responsibilities and maintain current service levels for children and youth.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be pleased to answer any questions.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

I will now open the floor to committee members to ask questions. MLA Shepherd, please go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to see you, Ms Pelton. Thank you for coming in today. I was just curious. You basically said that you've seen a significant increase in the number of cases going forward as well as cases being carried over from one year to the next. Is there any particular pattern that you're seeing there? Are these cases related to a particular issue? Is there a particular cause that you're seeing? Is it an increasing complexity of cases? Can you give a sort of sense of what you think might be driving it?

Ms Pelton: The number of child intervention – the caseloads within child intervention have increased, which impacts our numbers. As well, the complexity, I believe. From what we're seeing both across the office in direct advocacy services and in the lawyer appointments, matters are taking longer to resolve. They're more contentious.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you.

No follow-up, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right.

Are there any other members wishing to ask a question? I see MLA Wright. Please go ahead.

Ms Wright: Oh, thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'm wondering. You had just mentioned that if you weren't able to receive a supplementary funding request, this would of course affect service delivery. I'm wondering what that sort of lack of service delivery might mean in terms of your statutory requirements.

Ms Pelton: We would have to continue to maintain things like our mandatory reviews. They're legislated. I couldn't reduce those. Court-ordered appointments: I couldn't reduce those, but we could look at limiting the types of appointments we appoint lawyers for.

3:10

We might have to look at my reporting in terms of systemic issues and the work we do related to recommendations across the board. If we don't get the money we're requesting, it will impact children and youth.

Ms Wright: Mr. Chair, I've got a bit of a follow-up if that's all right.

The Chair: Sure. Please go ahead.

Ms Wright: I will be quick. In terms of the effect that that would have on the children you serve, I wonder if you could just expand upon that for us, please.

Ms Pelton: Well, I'll speak specifically to the lawyer program. What happens in court matters for child intervention is that everybody there believes that they know what's best for the child. You have a caseworker saying what they believe is best. You have parents believing what's best. Sometimes there's a blended family, so there might be two sets of parents and some grandparents and some foster parents. There's a lot of noise in a courtroom with everybody believing what's best for that child. Without the lawyer appointments, the young person's voice is lost. Really, they're the ones that it impacts the most, in addition to their parents and their family. But if we're not listening to what they're saying, we're missing a really critical part of the equation.

The Chair: All right. Are there any other members? MLA Johnson, please go ahead.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you so much, Chair. Thank you for being here and for the work that you do. You mentioned over 1,000 children that are dealing with the courts. It's up 12 per cent, you said, and that timely access is a really important safeguard for these children. I think we'd all agree on that. Is your office currently able to provide legal representation services within the timelines required to meet the needs of these children and these youth, or are there some instances you're seeing where demand has resulted in delays for them accessing representation?

Ms Pelton: I haven't seen a delay on our part yet, but we are really very I want to say pushy with our lawyers. A child's lawyer shouldn't delay a decision for a young person. That's why we're here today asking for this additional money, because I don't think we're going to be able to maintain that if we don't have that help.

Mrs. Johnson: That answered my follow-up as well. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, MLA Johnson.

Just a quick note. In the issue of fairness I will offer all members a follow-up question when they ask a question, so hopefully we can stick to that. If it's absolutely necessary, a second follow-up. We might use our discretion.

MLA Pancholi, I have you next on the list. Go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms Pelton. It's a pleasure to see you again, and thank you for the incredible work that I know you and your staff do in the OCYA. It's just really critical for helping support children in our province. I'm deeply grateful. You mentioned that the rate for lawyers has been at $125 per hour. I know how low that rate is and that it has not changed since 2008. As you see this increasing demand, are you also seeing challenges in finding lawyers who are willing to work at that rate in order to meet the increased demand that you have?

Ms Pelton: We have started to hear them make a little bit of noise about it, but we have a group of lawyers who are passionate about representing young people. We often have a list waiting to get on

our roster, so they are accepting of that, but they consider it pro bono work at that rate.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you.

As a follow-up, if you were, you know, to get this supplemental funding, this is in order to meet the demand that you're currently seeing, but would you also be able to take on more cases? Are there any cases that right now you're hesitating taking on or at least finding a lawyer for because of this uncertainty around the funding going forward?

Ms Pelton: Yes. At this point in time we have stopped appointing for supervision orders, and we're only appointing for contested temporary guardianship orders, so we are narrowing the gates in order to try to make it through this.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk, please go ahead.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Chair. Through you to Ms Pelton. A portion of the supplemental funding request, approximately $100,000, is related to the implementation of the new maternity and parental top-up plan benefit for Alberta public service employees. Madam, can you clarify when the new maternity and parental top-up plan came into effect? Was the benefit introduced as part of the recent collective bargaining negotiations and revised compensation structure for Alberta public service employees, for which supplemental funding was requested in November 2025 and approved in December 2025, or is this a separate initiative?

Ms Pelton: I will start, then I will have Bolu finish because she's much better at numbers than I am. The parental and maternity benefit top-up came in April, and it was separate from the salary increases that we asked for in November and were approved in November, December last year. It is a significant amount, and as we've seen our workforce turn over and have younger staff, we have more young families starting out. I believe it is up to 93 per cent top-up, so if somebody goes on a maternity leave, where in the past we would have only been paying part of that and then if we were filling behind – at this point in time if we fill behind we're still pretty much paying that employee for a good portion of their maternity leave, but I'll let Bolu add to that.

Ms Idowu: Yeah. Thank you for the question. The maternity top-up benefit and parental top-up plan is a 16-week maternity top-up and 16-week parental. That means a parent who gives birth is eligible to receive 32 weeks of the 93 per cent of their regular earnings. Like Terri was saying, before this got introduced in April, when people would go on maternity or parental leave, they would only get the employment insurance, which was 55 per cent and also had a cap, but with this new top-up plan eligible parents can get 93 per cent of regular earnings, and there is no cap. If someone earns $160,000 a year, they get 93 per cent of that $160,000, and the employment insurance is just 55 per cent up to $80,000 or thereabouts, so the employer now has to pay for the extra to get that person to 93 per cent of their $150,000 for example. It's for 32 weeks, so it's for eight months if one single parent gets both the maternity and the parental top-up.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you have a follow-up, MLA?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Yes, I do, Chair. Through you, is the requested amount expected to be sufficient to meet anticipated demand, and is this a one-time funding requirement associated with implementation or an ongoing cost pressure that will need to be reflected in future budgets?

Ms Pelton: It is an ongoing pressure that we will be reflecting in our budget when we come back in December.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

MLA Shepherd, please go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to return to the questions that MLA Pancholi was putting forward regarding, I guess, the lower rate: if you were to want to increase that rate or if we came to the point where that needed to be done, is that a decision you make within your office, or is there some form of regulation or other thing that would need to be adjusted to allow you to do that?

Ms Pelton: It's a decision made within our office, but I would, of course, have to come here and ask for that additional funding.

Mr. Shepherd: Understood. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to ask questions? Seeing none, on behalf of the committee I would like to thank you for joining us today. The committee will make a decision on your request and then follow up with you in writing.

Thank you again.

Ms Pelton: Thank you.

Ms Idowu: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. I can move us along to agenda item 4(b), which is the office of the Ethics Commissioner. The office of the Ethics Commissioner has submitted a written request to the committee for supplementary funding for '26-27. I understand there may be interest in briefly moving in camera before proceeding further with our consideration of this matter. If so, I would look to the floor for the appropriate motion.

MLA Johnson.

Mrs. Johnson: Yes.

The Chair: So moved by MLA Johnson that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices meet in camera to consider the request for supplementary funding from the office of the Ethics Commissioner, and that required staff from the Legislative Assembly Office remain in attendance. All those in favour of this motion, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

[The committee met in camera from 3:19 p.m. to 3:29 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. We are now back on the record. Just a quick reminder to everyone that Legislative Assembly Office staff will now be operating the microphones again.

Since we are not joined by the Ethics Commissioner at this meeting, I would like to move us on to agenda item 4(c), Elections Alberta. At this point I would like to welcome our guests from Elections Alberta to the meeting. The committee is considering a request from Elections Alberta for supplementary funding for '26-2027. The office has submitted a written request to the committee. I will invite Mr. McClure to make an opening presentation up to 15 minutes in length, and then I will open the floor to questions from committee members.

Mr. McClure, when you have a chance to get set, please begin your remarks by introducing your colleagues.

Elections Alberta

Mr. McClure: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening, members of the committee. It's a pleasure to meet with you to present the supplemental budget request for 2026-27 fiscal year. As you know, I'm Gordon McClure, your Chief Electoral Officer, and joining me today are Steve Kaye, chief administrative officer; Sunday Akintunde, director of election finance and our senior financial officer; Jennifer Maskoske, director of elections operations; and Swetha Rachel, our director of digital solutions and modernization. Additional members of my senior leadership team are also present in the gallery.

Over the next 15 minutes or so I will walk the committee through the supplemental budget we are requesting and its three components: referendum delivery costs, business unit and organizational capacity increases, and advance preparation for the 2027 provincial general election. I will close with the specific approval we are seeking, after which my team and I will be pleased to take your questions.

My office is requesting the committee's approval of approximately $59 million in supplemental funding for the 2026-27 fiscal year. This supplemental budget request reflects three streams: referendum expenses of $49,558,434, or about 83 per cent of the total detailed in appendix B; provincial general election preparations of $9 million, about 15 per cent, detailed in appendix D; and business unit and organizational capacity increases of $993,742, about 2 per cent, covering the salary costs of 23 FTEs, detailed in appendix C. The referendum costs are by far the largest portion of this request, and that is where I will focus most of my attention and time today.

Before turning to each component, I would like to give the committee the broader context of why a supplemental budget of this size is necessary. Three pressures are driving it. First, the October 19, 2026, provincial referendum was an unprecedented electoral event in both scale, scope, and complexity. Every voter could cast up to 10 ballots, one for each of the questions posed to them. The counting of all these ballots had to be completed manually by human beings at hundreds of locations across the province and included a province-wide special ballot option. In total, more than 22 million ballots were cast during this referendum. This surpasses the number of ballots cast in all of Canada during the 2025 federal election. All of this drove the staffing, facilities, security, and logistics cost I will present in the next few slides.

Second, our organizational capacity. Our 2024-25 annual report identified many ongoing pressures in my office: increasing legislative responsibilities, limited permanent staffing, facility constraints, turnover, and insufficient redundancies in key operational functions and roles. Elections Alberta must be adequately staffed to administer referendums, by-elections, and other electoral events as it prepares for the next general election. Our current structure does not possess the required bench strength to do so.

3:35

Third is the 2027 provincial general election scheduled for October 18, 2027. The general election preparations are an ongoing multiyear responsibility. Recruiting and preparing returning officers, improving systems, developing materials, and procuring supplies cannot wait until the next fiscal year.

The cost to deliver the 2026 referendum on top of our previously approved budget was $49,558,434. The expenses on this slide are drawn directly from appendix B. Counting staff is the largest expense, totalling roughly 53 per cent of the supplemental funding request. This cost to staff the manual count from the close of voting through the completion of the final count included counting officers, co-ordinators, and supervisors at each counting location and the operational oversight required to ensure the count was both accurate and secure. Counting staff handled ballots from thousands of election day voting areas as well as several hundred advance and mobile voting locations.

Facilities covers counting place rentals, recurring office leases, voting place rentals, and furniture required for counting, voting, and office operations. Freight and postage covers freight, courier, and postage for distribution, movement and return of ballots, ballot boxes, referendum materials across the province. Special ballot staffing and processing funded the core team that received and processed special ballots. This is a specialized, time-sensitive function that must be properly staffed to protect the integrity of these votes and every ballot cast in this manner.

The unofficial results show how significant this function was in that 5,109,533 valid votes, or 24.83 per cent of all votes cast across the 10 questions, or nearly 1 in 4, were cast by special ballot processed across all 87 electoral divisions.

Security and vehicles covered voting place security and the 24-hour province-wide count centres. Included are the costs for rental vehicles that were needed to support referendum operations and ballot transport requirements.

Digital solutions and technology platforms covers the additional technology and equipment that was required for the referendum. Taken together, these are additional costs conducting a secure and orderly referendum involving 10 ballots at geographically dispersed counting locations.

Having walked through the line items, I would like to highlight three factors that explain why the referendum costs are at this level. I previously shared the cost of hiring counting centre staff. Had we been able to hire additional staff, this would have reduced the time required to complete the count but not the expense.

Second, there was a province-wide event involving 10 ballots per elector. Ten ballots multiplies the handling, counting, and logistics factor by 10 virtually at every stage from special ballot processing to the movement of ballots, ballot boxes, materials in every corner of the province. In practical terms the 10 ballots produced more than 22 million votes, all of which were required to be counted by hand. Advanced voting accounted for 40.38 per cent of those votes, election day for 33.82 per cent, special ballot for 24.83 per cent, and mobile vote for .97 per cent.

Third, counting ran continuously, including overnight, at multiple geographically dispersed locations that drove the night count security requirement and the counting place facilities that we needed to rent.

The second component is the business unit and organizational capacity totalling $993,742. This is a salary cost, including employer contributions, for additional full-time equivalent positions. The positions are distributed as follows: eight FTEs in operational staffing covering outreach, special ballot, policy and training, field operations, and warehouse staffing; four FTEs across technology platforms, innovation and digital solutions, and modernization; four FTEs in information integrity unit; four human resource consultant and business partners FTEs in corporate and human resources; two FTEs in corporate finance; and one in financial compliance.

I'd like to connect this capacity directly to the risks we already have reported publicly in our 2024-25 annual report. It identified insufficient resources for growing legislative responsibilities,

limited redundancies for critical positions, process bottlenecks, staff turnover, and business continuity risks.

In a small office the absence of a single person in a critical role can put an electoral event at risk. The positions in this request address those risks across the organization. Corporate services provides human resources and administration services. Finance oversees budgeting, payroll, leases, and related financial administration functions. Information and technology supports corporate and returning office databases and systems. Elections operations develops our processes, training materials, and outreach and runs our warehouse and services.

The information integrity unit was approved and began operating in June 2026. It has proven instrumental in supporting both corporate services and compliance. The unit identified significant online content that posed potential risks to public safety, staff safety, and the administration of the 2026 referendum. In the first four months of operation it made referrals to both law enforcement and the provincial security intelligence office. Its information analysis has also supported corporate services in its objective of being the most reliable source of accurate election and referendum information online. More broadly, the information integrity unit and our outreach activities support public trust and participation.

The third component is $9 million for continued preparation for the delivery of the provincial general election scheduled for October 18, 2027. These costs are further detailed in appendix D. Contract services at $4.5 million cover pre-election returning officers and election clerk staffing, call centre staff, returning officers and advisers, and related pre-election support. These people are needed to be in place well ahead of the election to prepare their electoral divisions.

Materials and supplies, at $3 million, covers ballot paper, ballot boxes, forms, returning office stationery, and other election supplies. Procuring these early ensures materials are ready, packed, and distributed on time.

Advertisement, at $1.5 million, funds the 2027 provincial general election advertising campaign, including advertising to recruit and hire election workers. General election preparations are an ongoing, multiyear responsibility that cannot pause while we deliver other events. Funding this work now will keep us on schedule for October 2027.

I want to assure the committee that this request has been prepared carefully and will be managed responsibly. The estimates are needs based, grounded in operational requirements that take staff to house, secure, and supply each event in each business unit. They are also evidence informed. Where we have expenditure experience from previous events, we have used it. Where we do not, we have applied prudent planning assumptions. All expenditures will remain subject to Elections Alberta's established financial controls, oversight, and reporting, and every total in this presentation reconciles with appendices A through D of my letter.

In closing, I respectfully request the committee's approval of $59,552,176 in supplemental funding for the 2026-27 fiscal year. Your approval will allow my office to address the funding shortfall from delivering the 2026 referendum, to maintain its statutory responsibilities with adequate staff and coverage in critical roles and functions, and to stay on schedule for successful delivery of the provincial general election on October 18, 2027.

I would like to thank you for your time and for the opportunity to present this supplemental funding request. This concludes my presentation. My team and I would be very happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Mr. McClure.

I will now open the floor to questions from committee members. MLA Shepherd, please go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good to see you again, Mr. McClure and your team. Thank you, to you through the chair, of course. I appreciate you coming in today. Certainly, I think this is – folks, first of all, let me say, actually, thank you for your work during the referendum. Certainly, as you said, this was an unprecedented electoral event here in the province. Largely, from what I heard from my constituents who took the opportunity to vote, many by special ballot or at advanced polls or in person, the experience was a smooth one, so thank you.

3:45

I did just want to start, then, with the total cost we're talking about here. You mentioned, when you talk about the just over $49 million that you're requesting here for the referendum delivery expenses, that this is on top of your budget that you already had for the year. I would note that this is just below your total budget for the year of just over $51 million. Could you provide some clarification for us? How much of that $51 million budget was also taken up with the referendum? You talk about getting ready for the election, so there are preparation expenses, other things. Can you help us understand what the total cost was for your office, then, the $49 million that you're talking today and then out of the $51 million that you had?

Mr. McClure: Certainly. I'm going to ask our chief financial officer to respond to your question.

Mr. Akintunde: Yeah. Thank you for your question. For the annual budget that has been approved, we have a pre-election or pre-event budget in the amount of $34,710,045. That was what we leveraged to start the referendum. So to your question on the total cost of the referendum, including the supplemental that we are presenting at this time, the total cost will be $84,289,919.52.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. Excellent.

A follow-up, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Trying to understand this better. We know we've had a number of changes from how we conducted previous elections to how we conducted this one – you've talked about the 10 ballots, some of those sorts of things – particularly in terms of the hand counting. Then with the, I guess, hand counting 10 ballots, how much of the increase in costs – because this is obviously significantly higher, for a number of reasons, from where we would have been with the last election in 2023. So with the hand counting of the ballots, how much did that add in terms of additional man-hours from what you might have seen previously and what that cost might have been? Is that something you're able to qualify?

Mr. Akintunde: Yeah. Based on the fact that for the annual budget that we presented, we only budgeted for pre-election activity – we did not budget for the actual counters – to your question on how much that cost, for the counters already we have spent over $21 million just for counters, and we still have election workers to pay. That is what informs the supplemental that we are presenting.

Mr. Shepherd: Oh. There are more costs to come. This will not represent the sum total to date.

Mr. Akintunde: This is what has been incurred already. Then we are now asking for an additional $26 million to cater to the counters and the election workers.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. So in December we'll have a better sense, then, of the total cost for the entire referendum.

Mr. Akintunde: Yeah. What we are presenting now, the $84 million that is the total cost now, is still an estimate. By the end of December we should have – based on our analysis, we hope that will be the cost, that the total cost will be within that amount.

Mr. Shepherd: I understand. Thank you.

The Chair: MLA Dyck, I saw your hand. Go ahead.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you. Yeah. I appreciate you guys being here. Thanks for your work in the referendum. A lot of moving parts. I guess a couple of my questions were answered by MLA Shepherd here. I was talking about extra cost pressures associated as well. You did mention hand counting and just extra costs. It sounds like an extra $6 million potentially coming up for the request. Can you dive into that a little bit more for me so that I can get a better understanding of the whole total cost that might be presented in December? Then I also want you to dive in a little bit more on your initial approved budget. I think it was about $51 million. How much of that was currently spent on the referendum?

Mr. Akintunde: That's $34 million.

Mr. Dyck: Thirty-four million dollars of the $51 million? Okay.

So with those projections – yeah. I am looking forward to your budget presentations in December, but I would love to hear a little bit more on expected extra costs coming up as well.

Mr. Akintunde: What we're presenting in December will be the annual budget for '27-28. What we have now is the final numbers for the referendum. So we are not coming to present additional supplemental for the purpose of the referendum. What we are presenting now is the final number for the referendum.

Mr. Kaye: Maybe just to clarify, we have included the projection on the anticipated expenses, that are still to come in, in the $84 million. When we appear in December, we do not anticipate bringing additional requests for funding for the referendum. We will be presenting our '27-28 annual budget request. Sorry. I hope that clears that up.

Mr. Dyck: That does, yes. Thank you.

What portion of your budget of the $51 million – can you just break out what you had planned to spend? Can you talk about that? We're talking about extra allotment here overtop, significant dollars, but can you also just talk about what you spent your current budget on for the referendum costs?

Mr. Akintunde: Can you repeat that again?

Mr. Dyck: Yeah. Absolutely. Out of your current approved budget from this last year, can you just explain how you've spent that budget on the referendum costs? We have a supplemental request, obviously, for extra costs, but on the current budget can you explain to me just how you used your current budget on the referendum?

Mr. Akintunde: For election workers we have spent about $15 million. For facilities – rental costs for our offices, voting places, counting spaces – $7.7 million. Then for freight and postage we have spent about $9 million. Special ballot staffing, we have spent $2.2 million. Then for security and vehicles rental we have spent about $1.7 million. And for IT, digital solutions, and technology we have spent about $1.8 million.

Mr. Dyck: Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Mr. McClure and to everybody for being here today. Given that the referendum is now over but, of course, there are still these costs, what I'm hearing is that for the majority of the costs that you're seeking the supplementary budget allotment: those costs have already been incurred, right? This is not, you know, to meet a growing need or an ongoing need. At least for the referendum, for 84 per cent of your ask here, those costs have already been incurred. To some extent I'm sure some individuals who worked the election have already been paid or are seeking to be paid, and so these are costs that are not forward looking when it comes to the referendum. Simply put, Elections Alberta requires us to pay for the costs they've already incurred. Is that correct?

Mr. McClure: That is correct.

Mr. Akintunde: That's correct.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. That's it.

The Chair: Thank you.

MLA Johnson, I saw you next. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. McClure and your staff for being here, your team. Assuming the Legislative Assembly does pass this proposed electoral boundary change during our fall sitting, is Elections Alberta on track to be prepared to administer the next provincial general election using these new boundaries?

Mr. Kaye: Based on the timings that have been proposed, we will be able to deliver new boundaries as they're approved by the Legislature.

Mrs. Johnson: Okay. That's all I have. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

MLA Wright, I saw your hand, and then I see your colleague wants back in. Go ahead.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to delve a little bit more comprehensively into the matter of the staffing itself. I note – and you certainly referenced it in your presentation – you referred to, I think, the previous year's annual report where you had actually talked about some of those staffing pressures already. Certainly, in our previous meetings you talked about staffing pressures. My assumption, then, is that those 23 FTEs that you are now requesting additional funding for are in an effort to alleviate those staffing pressures.

One of the things that I'm wondering about – because we've had all of these things happen in about a year and a half. We've had citizen initiatives. We've had recall petitions. We've had the preparation for electoral boundaries to change. We've had a full-on referendum. I will add to all my colleagues around the table: thank you so much. When I went to vote, it was absolutely a seamless process. But even I, with sort of the knowledge I went into voting with, was shocked at how much longer it took me to actually vote

and the number of people it took to help me, like, even just the very act of getting all of the ballots, getting them signed, going and voting, and then putting them into all the other separate boxes. I can't imagine the work that would have had to have gone into that in the background.

If we could just talk about – you mentioned in the past issues with retention, so I'm wondering kind of where some of those primary pressures are. Is it really just because we've had more than one election-style or election-type event in the space of 36 months that's leading to this?

3:55

Mr. Kaye: Yeah. I'm happy to address that, and thank you for bringing the question up. For a lot of our folks the referendum was crushing. I myself worked a 22-hour shift. That was my longest shift. Everybody here at this table worked probably at least 16- to 20-hour days, but that comes with the territory. We're not here complaining. It was just a product of who we had to get the work done.

You raised a very interesting point that I want to touch on. Across all of Canada since January 2025 there have been 21 electoral events. During the same period of time in Alberta there have been 37 electoral events. We have had our foot on the gas for a long time. People are tired, and we have some concerns going forward about being able to hire some of the people that have worked for us in the past simply because we ran a marathon and included a triathlon and then a cross the English Channel swimming event.

It's been quite a bit. Again, we're not complaining. This is our job, and we'll do our jobs, but we identified significant lacks of redundancy if we lost a person for medical reasons or whatever. The gap that created was exponential, and the staff we had had to pick up the ball and run with it.

We are one of the leanest if not the leanest electoral management bodies in Canada. That's great, but it has to be sustainable. We'd like a little bit of water on the marathon route if we could get it.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

MLA Wright, do you have a follow-up?

Ms Wright: No, I do not.

The Chair: Okay. Great.

I have MLA Sinclair, then MLA Shepherd after that. MLA Sinclair, please go ahead.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, all, for being here today. The recent referendum was the first province-wide electoral event administered under your leadership as Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. McClure. Looking back on the way the referendum was administered, what were the most significant lessons learned, and what changes has your office identified to improve the delivery of future province-wide electoral events?

Mr. McClure: We're actually in the process of beginning debriefing on this. We're not quite done the referendum. Actually, there's still a lot of work going on behind the scenes. Logistically, one of the big things is that there were efficiencies gained, I can say right off, from centralization of some of the counts in certain areas. We modelled this and tested out for many times, and it showed the efficiency of modelling and testing.

This is why we colourized the 10 ballots, so that they could easily be identified, put into ballot boxes, and separated into 10; so that when counted – for example, question 10: there was a desire to have it quickly turned for the public's interest and answered – we were able to look and notice any errant ballots. We were able to quickly take question 10, not have to try and separate it out from the other 10 questions. We had them all separated, and there were great efficiencies.

I may ask Ms Maskoske if she has any other observations.

Ms Maskoske: Sure.

I think there are so many lessons learned when we're going through an event of its first kind and not much to look back to on lessons learned other times. There will be efficiencies in just how we recruit our returning officers: providing them more direction, supporting them, being able to give them additional supports in training material. We will be able to recruit our returning office teams more quickly, just understanding a magnitude of what this was, being able to prepare a framework for one event and how do we scale it up.

Special ballots, as an example, you know, we did not anticipate the turnout that we received of them, so now we can learn and look forward when it comes to a PGE, a provincial general election. If we anticipate the same type of turnout, we now know the level of detail that we need to be prepared for with our election workers being able to understand the different roles that we included: ballot box clerks, voting officers, record clerks.

We're better able to understand each of those roles more so in the fact of how we recruit them. Yeah. Special ballots: like I say, big lessons learned with that one, the logistics of just having the sheer volume of people at our hands and ready to go.

Mr. Kaye: I think one other thing if I can add. There was a bit of a change in the typical sort of voter behaviour model that we've seen. We saw a real uptick in the special ballot and advanced vote and a different number on voting day. That's a bit different than the models that we've seen in the past. We want to take some time to analyze that, because that could be impactful, again, when we get into the 2027 PGE, so that we can prepare the best delivery model to serve Albertans and provide opportunities to engage in the process.

To Jenn's point, this was a very, very significant event, and the lessons learned, both good and bad, are really resonating with us right now. We will debrief fully on that. We've already begun that process.

The Chair: All right. Do you have a follow-up, MLA Sinclair?

Mr. Sinclair: No. Thank you.

The Chair: MLA Shepherd, please go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just returning to the question of the staffing, then. You're requesting funding here for 23 new FTE positions. I just want to be clear. You had spoken before about sort of short-staffing, that sort of thing, so when we're talking about these 23 FTEs, we're not talking about any vacant positions that you're needing to fill. We're not talking about staff that might have left in the last few months or were maybe burnt out during the referendum. What we're looking at here is just 23 brand new positions within the office. Is that correct?

Mr. McClure: That is correct.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay.

I guess, at this point are there additional staffing needs? I'm just curious because you were talking about sort of the stress, the pressure. Were you, in fact, during the referendum running short-staffed? Do you have vacancies in the office that you're working to

fill? Do you have a sense of how many further FTEs you're currently running short?

Mr. McClure: Well, that's a difficult one to – I have staff who are now off sick, who had appendicitis during this event and put it off to go and get treatment, so people went above and beyond.

Mr. Kaye: And to your point, yes, we have vacancies. Yes, we lost people along the way, which is very, very unfortunate. You know, this was a hard thing. Yes, we are looking for those 23 positions. The committee should anticipate, when we come in December, that we will be contemplating additional positions.

When you look at our model, and I spoke of this earlier, our ratio of employee per capita – we can use Quebec for an example. They're at the opposite end of the spectrum. They are very, very well staffed. Quebec has a population of 9 million people. They employ 300 full-time election workers, and they scale up by another 100 when they get into event mode, so they have a total of 400 staff in an event. Elections Alberta – well, Alberta, first, has a population of just over 5 million people, so about 56 per cent of Quebec. If we had a similar staffing model, we would have 224 employees. We have 54, so we have run lean for a long time, but the committee should be prepared to hear us requesting additional positions because one of the lessons we learned during the referendum, which was not the most favourable one, is that this was very difficult for our staff.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you.

Mr. Kaye: Both full-time staff and the people we deploy in the field.

The Chair: Thank you.

A follow-up, MLA Shepherd?

Mr. Shepherd: Yeah. If I have a further opportunity. Can you give us a sense – I guess you're going to have various levels of staff. You're going to have some who are fairly junior, fairly lower on the totem pole. You're going to have folks who are senior, and of course you're going to have folks with a lot of institutional knowledge. You know, the loss of those folks is going to have even more impact. Do you have a sense, I guess, of how you're doing in terms of retaining your senior staff, folks that have institutional knowledge, or has sort of the process of all this maybe – folks might choose to retire early, that sort of thing. Do you have a sense of what your needs might be to sort of backfill at that level?

Mr. Kaye: Why are you looking at me when you say that, as one of the oldest people at the table? You know, that attrition of knowledge, that attrition of experience is a risk in any organization. A part of surviving that kind of event, and it occurs everywhere, is having a very well-documented process. If you do have that kind of turnover, can someone come through the door, pick up some sort of material to get a very, very comprehensive understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the position but, more importantly, the unique functions of the position within the organization? You touch on a key point because we did have a couple of instances where, for various reasons, key critical people either, for lack of a better term, had to briefly take a knee or became consumed with other things.

4:05

That is another lesson we've learned. We don't have a redundancy to plug that hole in the dike when it occurs, and those holes tend to grow very quickly if you don't do something to stem the flow of water. So, yes, we're very alive to attrition, to knowledge, experience capture, and these are all things we're working on while we work to deliver all these events.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

MLA Gray, please go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, and thank you very much to the team from Elections Alberta. I feel like I've had an awareness of how much the government has changed legislation over several years and how much work you're doing, but the numbers you were presenting of the real impacts – you described 37 electoral events in comparison to, Canada-wide, 21. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but those electoral events would include multiple petitions, multiple recalls, a 10-question referendum, which . . .

Ms Pancholi: And by-election.

Ms Gray: And by-elections, yes. Yeah. There's just a lot that's happening.

The question I have is that you came with kind of three pillars for the funding: referendum, organizational capacity, but also 2027 general election. I wanted to ask about some of the costs around the general election. Thank you, Mr. McClure. You sent a letter to all MLAs on October 30 highlighting some of the pressures that the organization has been on, and you included the line that Elections Alberta is already the leanest electoral management body in Canada on a per-voter-served basis. I have to say that the comparison to Quebec: very material in helping us to understand the difference. Fifty-four where in another province it would be 224: that is a stark difference. So, again, kudos to the entire team for everything you've been managing.

My question around your request of the 2027 general election is that, obviously, in previous budget requests you knew that new maps would be coming, but as your letter makes clear, the time to implement new maps is material to you. I'm really curious about the less time that you have as far as that time frame: how does that impact the cost? I come from a previous background in software management where we used to say, you know, that nine women can't make a baby in one month. Sometimes there are just things that are hard to move. What challenges do you expect to encounter, and how will that impact costs? That is the thrust of my question.

Mr. McClure: We'll start with you and then go to Swetha.

Mr. Kaye: Yeah. That's a great question. I think some additional insight here – I know certainly before I started with the office, when people spoke about boundary commissions and changing boundaries, I'm like: oh, well, you just get a new map and away you go. There's an awful lot that goes into it over and above just creating maps, and we have Swetha here, who is from our IT branch, who has a very, very intimate understanding of all the implications. I think it would be very informative for people to really understand the events that occur in an electoral boundary change and the implications on the number of divisions and sequential nature in which those occur.

I'll stop and Swetha can start. She is the SME in the room.

Ms Rachel: Thank you, Steve.

I'll start with the importance of electoral divisions for all our activities and preparation. Electoral divisions or the boundaries that define them are fundamental to all the activities that we start for an election event. Once the electoral boundaries are finalized, our office, our GIS team would need to incorporate these boundaries

into the geospatial system, and then we need to start preparing voting areas.

Voting areas are the small boundaries that we create within an electoral division. Currently we have about 4,900 voting areas, just to understand the complexity. To create these voting areas, we do have programs. We can programmatically create it, but that's not sufficient. We usually work with our returning officers in collaboration to ensure the voting areas that we create are practical and make sense from an operational perspective.

Once the electoral divisions and voting areas are prepared, then we need to incorporate all this into various applications. One of the major applications would be the electoral register. Currently our register has about 3.2 million electors. Eighty per cent of that work can be done programmatically. The remaining 20 per cent needs human intervention. Given the size of the register that's a substantial amount of work that takes a very long time to implement. Once that's completed, we need to adapt the same data across various other applications like candidate registration application, financial disclosure application, our election management system.

Only once we have all these foundational activities implemented can we then really start our election process like hiring returning officers to an electoral division and preparing or figuring out the packing, how many materials are required for each electoral division, and that is from where we prepare our work. Most of these activities are done by various departments within our organization; however, none of those can be done simultaneously. Everything needs to happen in a sequential order. Each output of each phase is the foundation of the next phase, and that is where the timeline challenge comes into play.

Ms Gray: Just as a follow-up, I think – and I realize it might be tough to answer because I'm asking you a hypothetical. I suppose the yes/no question is that the less time you have, the more expensive it may get as you scramble to get the work you need to do done in less time. It may take more resources in that kind of project planning triangle. Would that be a fair statement to make?

Mr. Kaye: Yeah. That is a fair statement. There are going to be cost implications associated with the number of boundaries if there is an increase as well. Each boundary creates an additional expense and, you know, electoral division. We have to prep, package, staff. I mean, there are implications, certainly. You know, it's a bit like doing the count. You can hire this many people, and it'll take this much time. If you hire more people, you can compress the time, but you pay them more money. I think it's reasonable to say that there could be costs associated to it, yes.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

MLA Wright, I think I have you next. Go ahead.

Ms Wright: Thank you very much. One of the things that I recall from last year at around this time was that you were very, very clear that – because that was also, I think, a request for supplemental funding as well as a request that we had on this year's budget. I think I'm referring to the $34 million that you talked about having already spent out of that sort of budget. One of the things, Mr. McClure, that you were very, very clear with all of us about was that if you spent it now, it was going to have an effect on the next election event, whatever that event might be. I'm wondering, then, if those same implications are still in play right now. If we were, for instance, to not award you the full amount that you're asking for today, what are the implications for your office and for the election itself, for the, I guess, actual nature of going into an election event?

Mr. McClure: Yeah. The funding that we received helps fund us in terms of election readiness, and being election ready gives us an efficiency. We're no longer – so we can buy the paper, we can have ballot boxes ready, we can develop the training materials in advance. That gives us an efficiency. If we go to market at a time of dire need, we don't know what we would pay, and we could actually end up paying a lot more or being held hostage if someone knows that we're desperately in need. When we sought the funding, it actually helped keep the costs of this referendum down because we were able to purchase things in advance of the referendum being announced officially and be prepared. It's a state of preparedness, and it helped us get ramped up and move quicker.

That creates efficiency as well so people can then be focused on other activities, and there was a lot of activity. But that funding: you know, the general consensus amongst myself and my leadership team is that by having the funds available for a continuous state of readiness, we are able to find efficiencies, and by finding those efficiencies, we're able to contain the costs of this referendum much below what others had speculated it would be.

4:15

Ms Wright: A quick follow-up, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yeah. Go ahead.

Ms Wright: In terms of implications, though, if you don't receive that full funding request today or at some point, what will that mean for your planning, then? You've talked an awful lot about efficiency, so then what will that mean for perhaps a lack of efficiency?

Mr. McClure: Yeah. It could slow down our planning. It would slow our ability to prepare in advance. We're not able to go to market and restock our warehouse with what we need. We cannot begin training. We cannot begin recruiting.

Ms Wright: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

MLA Shepherd, please go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the breakdown of all the different costs, and it's just sort of interesting looking at: there are different things that are all impacted, I think, by some of the decisions that have been made on the Legislature side. When we're talking about hand counting the ballots, for example, we've got the staff costs for the actual people doing the counting, but my understanding is that then it also ripples into other areas like, for example, with the facilities. With hand counting the ballots, that wasn't necessarily able to be done at the polling locations, so then there are a number of vehicles that had to be rented.

In fact, I had a little memory. It was an interesting thing. I was taking a trip down to Brooks with my colleague. Went to rent a vehicle, and talking with the rental guy, he said: "Yeah. You know what? It's interesting. All these vehicles on the back lot here today are all reserved for Elections Alberta." Their entire stock.

Mr. Kaye: We're sorry about that.

Mr. Shepherd: Yeah. It's okay. I was still able to get a car.

I mean, there's that involved as well, and then all that transport and everything, so significant ripple effect. For the opportunity for us to learn as sort of that this is the first significant province-wide, you know, electoral event we've had under these rules and with hand counting being the norm, by comparison, I guess, how much less of this infrastructure – or how much could we be saving on

this? Do you have a sense of those numbers if we had used vote tabulators in this case versus the hand count?

Mr. Kaye: We went to great lengths to prepare for this, and rental vehicles were certainly one of those things. Not every polling place worker drives an SUV or moving-style van capable of moving 10 or more ballot boxes, so to ensure the delivery and movement of some 80,000 ballot boxes throughout the province, which I might add occurred without event, we had to secure these vehicles. It's not worst case; it's just prudent planning. So yes. We did that.

Yeah. Sorry. The last part of your question again? I got sidetracked.

Mr. Shepherd: Just trying to get a sense of, like – and I recognize you're probably not going to know total numbers off your head – ballpark figure difference sort of in what the cost would have been if we had done this with vote tabulators as opposed to all of this infrastructure for the hand count.

Mr. Kaye: You know, I don't think anyone here at the table has that number. We knew what the rules of engagement were when we were preparing for this event. We knew that tabulation devices were not going to be used, so we never did a workup to determine what, if any, cost differential there might be. It was clear to us how we were going to have to conduct this, and we never did a sort of workback to determine what it might have been using another, alternative method.

Mr. Shepherd: Fair enough.

Let me ask this. My understanding is that before you already had the equipment, tabulators, et cetera, everything from the '23 election, so there would have been no additional cost for that equipment, those things. So what we can say is that there would have been significantly less staffing costs, maybe less transport costs.

Mr. McClure: The tabulators we actually acquired from vendors.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. Those are rentals, so that would have been a cost. Fair enough.

Mr. McClure: Significant cost to actually attach for the tabulators. I just can't tell you what the cost would be today.

Mr. Shepherd: I understand. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

MLA Gray, go ahead.

Ms Gray: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and again, thank you. I find that the responses we're getting are incredibly helpful in trying to understand the challenges and the process. In my last round of questions we were able to confirm that the less time Elections Alberta has with any new electoral maps, the more likely it is to cost more. Obviously, you're not able to do estimates now. That would be something a future committee would need to have.

Referencing back again to the letter that Mr. McClure sent on October 30, it talks about the operational realities of delivering a provincial general election: requires sufficient time be preserved for implementation. And it urges all members to consider the time required for implementation as deliberations concerning electoral boundaries proceed.

I will just note that in the Election Act 4(1), that describes the job of the Chief Electoral Officer, one of the first things you're responsible for is providing guidance to your organization but also back to the Legislature. The correspondence that you sent to us received a response from the Minister of Justice. I'm a sub to the committee today; I'm not normally a member of the Legislative Offices Committee. I would just like to clarify for the record that as an independent officer you and your team report to the Legislature, and the government and, more specifically, the Justice minister cannot direct your work. Is that correct?

Mr. McClure: That is correct. We report to the Legislature and Legislative Offices.

Ms Gray: Yeah. Thank you. I ask that because I found the framing of the Justice minister's letter certainly not the tone I would have expected, and I appreciated that as an independent officer you were taking the time to warn all MLAs of information they needed to be aware of regarding timeliness and now costs as we look at the increased funding for the general election. I appreciate that clarification.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Gray.

MLA Johnson, please go ahead.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to come back to the question I had asked previously just for clarification. I mean, forgive me for going over this if we've already discussed it. From the '25-26 approved budget you spent $34 million on the referendum. You've asked for $49 million for additional – sorry. I'm on the wrong one here. I'm going to come back.

The question about – I apologize – the next general election under the boundaries, and I want clarity on some of the recent comments on these timeline challenges. Do I understand correctly to say that you can and will deliver, but there may be extra costs associated in order to ensure that we have the people and equipment that we need? Is that correct?

Mr. McClure: We can deliver. If we start at the end of the sitting and we have 91, we can deliver. The timing is more constrained. It will bring more effort. More effort comes with cost. We have yet to articulate what that cost would be, but there could be more additional cost.

Mr. Kaye: I think something that is not necessarily tangible and captured in the figures we've presented to you today: we have long said that a reasonable implementation period – and I want to emphasize the word "reasonable" – for a boundary change is 12 to 18 months. The figures that were not captured today in our presentation are the expenditure of human capital that we have just gone through. We talked about the pace we have been operating at. Compressed timelines increase a number of things, but it increases the pressure on our people as well. We can't give you a number of what that looks like because it's just not a tangible thing.

You know, 12 to 18 months is a reasonable implementation period where we can go through all the steps we need to to make sure this is done correctly. If it shortens, we can achieve it. Additional staff to support all the work that goes into doing this is going to be absolutely helpful and probably eliminate some very long shifts for some people again, but based on the timelines that have been described to us in the letter someone referred to, if this occurs by early December, Elections Alberta will deliver.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

MLA Pancholi, I have you next on the list. Go ahead.

4:25

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you. Following up on that, as you said, if the timelines go as planned, that the

legislation is passed and you're able to proceed, does there become a point where – going back to the comment from my colleague MLA Gray, you know, more people can't fix every problem. Even if you had sort of unlimited funds to be able to hire all the people, is there a point after – the current session is expected to end first week of December. At what point or what period of time would it be difficult to hire your way or spend the money needed to be able to implement a 91-seat map or any new boundary map? Would there be a time point where it would be very difficult or impossible for you as Elections Alberta to be able to do that?

Mr. Kaye: That's a tough one to answer because it would depend on staffing, additional staffing. Certainly, based on the process that needs to be implemented, there is a point in time where it can't be achieved. What that point in time is at this moment in front of you I can't tell you. You know, to someone's reference to nine women can't make a baby in a month, there will come a point in time where we simply cannot do this. What that date is I can't tell you. There are a lot of variables that will impact that, but without question there will be a point in time where this becomes impossible.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you.

As a follow-up, as you're saying, you are confident you'd be able to deliver and have an election with a map if it's passed before, you know, the end of this session. That's based on factoring in, as you've said, the status quo or what you've experienced as an organization, the strain, the challenges you've had. Maybe I should ask: like, is that factored into your assessment about your ability to do this? You're asking people to come back to run an election on new maps in the future. As that time shortens, if it does, do you have a harder time recruiting people to be able to come back and do this work, the knowledgeable people, the people that you said it's hard to just replace with somebody else? They have that institutional memory; they understand how these things work. Does it get harder, given how stressful it has been for Elections Alberta in the last year, for you to be able to find those people to be able to do that?

Mr. Kaye: Yes.

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

MLA Dyck, please go ahead.

Mr. Dyck: Awesome. Thanks for the conversation so far and the explanations. I would like a little more clarification on some of my prior questions, and then I also have another question, a follow-up question. From the 2025-2026 approved budget you've spent $34 million on the referendum. You have asked for $49 million for additional referendum costs. Am I to understand that there will be no further requests for additional funding for the referendum because that $84 million will cover the entire cost of the referendum? That's my understanding.

Mr. Kaye: Yes.

Mr. Dyck: Okay. Thank you.

I have another follow-up question just on the steps to get after the boundaries are changed or if the boundaries are changed according to the Legislature. Can you further explain and dive a little bit more in on what those steps are? I'm still not understanding a 12- to 18-month process of change. I would love a little bit more further explanation on what 12 to 18 months looks like.

Mr. Kaye: With the committee's permission I can give you a very comprehensive explanation of that entire process. It's going to take a bit of time. If that's okay, we have the people here in the room today by design that can walk you through the various teams that are involved, the work that they do, and the approximate timelines to get this done.

Mr. Dyck: If you can give me a broad overview, I would like to hear some of that; maybe not an hour's worth. But I do think I would like to hear a little bit more on versus just: hey, there are some GIS maps that we need to change. I would like a little bit of that.

Mr. Kaye: I think it would be informative and educational. I know that when I heard it for the first time . . .

Mr. Dyck: Sorry. Maybe what's easier, actually, not to – maybe we can do a quick overview in the committee, and I would maybe ask for a written response of that. I know it's a little bit more work, but I do think that that written response might be worth while for the committee as well. Can we do a kind of a split on that?

Mr. Kaye: Well, I was going to say: can I meet you in the middle? How about we use the folks we have in the room here to provide the snapshot for you? If at the conclusion of that anyone would like additional information, we are happy to provide that for you. Does that work?

Mr. Dyck: I'm happy with that. Yeah.

Mr. Kaye: Fantastic. I'm going to call up Abdullah from our IT division. He's going to walk you through the initial phase, which is the GIS buildup of an electoral boundary change.

Abdullah, thank you.

Mr. Bin Naeem: Thank you, Steve. Thank you, everyone.

The Chair: Do you mind just quickly introducing yourself for the record?

Mr. Bin Naeem: Absolutely. My name is Abdullah Bin Naeem, and I'm the director of technology platforms and innovation here at Elections Alberta. Like we mentioned at the table here, if by the end of this sitting, for example, everything is all good and we're able to proceed with the 91 boundaries that come into play, we can then kick off a domino process, as we talked about earlier.

What that looks like is that it includes various other teams, not just mine, for example GIS. That seems to be a point of interest here. GIS doesn't own the 12 to 18 months. We're a cog in the wheel of elections operations. If we were to walk through, say, the first week of December, and we said, "Okay. We're all good. We're now going to have to create the EDVA map," is what we call it, the EDs and the VAs all together, that process itself would take anywhere between a month and a half to two months, but we're going to compress it this time around, and that's because we simply don't have the time.

One of the elements that we are going to have to remove, which usually happens in a normal operational period for any election, is something called map review, which my colleague touched on earlier, which is in collaboration with the returning officers across Alberta. That is the local knowledge that we rely on when we are building out the different VAs and assigning them to the populations of that ED. That process itself in a normal timeline takes about three to four months. We're going to have to completely remove that from this chain of process.

That buys us some time to be able to then deliver our work to my colleague's team, which is digital solutions. That's where I think I'll hand off to Steve again, and he can then bring my colleague in to explain.

Mr. Kaye: Sure. Thanks, Abdullah.

The next phase in the process would be Swetha and her team and the work they have to do to get this through the next phase.

Ms Rachel: Thank you, Steve.

As I mentioned before, once we have the electoral division and the voting areas, we need to adapt that information into other applications. Register of elector is an application with the 3.2 million records; 80 per cent of the work can be programmatically done. Again, the 20 per cent remaining needs to be done manually by human intervention. Somebody will have to sit and look at the address and determine on a map if this address is within ED 35 or voting area whatever the number is. That takes significant time; 20 per cent of 3 million is still too large. That takes a very long time to do. It will take months to implement that.

Just to give you context, for the 2023 PGE we started this work in 2021. We drew the map, we got people hired, and they started work. About 40 data entry people were hired to do this work for us. Each municipality is very different. It takes somebody some time to understand the area to even fix these addresses. It takes quite a bit of time. Once that data is all complete, only then can we incorporate these changes into other applications like candidate registration. That needs to be available for the candidate while the PGE is happening. We need to make sure the system is ready for the new candidates to be registered. Then we also need to incorporate the same thing into our election management system, and that's the system where we would be hiring our returning officers and their staff. We also would be selecting voting locations, and all the functionalities for the election happens in that election system.

All this needs to happen sequentially. Each system will take about three months normally. Then that all increases the time to finish, to start the foundational activity for the operations team to start hiring the returning officers in that election management system. The system needs to be ready first. So that is the timeline.

4:35

Mr. Kaye: Perfect. Thank you, Swetha.

Then the final stage in the process is Jen's team, the operations group, and the work they have to do to get things out to people. Jen, you can touch on what that looks like for you and your team.

Ms Maskoske: Sure. Thank you.

What we then would have to take a look at is the returning officers. If EDs have changed – we can't always have the same returning officers, so we'll be recruiting new ones. They then need to find an election clerk. You can only have one returning officer per ED. They then search out for an election clerk. They would need to recruit the rest of their team, which totals about five people in an office. You can imagine that we don't just hire people without doing interviews, assessments. That all adds up with time as that's going through, anticipating, you know, a few months for that.

Then the next phase is that we have to train everyone. Training takes time. We know that new legislation has come out. Voting places on advance votes have to be within 100 kilometres, election day within 50 kilometres. As they've got their EDs and their boundaries have been drawn, they're also now looking at, "Where do these voting places fit, and what are your breakdowns of electors?" so ensuring that your voting areas have the right number of voting places to accommodate the electors that are in that area. They're working on that. Then they also need to now go and recruit all of the staff that are going to work inside of these voting places. Every voting area has upwards of potentially six people at it. So times that by however many voting areas you've got in a voting place, recruitment is going to take some time. Training those folks is separate from the training that we provide to the returning office teams. It's all just snowballing as the timeline is going through.

Mr. Kaye: Yeah. Then there's the equipment preparation, shipping, getting all our offices set up, et cetera, once they've been identified. It is a complex, multifaceted process.

That's the end of our little snapshot. If more information is required or desired, please let us know. I'm sure that within the coming days we can get something put together for the committee.

The Chair: Thank you for that information.

MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I'll put on the record that, yes, I think, at least the MLAs – I can speak for the MLAs here – would appreciate that written overview of what you've just provided a snapshot of. Perhaps it would be tabled with the committee. That would be greatly appreciated.

I just wanted to ask: in all of that process Elections Alberta also is responsible for updating the voters list ahead of a general election, is that correct? Is that also part of the work that is going to be under way? Of course, that's not necessarily – although I guess you'd have to know the boundaries to know which voters would be perhaps in which electoral district, but that's also the ongoing work. Is that sort of part of the process, and when does that begin?

Mr. Kaye: I think Swetha can touch on that for us.

Ms Rachel: Yeah. Thank you. Postreferendum we need to update all that electoral information, and typically it takes about eight months. This time around we increased the number of temporary workers to shorten that. So right now we are in the moment where we will be updating elector data and also updating that same data with the electoral division changes. It's very challenging. It means we have to maintain two different sets of boundaries to ensure we update elector data while we are fixing or updating the new boundaries.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. So that work is part of the work that's going on currently, already as part of the referendum. Is that sort of captured in some of the supplementary funding requests that are before this committee right now? Or is it just part of the ongoing preparation work?

Ms Rachel: Some of it is part of it, but most of it will come through the annual budget.

Ms Pancholi: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

Are there any other members with any questions for Elections Alberta? All right. Seeing none.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you for joining us today and for answering our questions. The committee will make decisions on your request and then follow up with you in writing.

Mr. McClure: Thank you very much.

The Chair: All right. We'll just give folks a couple of minutes to clear out.

All right. We can move on in our agenda. We will now be proceeding to 4(d), which is decisions on the request that we have just received. At this point the committee needs to make decisions on the request for supplemental funding that we reviewed today. We will start with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

First, we have the request for $550,000 in supplementary funding from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Is there any discussion on this request? I see a couple of hands. MLA Gray, please go ahead.

Ms Gray: Apologies, Mr. Chair. This might be out of order; I'm not normally at this committee. This is a very long meeting, and I wondered if my colleagues might be open to a five-minute break before we start deliberations.

The Chair: You guys good with a break?

Sure. We can do a five-minute coffee break.

[The committee adjourned from 4:41 p.m. to 4:47 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. I'm going to bring us back into order.

We are on agenda item 4(d), which is decisions on the request. We'll begin with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. First, we have the request for $550,000 in supplementary funding from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Is there any discussion or motions on this request? MLA Johnson, please go ahead.

Mrs. Johnson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that

> our Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate in full for $550,000 . . .

The Chair: Okay. We're going to pull the wording up just to make sure you've read it fully into the record. Do you want to . . .

Mrs. Johnson:

> . . . for the 2026-27 fiscal year and that the chair on behalf of the committee forward the request to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

The Chair: Okay. We have that fully read onto the record now, so I will ask for any discussion on this motion. MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to say that we stand in support of the motion that has been introduced. The office of the Child and Youth Advocate does incredibly important work, especially as it relates to – they were speaking of the work they do to represent children in care who are in proceedings. I know how important children's voices are in that work, so I can fully say that we support this motion.

The Chair: Are there any other members who are looking to weigh in?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call this question. All those in favour of the motion as moved by MLA Johnson, please say aye. Any opposed? All right.

That motion is carried.

We can move on to the office of the Ethics Commissioner. This request from the office of the Ethics Commissioner: the office has requested $36,342 in supplementary funding. Is there any discussion or motions on this request? I see MLA Sinclair. Please go ahead.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As per our previous discussions I would like to move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request from the office of the Ethics Commissioner, and I'll read the whole thing when it's up there. Good. Thank you. I would like to move that

> the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request from the office of the Ethics Commissioner for supplementary funding in the amount of $36,342 for the 2026-2027 fiscal year and that the chair on behalf of the committee forward that request to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Is there any discussion or comments on the motion as submitted?

I don't see any, so I am prepared to call this vote. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed?

That motion is carried.

Moving us along to Elections Alberta. Next we have the request for $59,552,176.83 in supplementary funding from Elections Alberta. Is there any discussion or motions on this request? MLA Dyck, I see your hand. Please go ahead.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate that. I would like to also move a motion here on this item. I would move that

> the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request from Elections Alberta for supplementary funding in the amount of $59,552,176.83 for the 2026 fiscal year and that the chair on behalf of the committee forward the request to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, MLA Dyck.

Are there any comments or discussion on this?

Ms Rempel: I apologize, Mr. Chair. I did have a typo on the screen. I just want to confirm that it is the 2026-2027 fiscal year. That is on me.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for that. The 2026-2027 fiscal year.

Now that we're clear what we're talking about, MLA Dyck, did you want to speak to your motion?

Mr. Dyck: Yeah. I would love to. Thank you, Chair. This request is supplementary funding, which is reasonable and is largely to cover the costs or all to cover the costs associated with the referendum, so I should say largely associated with the referendum. There's also the second part of this. In the $59 million is $9 million for preparation for the next provincial election, which is a core responsibility of Elections Alberta. I think I would encourage the entire committee to vote yes on this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Dyck.

Are there any other members wishing to join? MLA Shepherd, please go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I speak in favour of the motion, absolutely. I really appreciated the presentation we had from Elections Alberta today. Helpful to get that figure in the record, that we are looking at approximately $84 million for the cost of the referendum, so that's coming out to about 2.3 times the cost of the last election in 2025.

Also, amazing to hear from Elections Alberta, you know, just frankly how heroic an effort this was. They're noting that there were 21 electoral events across Canada since 2025, and here in Alberta we have had 37 electoral events, including this, in which there were more votes cast in the province of Alberta than in the entire last federal election. It's no surprise to hear from Elections Alberta that this pushed their staff to the limit, their office and their resources, that indeed they are working to recover, but at the same time they are stepping up to the task. I do want to just again note for the record

our thanks to the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. McClure, all of his staff for their hard work under some increasingly strong demands.

Let's be clear where these demands are coming from, Mr. Chair. We have seen multiple changes to election law over the last couple of years, which directly led to the results that we have: the Premier and government's decision to lower thresholds for by-elections, for citizens' initiative petitions, and the government's own insistence on putting nine questions on that referendum, so nine-tenths of those costs being directly attributed to a direct decision of the Premier and government. We will leave that to Albertans, I guess, to determine what the return on investment is given the outright rejection of several of the Premier's questions and rather middling results on the rest.

What I will say is that I was very appreciative of Elections Alberta today. They came well prepared, and they have given us a very good sense of the pressures that they face going into the next provincial election under a new set of boundaries, again, by decision of this government on a fairly compressed time frame.

I think it is reasonable that we support the supplemental costs. As one of my colleagues noted, these are costs that are already gone with the small amount that they have sort of estimated for the remaining counters and those that are still working, but these are all amounts that they have expended. I think it's reasonable that we reimburse them as they were acting at the direction and decision of government, so I'm in support of this, Mr. Chair.

4:55

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to this motion?

All right. Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed?

That motion is carried.

With that, I can turn us on to our next agenda item, which is officers of the Legislature. The next items on the agenda include officer contracts and the annual compensation review for the officers of the Legislature. To respect the privacy of the officers, I recommend that the committee along with the appropriate Legislative Assembly Office staff consider moving in camera for this discussion. Is there anyone who would be interested in making that motion? MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk.

All right. Moved by MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices meet in camera to discuss officer contracts and conduct the annual compensation review for the officers of the Legislature, and that required staff from the Legislative Assembly Office remain in attendance. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

[The committee met in camera from 4:56 p.m. to 5:19 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. We are now back on the record. Just a quick reminder to everyone that Legislative Assembly Office staff will now be operating the microphones again, so we can continue on our agenda regarding officer contracts.

As committee members are aware, the term of the current Child and Youth Advocate expires this spring. I would like to open the floor to any discussion or motions on this issue. MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk, please go ahead.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: I would like to make a motion that we recommend Terri Pelton be reappointed as the Child and Youth Advocate for a five-year term.

The Chair: Okay. That's the motion. It's moved by MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk that

> the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices recommend to the Assembly that Terri Pelton be reappointed as Child and Youth Advocate for a five-year term.

Would you like to speak to your motion?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Well, I think her past experience, which is, I think, over 30 years, like, shows that she has, you know, extensive professional experience in the social services sector and experience working with vulnerable children and youth. She's been an advocate since 2022, so she's established herself. She's played an important role in developing the office's investigative and legal representation programs and also has extensive experience in organizational leadership. I think that makes her very qualified.

The Chair: All right. Are there any other members looking to weigh in? MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the member for introducing this motion. I stand in support of this motion. I had the privilege of getting an opportunity to see the work that Ms Pelton has done even before she was first appointed as Child and Youth Advocate as I was the critic for children's services for four years as an MLA and certainly know that her history not only in her time as the Child and Youth Advocate but working in that office has been a long time fierce advocate for children and youth. I think the stability and consistency in that office as they continue to grow and serve more children is deeply important. We stand in support of this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other members looking to join in? All right.

With that, I can call the vote. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed?

That motion is carried.

All right. Continuing on our agenda, discussion of annual compensation review. I will open the floor for discussion or motions regarding the annual compensation review for the officers of the Legislature. Does anyone have any discussion or motions to put forward? MLA Sinclair, please go ahead.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move forward that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve a compensation adjustment for the officers of the Legislature – do you want me to read what's on the screen?

The Chair: Yeah. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Sinclair: I hereby move that

> the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve a compensation adjustment for the officers of the Legislature that is equal to any general increase or other salary modifier provided to senior officials in the Alberta public service during the 12-month period commencing November 18, 2026.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, MLA Sinclair.

Is there any discussion on this motion? All right.

Seeing none, I'll call the question. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? All right.

That motion is carried.

That concludes business under agenda item 5.

I can move us along to agenda item 6, which is other business. I have an item for that on the report on the audit results for the office of the Auditor General. As committee members are aware, this committee is responsible for arranging for the annual audit of the office of the Auditor General. We have an agreement in place with the firm of St. Arnaud Pinsent Steman to conduct this work for us through 2027. As

part of the annual audit process on June 26 I as the chairman of the audit team, the Auditor General, and senior staff from his office – at that time the ’25-26 audit was completed with no issues identified. The Auditor General will include the final audit documents in his office’s annual report. As always, committee members will have the opportunity to raise any questions they have at the upcoming budget meeting.

With that, are there any other items for discussion under other business? I see none.

Next meeting date will be at the discretion of the chair.

With that, we can move to adjournment. Would a member move to adjourn? MLA Dyck has moved that the November 5, 2026, meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be adjourned. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

[The committee adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]

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