



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Children and Family Services

Tuesday, October 29, 2024
8 a.m.

Transcript No. 31-1-12

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Joni Brodziak, Assistant Deputy Minister, Youth and Preventive Services

Cynthia Dunnigan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Indigenous Partnerships and Strategic Services

Lisa Sadownik, Deputy Minister

David Wheeler, Assistant Deputy Minister, Child Intervention Delivery

8 a.m.

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

[Mr. Sabir in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Irfan Sabir, MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and chair of the committee. As we begin this morning, I would like to invite members, guests, and LAO staff at the table to introduce themselves.

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

Ms de Jonge: Chantelle de Jonge, MLA for Chestermere-Strathmore.

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

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

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

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. MLA Jackie Lovely from the Camrose constituency.

Ms Brodziak: Good morning. Joni Brodziak, assistant deputy minister of youth and preventive services for Children and Family Services.

Mr. Wheeler: Good morning. Dave Wheeler, assistant deputy minister of child intervention delivery.

Ms Sadownik: Good morning, everyone. I'm Lisa Sadownik, Deputy Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Baptista: Good morning. Darren Baptista, senior financial officer for Children and Family Services.

Ms Dunnigan: Good morning. Cynthia Dunnigan, assistant deputy minister of Indigenous partnerships and strategic services.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning. Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

Ms Hayes: Good morning. Patty Hayes, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Schmidt: Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Ellingson: Court Ellingson, Calgary-Foothills.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

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

Mr. Huffman: Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: We don't have anyone joining online, but I would note for the record the following substitution: Member Ellingson for Member Sharif Haji.

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

devices to silent for the duration of the meeting. Comments and discussion should flow through the chair at all times.

Moving on, approval of agenda. Members, are there any changes or additions to the agenda? Member Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to advise the committee that I intend to bring forward a motion on the schedule of the committee under other business this morning.

The Chair: Okay. Anyone willing to move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the proposed agenda as distributed for its meeting held on Tuesday, October 29, 2024? Any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried.

We have minutes from the Tuesday, May 28, 2024, meeting of the committee. Do members have any errors or omissions to note?

Seeing none, can somebody move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on Tuesday, May 28, 2024?

Mr. Schmidt: So moved.

The Chair: Moved by Member Marlin Schmidt. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried.

Now I would like to welcome our guests from the Ministry of Children and Family Services, who are here to address the ministry's annual report 2023-24 and the Auditor General's outstanding recommendations. I invite officials from the ministry to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes.

Deputy Minister.

Ms Sadownik: Thank you, Mr. Chair for the introduction and to committee members for having us here today. I'm pleased to be here to reflect on the 2023-24 Children and Family Services annual report. You've already met the assistant deputy ministers at the table with me. Attending from the gallery is also Brian Makowecki, ADM for regulatory compliance, quality assurance and business supports. For this reporting period Children and Family Services has continued its critical work keeping children and youth safe, removing barriers to adoption, enhancing supports through caregivers, and further funding women's shelters and sexual assault centres.

This morning I will speak to some of the key accomplishments my department made in 2023-24. Preserving the safety, well-being, and cultural and family connections of vulnerable young Albertans is the ministry's top priority. We work with families whenever we can to keep children safe in their homes. Unfortunately, that is not always possible. In those situations, the ministry first looks to family-based placements, like kinship care with extended family, or to foster care. In 2023-24 we had more than 2,300 kinship care providers and more than 1,500 foster care providers. Foster caregivers are vital to the child intervention system as they provide a family-based home for children who need safety and stability when kinship options do not exist.

Recognizing the need for more foster caregivers, the ministry invested in recruitment and retention. This included Just Like You, a province-wide provincial campaign, a caregiver referral program enabling caregivers to support young adults transitioning out of care and funding counselling services for caregivers.

Now I want to speak to Indigenous children in the child intervention system. On average each month 6,530 Indigenous children receive child intervention services. That is why the ministry partners with Indigenous communities in the spirit of reconciliation, collaboration, and ensuring the safety and well-

being of Indigenous children. Families receive child intervention services regionally from the ministry or through one of 20 delegated First Nation agencies across Alberta. The ministry remains committed to addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth and continues to recruit, train, and support kinship caregivers so children are better connected to their culture. All children in care are supported to maintain relationships and cultural ties such as by making sure all have a cultural plan.

We've continued with several First Nations in Alberta or their designated Indigenous governing body, or IGB, to exercise their legislative authority over Children and Family Services under the federal Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families. The ministry's role is to support IGBs' readiness to assume authority in transition planning. In 2023-24 we collaborated with IGBs by sharing information and historic case file data, entering into trilateral co-ordination agreement discussions, and collaborating on bilateral transition plans that allow for joint case file planning. The ministry also signed a bilateral information sharing agreement with KTC Child and Family Services to support the founding First Nations in implementing their IGB law. Since 2020-21 the ministry has transferred 226 First Nations children, youth, and young adults to four IGBs. This work is just beginning, and the ministry remains committed to this First Nations-led process.

Temporary homes are essential, but legal permanency through adoption or private guardianship provides meaningful and real stability to children and youth. We support families on their adoption journeys. For the first time we held a province-wide staff event on the importance of permanency for children in care across all service delivery regions. The government also introduced a one-time subsidy of \$6,000 to help cover private adoption costs through a licensed agency by up to 50 per cent. As well, a new tax credit helped cover domestic or international adoption costs.

The ministry also made critical investments in the safety, well-being, and future of vulnerable youth and young adults. We invested more than \$38 million in the transition to adulthood program, or TAP, which helped 2,009 young adults work towards transitioning out of care. TAP provides opportunities to find mentors, employment, and education and build life skills and cultural connections. Advancing futures, offered through the TAP education pathway, helps young adults formerly in care pursue a postsecondary education. In 2023-24 nearly 990 young adults received \$14 million to support their studies, and I am pleased to report 885 participants completed their studies.

Ensuring a robust workforce in child intervention has been a challenge for us as well as provincial colleagues around the country. We continue to pursue strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of child intervention practitioners, whose work is critical to keeping vulnerable children and youth safe. Our strategies include expediting and streamlining interview processes, adding recruitment staff, offering flexible work options, and enhancing mentorship and mental health supports for new and existing staff.

8:10

Specifically in the reporting period, the ministry launched an education grant and introduced a psychological safety program to ensure staff professional growth and well-being. I am pleased to share that in the reporting period we had a net gain of 68 child intervention practitioners in 2023-24 and continue to see positive gains in the coming year.

An important strategy in keeping children and youth safe is our prevention and early intervention services and programs. These programs strengthen families and reduce the need for more intensive services. In 2023-24 government invested \$68.2 million

into 70 family resource networks, 18 of which serve cultural and linguistic groups such as Indigenous, francophone, and newcomer communities. Through these networks, families can access supports from playgroups and parent education to home visitation and intensive services for families with complex needs. More than 51,000 caregivers and 77,000 children access the networks, an increase from the previous year of about 50,000 people with about 17 per cent identifying as Indigenous.

Additional prevention initiatives supported by CFS are a \$9.4 million annual investment in family violence prevention to promote healthy relationships and support those who experience violence and an investment of \$1.8 million in 12 community organizations through the youth suicide prevention grant, supporting front-line service delivery, training, awareness, and research.

While prevention is the preferred way to mitigate issues families face, sometimes crises occur in families that require unique services. Children and Family Services supports several crisis services, including women's shelters, sexual assault centres, youth emergency shelters, and child and youth advocacy centres.

A critical change last year was the transfer of responsibility for the prevention of family violence and sexual violence to the ministry. This shift has provided us the opportunity to strengthen connections to our other prevention programs like family resource networks. We also know that one of the factors contributing to the need for child intervention involvement is exposure to domestic violence. Having programs together in one ministry enables us to ensure we use a consistent approach to supporting families. Over time we expect this transfer to help support healthy families and reduce the need for more intrusive types of supports required when a family is in crisis.

I want to focus on two mandate items respecting crisis services, women's shelters and sexual assault centres. In 2023-24 we invested \$59 million in programming and operations for 31 women's emergency and 17 second-stage shelters, five fee-for-service shelters in First Nations, and support to the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. More than 4,700 adults and 3,900 children accessed women's emergency and second-stage services. Women's shelters also served almost 5,800 women and children through outreach.

The government's mandate commitment is to increase funding by \$10 million over four years. In February the minister held a round-table to gather input on how to invest in the long term. The first \$5 million rolled out in March, funding more than 100 beds in existing innovative programming dedicated to survivors of sexual violence. The ministry also provided \$13.8 million to 15 sexual assault centres and their umbrella organization. In 2023-24 more than 8,200 clients accessed services like crisis aid, counselling, police and court support, and outreach. As with women's shelters, the ministry is committed to increasing sexual assault centre funding by \$10 million over four years. This work started in '24-25.

Those were some of the key accomplishments made by Children and Family Services. Before I conclude, I want to acknowledge the people we get to work with. The staff of Children and Family Services and our community partners continue to serve children and families every day, especially those who are struggling to maintain healthy relationships. I wish to thank them for their tireless work to support Alberta families when they need them most. Their dedication is essential to maintaining healthy and safe children, youth, and families.

Thank you, and I look forward to the committee's questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now turn things over to the Auditor General for his comments. Mr. Wylie, you have five minutes.

Mr. Wylie: Thank you, Chair. I'll just briefly remind the committee of the four outstanding recommendations we have to the ministry. One was originally made in October of 2014, and that recommendation was repeated in November of 2020. It related to the issue of removing access of individuals within the department. We recommended that the department improve access-control processes for all of its information systems to ensure that users' access to the application and the systems is appropriately authorized and disabled promptly when employees leave their employment or move roles within the department.

As the committee would be aware, system-access controls are the cornerstone of data security. They ensure that not only authorized employees have access to systems. We repeated this recommendation in 2020, and we're going to be reporting the status of our recommendations soon. The department has indicated that they have implemented this recommendation, and we've completed our work. So we'll be publicly reporting the results of that in the very near future.

The remaining three recommendations stem from our July 2016 report, and that was an audit, a very comprehensive audit on the systems to deliver child and family services to Indigenous children in the province. Again, the department has indicated that the recommendations have been implemented, and we are currently in the process of following those recommendations up. In that audit we recommended that the department enhance its processes so that they include the needs of Indigenous children and families in the design and delivery of its early support services and report to the public regularly on the effectiveness of those early support services to Indigenous children. We also recommended that the department ensure that care plans for each of the Indigenous children that require intervention services are adhered to and meet the standards of care that the department sets for all children in Alberta and that they analyze the results of those services to Indigenous children and report to the public regularly on the progress in achieving the planned results. Finally, we recommended that the department continues to enhance the staff training of the history and culture of Indigenous peoples as well as its training of intercultural understanding.

I would just highlight, as the deputy indicated, that provision of services to Indigenous children within the province is substantial. At the time we did the audit, about 10,000 was the average caseload. That was the monthly caseload at that time, and by far the majority of those children were Indigenous children.

Just to bring some context, maybe, to our recommendations: some of the findings. In the area of early supports we found that there was a lack of clear co-ordination and processes regarding the provision, access, and delivery and funding of early support services for Indigenous children and families. The department did not have a system to identify the needs for early supports or align services with those needs. It also had limited public reporting on the results of its early support services. Just like in health care, early support services to children are extremely important. I'll just highlight that the notion of this child-centred focus is also very important, just as it is in health care. You need to have a patient focus. The child focus was very important, was a key part of our work.

The other area dealing with compliance with standards. We found that compliance results for Indigenous children receiving services were less favourable than for non-Indigenous children. For example, Indigenous children in Alberta receiving services from regional offices experienced less frequent caseworker contact and

less frequent review of their care plans than non-Indigenous children. Also, the results analysis and reporting specific to Indigenous children receiving services was limited.

And how is my time? I've got 27 seconds.

Just to again drill down just a little bit more. Some of the findings – and they're identified on page 18 of our report – were that Indigenous children were on average

- more than twice as likely not to have had their permanency plan followed up every three months
- nearly one-and-a-half times as likely not to have face-to-face contact with their caseworker every three months
- and more than one-and-a-half times as likely to have gaps of seven months or more between face-to-face contact with their caseworker.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wylie.

We will now proceed to the question from committee members, and we will begin with the Official Opposition. You have 15 minutes.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My first set of questions are related to the E coli outbreaks at daycares in Alberta. I don't have a reference to an annual report because neither of the annual reports for Children and Family Services nor Jobs, Economy and Trade discuss the incidents at all. However, we know that in August and September of 2023 448 cases of E coli infections were reported related to a number of daycares in Calgary and that Children and Family Services was responsible for overseeing the regulation of daycares at the time

8:20

Now, the review panel that investigated this or that looked at this issue reported, on page 16, "38 children and one adult were hospitalized" and that some children will have persistent health issues that will require indefinite care. I'm referring to outcome 2, the department's mandate to make sure that children and youth are protected. Can the department give us an update on the health of the children who were hospitalized and tell us what their health issues are and whether or not they'll be expected to fully recover?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question, Member. As you mentioned, responsibilities for child care transferred from Children and Family Services to Jobs, Economy and Trade in February of 2024. We have not reported on any child care-related outcomes or activities in our annual report, which we're here to talk about today. I would recommend that any questions around that incident be raised with Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Schmidt: Can the deputy minister confirm that she's been the deputy minister since June of 2023? Can she confirm that?

Ms Sadownik: I was the deputy minister. Yes.

Mr. Schmidt: So you were ultimately responsible for the regulation of children's daycares when this incident occurred. Is that correct?

Ms Sadownik: That's correct.

Mr. Schmidt: So why can't you answer questions about this at the committee?

Ms Sadownik: I appreciate the question. If I can answer. Our invitation here today was to speak to the 2023-24 Children and Family Services annual report.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Annual report. Neither your ministry's report nor JET's report make any mention of this incident at all. It is shameful that you are not prepared to answer questions for an issue that you oversaw, that you were responsible for when this happened.

Ms de Jonge: Point of order under 23(i). The member opposite is falsely implying that the deputy minister has an ulterior motive, using remarks like "shameful." That's unnecessary. The deputy minister is here, like she said, upon invitation to speak to the annual report.

This is also a point of order under 23(b). The member should be asking a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or that the individual deputy minister addressed and should be in line with what's in the annual report.

The Chair: Well, a couple of things . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know my position. The deputy minister said that she was responsible for overseeing daycares at the time that this incident occurred. The fact that it was not in their annual report doesn't mean that we can't ask questions about it. This committee has the purview of all government activity in the fiscal year under review. It seems to me a little bit convenient that the department omitted the most significant incident that they had in this fiscal year, and it certainly appears to me like they are avoiding accountability on this issue.

The Chair: There are a couple of things. To your first point: the discussion at all times should flow through the chair. Second thing. With respect to the scope of the question, not just the annual report, I think that the reporting year is what's under discussion, as the deputy talked about the activities, the accomplishments of the department within that reporting year. That was all in scope, and the report itself is just a snapshot of what happened. Any questions relating to 2023-24 – that is the year under consideration – with respect to the ministry is within the scope along with the Auditor General's recommendation.

The second thing is that the timeline of the incident is August to September 2023, and that timeline is covered by this reporting here.

The third thing is that, as the deputy has indicated, now that file is being moved to a different ministry. As the member pointed out – and I have checked as well – that report also doesn't mention anything about this significant incident that impacted many individuals, many children in this province.

I find it difficult because next year when that other ministry will report, they will not have to include this because they will be reporting on the year under discussion, 2024-2025. It looks like that by moving this file to a different ministry, nobody seems to kind of answer or want to be accountable for this question, and I do not believe that government shifts responsibility to skirt accountability. There could be many reasons that government changes responsibility, designates one ministry another responsibility, but that doesn't mean that they are doing it just to avoid the responsibility.

The ministry was provided notice that these were the questions that came up in premeeting and they will be asked about these questions. As such, I find that this question is within the scope. At that time the department was responsible. They were on notice that these questions will be asked, so they should try their best to answer

these questions, and if they can't, they should take it under advisement and provide written answers to this committee.

Thank you.

Ms de Jonge: Mr. Chair, may I? I'd also like to now call the point of order 23(i) again. In the member's rebuttal he implied that . . .

Mr. Schmidt: You can't call a point of order on a point of order.

Ms de Jonge: Can I, Chair?

The Chair: You can finish.

Ms de Jonge: . . . this was, you know, skirting accountability. I don't call point of orders lightly. It's the first time I've raised this in committee as an individual member, and I think we should keep the tone respectful. I've heard your ruling on the second point of order, but to the first point of order that I called, 23(i), in rebuttal to the point I raised, the member again made that same implication that government and the deputy were skirting accountability. That's clearly not appropriate.

The Chair: I think I addressed that. You don't raise a point of order on a point of order.

I think that if you want to respond you can, but I can deal with this. As I said, discussion at all times should flow through the chair and we should keep our comments respectful.

With that, I guess, to Member Marlin Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can officials tell the committee how many victims of this outbreak have persistent health issues, the nature of those health issues, and whether they'll be expected to fully recover?

Ms Sadownik: As I mentioned, any matters relating to child care, including the E coli outbreak, have not been included in the Children and Family Services annual reporting. Those responsibilities along with the subject matter, experts' understanding of the outcomes as of the end of fiscal year '23-24 would be with Jobs, Economy and Trade. I would recommend raising those questions with that ministry when they come to committee.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. How many parents were made aware that the kitchen responsible in this incident was repeatedly violating the health code? What did Children and Family Services do to make parents aware that this kitchen that was serving their children food had repeatedly violated the health code?

Ms Sadownik: As I've mentioned, any information related to child care, including the E coli outbreak and responses to these questions: I do not have that information. It was not part of scope of work for this ministry as of the end of '23-24.

Mr. Schmidt: Right. But as we established, when the incident happened, it was your ministry, so it is shocking to me, again, that the department is unprepared to answer these questions. Now, AHS public health inspections found that the kitchen that prepared these foods were – okay. Were children's services inspectors aware of the issues with the kitchen in 2023-24?

Ms Sadownik: I'll repeat: I do not have any information to present today about child care as that is no longer within the scope of my ministry nor was it by the end of 2023-24. There was an investigation. There was work done. It was no longer in the Ministry of Children and Family Services. I would recommend

raising those questions and seeking those answers with Jobs, Economy, and Trade.

8:30

Mr. Schmidt: The panel report identifies that this was not the first case of an E coli outbreak in a child care setting. Page 64 of the panel's report indicates that nine children were infected in 2022 in a daycare. I will note that Children and Family Services was responsible for regulating daycare for the entirety of fiscal 2022-23. The footnote to the statement in that report says that information was provided to the panel by Alberta Health Services. Can the department tell the committee: what work did children's services do to review that incident in 2022?

Mr. Lundy: Point of order, Chair. Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is a point of order under 23(b); 2022 is outside of the scope of what is under consideration today. I would also like to call a point of order under 23(c). While we certainly are aware of the member's position on this issue, it does not change that this is in fact a needless repetition of the same question to a ministry official who has already answered it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. All we have in the panel report is an incident that occurred in 2022. We don't have any dates. We know that with the incident in 2023 the investigation proceeded through the fiscal year 2023-24 and '24-25. So it's highly likely that if the information were made available from Children and Family Services, this investigation could have concluded within 2023-24. We don't know because there's no information in the annual report. There's no information in the panel report. I can't find any information on the Alberta Health Services website about this incident. Government has provided absolutely no information at all about the timeline or the nature of this incident. So I'm asking the department to be forthcoming with information about what happened in 2022 with an E coli outbreak that infected nine children under their watch and tell us what happened.

Now, on the member's 23(c), repeating questions, we've had this point of order repeatedly at this committee. The chair has repeatedly ruled that our time is our time to use as we see fit to ask the questions that we want answers to.

I'm sorry that the government is uncomfortable with these questions around E coli. I was kind of hoping that they would also be seeking some clarity and accountability because they're the ones ultimately responsible for the infection of 450 students.

These are not points of order.

The Chair: Thank you, Member. As I said, anything that the ministry was responsible for in the reporting year, any activity, any incident that happened then is within the scope. Second thing, with respect to repetition, the member has only asked a few questions. Public service can choose to answer as they see fit. But these questions, I have already ruled that they are within the scope, and the ministry was informed that these questions will be asked by the members.

Member Schmidt can proceed.

Mr. Rowswell: Point of order. Under Standing Order 65(2)(b) I ask the committee whether they sustain the ruling of the chair. This is a nondebatable motion. The ministry officials have clarified several times that the reporting of child care was transferred to Jobs, Economy, and Trade before the end of the fiscal year, and this line of questioning could be posed to that ministry. We had agreed to bring JET to present in Public Accounts in the spring, which is reflected on the calendar that the committee agreed to. Despite this

being made clear to the members opposite, that their line of question is not within the scope of CFS and would be better directed to JET, they continue to follow this line of question.

The Chair: Well, we will take a five-minute recess while we consult on this.

[The committee adjourned from 8:37 a.m. to 8:41 a.m.]

The Chair: We will reconvene.

Member Rowswell has moved a motion under 65(2)(b), which states "the Chair shall maintain order in standing and special committees and shall decide all questions of order subject to an appeal to the committee." Basically, it is a challenge to the ruling I made earlier, and the only question I will ask is that that ruling be sustained. The question I will ask: all in favour of that ruling being sustained? And all opposed? Okay. I think that ruling is overturned, and we will move on. I think going forward those questions will not be in scope.

Member Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. I'm moving on now to child intervention, to prevent abuse to children, specifically those children with trans orientation. On January 31, 2024, the Premier took to YouTube to announce the government's transgender children policies. In that video she stated that in the handful of rare situations where one or both parents reject or become abusive to a child who identifies as transgender, we have child protection laws that will be strictly enforced. On page 15 of the annual report it states that over 3,000 children and youth had a child intervention file open because their safety, security, or development was at risk. How many of those files were opened for a child who is at risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question, Member. We do not have at this time data in regard to specific nature of the cause of intervention beyond abuse and neglect in meeting the criteria of the CYFEA. What we have done to improve our data is a voluntary survey, where we are looking to collect greater data around the nature of the children and youth who come into the intervention system. So we should have greater data to that effect in the future. However, at this time for '23-24 I'm not able to provide that answer.

What I can reassure you is that through the full spectrum and continuum of services we provide, from prevention, early intervention, through our family resource networks into the child intervention system, we are open to all circumstances and to supporting regardless of the needs of the children and family, with the goal, ideally, of keeping families united and not having to intervene. That's regardless of the reason for a referral to us.

Mr. Schmidt: Right. So when the Premier says that child protection laws will be strictly enforced in the cases of sexual orientation abuse, it's impossible for the department to actually follow up on the on the Premier's commitments.

I want to go on to my next question. Child intervention caseloads is discussed on page 15 of the annual report. How many child intervention practitioners had over the benchmark of 13 cases in the fiscal year?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. I'm just going to check with the team if we have those specific numbers. What I can tell you about the workload assessment model is that as of September 2023 the model was that 11 to 13 cases was the appropriate load, which was a reduction from prior year, 12 to 18.

We do not have averages that we can report to you. We do assess it by region. It is a constantly changing number given the amount of in and out of cases. It also factors in the complexity of caseload. What we do is track it on an ongoing basis. Staff who have concerns or feel that their caseload may exceed the measures have the opportunity to appeal. Then we will look into it and redistribute the workload as needed.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, I don't know. Pick a time frame that you have a number for. How many child intervention practitioners had over the benchmark of 13 cases, let's say, at the end of fiscal 2023-24?

Ms Sadownik: I do not have that number for you here today.

Mr. Schmidt: How many staff appealed their caseload in the '23-24 fiscal year?

Ms Sadownik: I don't have that number with me, but we can get you that number.

Mr. Schmidt: Can the deputy minister commit to providing a follow-up answer in writing to the committee?

Ms Sadownik: Yes.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you.

On page 15 of the annual report it states that "9,162 children and youth received child intervention services." CBC reported in mid-February of 2024 that there were 561 counts of overdue face-to-face contact by Children and Family Services workers with children across all provincial zones. What's the total number of overdue face-to-face contact with children across all provincial zones for the '23-24 fiscal year?

Ms Sadownik: Thanks for the question. I'm just going to find some information about the reporting system. We do have a couple of tracking systems I'll talk about. One is an early intervention tracker that identifies certain criteria that would indicate higher risk and the need to increase our involvement or oversight in certain cases. We also – and I think this is the data you're talking about – have a service delivery accountability standard where we track for all of our offices, whether they are regional offices being delivered by Children and Family Services or delegated First Nations, certain criteria or performance metrics and how we are doing in that regard.

Certainly, we do look at things like: do we have a recorded legal authority? Do we have a recorded service plan? Are the service plans appropriate and recorded face to face? Over the year '23-24 across the province the recorded face-to-face metric was at 90 per cent.

Mr. Schmidt: Again, my question was about overdue face-to-face contact. How many, like, in absolute numbers? How many overdue face-to-face contacts were there in fiscal '23-24?

Ms Sadownik: I don't have that specific data. I have the percentage that I've provided to you.

Mr. Schmidt: Does the department actually track that? Can you commit to responding to that question in writing to the committee?

Ms Sadownik: It's point-in-time data, so we would be able to provide it as of a point in time. End of March 2024?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. That would be fine.

What's the average amount of time that it took for a child to have an assessment meeting with a child intervention practitioner in '23-24?

8:50

Ms Sadownik: In the fiscal year '23-24 we did a significant number of assessments. We had 23,325 referrals moved to initial assessment, and that includes having about just under 2,000 intakes a year and a total of 3,381 opening to assessment. The amount of time it takes for each of those can be very unique, depending on the circumstances. We've also . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. That's why I'm asking for an average. What is the average amount of time to have an assessment . . .

Ms Sadownik: I'm just giving you a bit of context about the difficulty in . . .

Mr. Schmidt: I don't want the context. Thank you, Deputy Minister. I want the average amount of time.

Ms Sadownik: We can see if there's appropriate information to share part of the context. What I was sharing with you is: as we've made that system more robust . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Can the deputy – I'm sorry, Deputy.

Ms Lovely: Point of order. Mr. Chair, I want to call a point of order under 23(j). The member opposite's treatment of the ministry official is becoming increasingly insulting and abusive, in my humble opinion. He's starting to raise his voice. He's getting visibly agitated. I don't find that this lends itself well to a good discussion today in PAC. We're here to ask questions of the ministry officials, and I believe that needs to be done in a respectful tone, and we certainly are starting to veer away from that today.

During my time sitting in the House, you know, with this member, I opposed him in a discussion, and he came chasing after me in the lounge, and I wonder, for the safety of these ladies here: is he going to come chasing after them as well? Is that what's going to be next?

Mr. Schmidt: The member is lucky that she is protected by parliamentary privilege here in this committee.

Ms Lovely: Excuse me? Am I being threatened?

Mr. Schmidt: I'm arguing the point of order. Thank you very much. This is not a point of order. I'm just asking the deputy minister to provide a succinct answer to the question.

The Chair: Well, we should try to keep conversations respectful, but I think, Member, you went too far in your point of order as well.

I do not find it a point of order, and I think I would suggest that conversations be directed through the chair and try to make the best use of this time.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So again to the deputy minister: what was the average amount of time that it took for a child to have an assessment meeting with a child intervention practitioner?

Ms Sadownik: I appreciate that you are looking for a very black-and-white answer, but I'm going to continue to answer in the way that is appropriate for this matter in that every case looks a bit different, and we have increased the rigour around intake to ensure we have all of the needed conversations, collected all the appropriate information because taking a child into care is not a small decision. It can take a greater amount of time if necessary given that our goals, ideally, are to keep a family unified and offer the supports they need to stay at home. So the timing really differs,

depending on circumstances. It's always in the best interest of the child, what will keep them safe, and we do not have a set time frame. We do what we need to do to get the best outcome for the child.

Mr. Schmidt: Page 47 of the annual report indicates that child intervention services were underspent by almost \$30 million. Now, the deputy minister indicated that they had net 68 increased staff. What were the total number of vacancies at the end of '23-24 in that area of the department?

Ms Sadownik: Your assertion that we had a surplus is correct, and a great deal of that had to do with unfilled vacancies. I'm going to get the team to double-check this, but my understanding is that we had about a 12.5 per cent vacancy in child intervention practitioners over '23-24.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will proceed to the questions from the government committee members.

Ms Lovely: I'm aware that the prevention of family violence portfolio was transferred to CFS last year. Looking at page 36, I'd like to take a bit of a deeper look at the women's emergency shelter program. I note that the government committed to increase women's emergency shelter funding by \$10 million over four years; \$5 million of that funding was distributed in '23-24 with the remainder to be disbursed by '26-27. Regarding the \$5 million that has already been distributed, can the ministry please outline and provide more details on where that funding was directed and the outcomes that funding was targeted at achieving, and can you please further explain how the ministry is meeting its mandate commitments to women's shelters in '23-24?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. To meet the year 1 mandate commitment, an increase of \$5 million was provided in 2023-24. The additional \$5 million was provided for \$3.9 million as one-time funding to support previously unfunded beds, \$1.1 million to partially address new capacity. The \$5 million was distributed to women's shelters in 17 communities across the province to increase access of over 100 beds per unit at shelters, including doubling the number of beds available in Whitecourt and adding new beds at the Banff YWCA and Eileen's Place, a second-stage shelter in Morinville.

Many of these shelters were in rural areas with high utilization rates. The funding supported innovative programs to help meet high demand in rural areas. Solutions to enhance supports for rural shelters include \$350,000 for Rowan House Society's new, first-of-its-kind program in High River, which empowers women to have agency over their choices while experiencing domestic violence; \$275,000 for Big Hill Haven in Cochrane, which has no physical shelter and rents units so those fleeing abuse have somewhere local to stay.

Ms Lovely: Thank you.

Looking at page 39, I note that the "government increased funding for sexual assault centres by \$10 million. In early 2024, the ministry, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services and sector stakeholders began working to determine how these investments will be made." Can the ministry expand on the framework for making decisions to determine how the investments would be made?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. The department is working with our 15 funded sexual assault centres and the

Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, or AASAS, to inform implementation of the mandate commitment. On May 30, 2024, the minister hosted a round-table with the centres and association to solicit input on the mandate commitment and began discussions about a future vision for sexual assault services in Alberta. The May 2024 round-table event was just the start of this work, and feedback from the round-table will inform the initial implementation of the mandate commitment, including supporting stabilization of the sector in the face of rising operational costs to deliver services.

Ms Lovely: Okay. Well, thank you.

With that, I'd like to cede my time to Member Armstrong-Homeniuk.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you. Chair, through you to the deputy minister, first of all, I want to thank you all for doing such a fantastic job. I know that your ministry is very busy and there are lots of components to it, and I just want to commend you for all the hard work you do.

Looking at the women's shelters a little more, on page 37 I see that the average length of stay for women admitted to shelters has increased. Over a quarter of women spent more than 21 nights, with the percentage of women spending two months or more at an emergency shelter rising to 4 per cent in 2023-2024, and that's up from 1.6 per cent in 2022-2023. I also see that 50 per cent of women spent nine months or more at a second-stage shelter in 2023-2024, which is an increase from 41 per cent in 2022-2023. Can the ministry expand on the factors that the ministry has identified as influencing the trend of longer stays in shelters?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. Shelters are indicating that challenges in accessing affordable and safe housing are a major barrier to clients' ability to re-establish themselves in the community. Longer stays are being attributed to clients facing difficulty in securing available and affordable housing options once they leave the shelter, so that is resulting in longer stays in those second-stage shelters.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

I'm also wondering if you could comment a bit more on the second-stage shelter and what it is, and what are the differences?

Ms Sadownik: Women's emergency shelters offer short-term safe and supportive accommodation to individuals and their children fleeing abuse or experiencing crisis. Those initial shelters offer stays of up to 21 days with an option of extension. So there are some who stay longer than the 21 days, depending on the circumstances.

9:00

Second-stage shelters, however, are intended to provide longer-term stability that allows adults and their children to rebuild their lives. So many will stay in an emergency shelter and then move over into a second-stage shelter before they can find a permanent home. Often clients require additional, longer-term supports to obtain and maintain stability in their lives. Second-stage shelters provide secure housing and support programming for six months to two years, so the additional wraparound services that they get there are supportive of moving into permanent housing as well. Second-stage shelters can bridge the transition between an emergency shelter and a woman living independently.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you. Also, Chair, through you to the deputy minister, on page 35 of the report, I note that a key priority for the ministry is ensuring youth have access to the

supports they need to thrive and reach their fullest potential. To that end, in 2023-2024, Children and Family Services provided \$1.3 million to community organizations for a range of mentoring supports. Can the ministry expand on the importance of mentoring as it relates to ensuring youth in Alberta reach their fullest potential, and what type of mentorship supports have received funding?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. Mentoring is a topic that's very important to us and we see a lot of benefit from, particularly for youth. It's an opportunity for youth to build protective factors through a relationship with a positive role model and, for many of them, that's the most critical thing they can have at that point in their life.

A mentor is intended to be an adult who is consistently and personally invested in a youth's development and offers guidance by helping youths navigate any challenges they encounter in their life. Mentoring supports can be tailored to meet the unique needs of Alberta's youth population. A consistent mentor relationship can make a significant difference in a young person's life as these relationships can help youth develop confidence, self-esteem, practical life skills, and social skills. Further, mentoring can also support young people to learn practical job skills that meet the demand of the labour market and help them succeed.

Funding has been provided to agencies for one-to-one and group mentoring. At-risk populations served include: Indigenous youth, youth transitioning out of government care, and 2SLGBTQIA-plus youth.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you. Chair, again through you to the deputy minister, can you provide more details on how these community organizations are selected to receive funding?

Ms Sadownik: At the time that the funding was introduced, grant applications are assessed by a selection committee based on how a program through the work of a mentor would achieve meaningful and measurable results and how the program would meet local needs, contexts, and circumstances.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you. Again, Chair, through you to the deputy minister, as outlined on page 17 of the annual report, Children and Family Services expended \$9.3 million in 2023-2024 for 164 therapeutic foster caregiving placements across Alberta to address the need for family-based foster care systems for children and youth with complex care needs. This is an increase from the \$7.3 million budgeted for therapeutic foster caregiving services from the previous year. Could the ministry please expand upon this \$2 million increase in funding to this specialized system of foster caregivers?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. Therapeutic foster caregiving was introduced in 2022-23 as a new approach to offer support to children with enhanced needs in a home-based setting. Therapeutic foster care is a critical step in the continuum of placements available for children and youth in care. As the implementation of the new therapeutic foster care program occurred over two fiscal years, the addition of \$2 million reflects the ongoing implementation of the 164 therapeutic foster care placements. This significant financial investment addresses the commitment to provide a family-based model of care, provide increased therapeutic supports, reduce placement disruptions, and embed culturally-focused elements to preserve children's cultural identity.

Therapeutic foster care uses an evidence-informed approach that combines therapeutic interventions, trauma-informed care, and specially trained caregivers for youth who would otherwise be

living in group care. And as we've said repeatedly, the preference is always for family-based care and, ideally, for families to be reunified. The goals include: reunification with family, kin, and community; maintaining cultural elements to preserve the youth's identity; and a reduction of placement disruption for the youth.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you for your answer there. Again, Chair, through you to the deputy minister, on page 18 of the report, it is notable that "on average each month, 691 children and youth were placed" into a community group care setting as compared to the average of 642 children and youth from the previous year. Could the deputy minister please expand upon the reasons for this slight increase in children and youth in community group care settings, despite the emphasis on family-based placements by child and family services?

Ms Sadownik: Yeah. Thank you for the question. This increase – you know, as we've mentioned, preference is always for family-based care. We have also seen an increase in the number of children and youth who have complex needs, whether they are multiple diagnoses; behavioural issues, often coming from significant trauma in their past; addictions, another contributor to the complexity. It results in the need for more children and youth with these complex needs to be best placed in a family-based setting, at least initially, like kinship or foster caregivers, and resulting in the requirement for more specialized services. This increase is due in part to case complexity in the permanent care caseload and, as I mentioned, increases in mental health issues and addictions.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you for the answer. Chair, again, through you to the deputy minister, I see on page 18 of the annual report, that there was an \$82.8 million investment in community group care services to specifically support children and youth experiencing adversity. Could the ministry please expand on how this investment will go on to support children and youth in community group care placements, who are experiencing case complexity, mental health issues, and/or addictions?

Ms Sadownik: Thanks for the question. The growing complexity of cases highlights the critical role of healing and resiliency in addressing youths' adverse experiences and behaviours. That's why the ministry is implementing a province-wide and multi-phased procurement approach, which began in '23-24. We have broken it up into phases depending on regions so it will happen over two fiscal years: the one we're talking about here, '23-24, as well as '24-25. Part of that procurement includes a 22 per cent increase in the average daily rate for a community group care for all group care placements across Alberta. So that is an increase from \$450 per diem to \$550, a very significant and well appreciated increase by our providers. This investment reflects our commitment to evidence-informed care, positive development, consistency, connection, and skill building in a safe, community-based environment with a staffed, homelike setting for children and youth.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you. I see that there are only 43 seconds left on the clock there. Again, I want to comment on all the good work that you have done and that you continue to do to support youth here in Alberta. You need to be commended on all your hard work today. Thank you.

With that, Chair, I cede my time.

The Chair: Okay. We had 19 seconds remaining, but we will now proceed to questions from the Official Opposition. In this rotation you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In the answer to one of my previous questions about whether or not the department keeps data on the number of children who are taken into care because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, the deputy minister said that they were setting up a voluntary survey with questions that people could answer. Can the deputy minister tell us whether or not the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are explicitly mentioned in that voluntary survey?

9:10

Ms Sadownik: The questions do include: how do the children or youth identify? I won't get the exact categories correct, but it does include gender, sexual orientation, so if they consider themselves bisexual, pansexual, asexual. We do have specific questions that help us get an understanding of what are the specific considerations or supports that we may need to provide to the range of children in our care.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. According to the annual report, the vast majority of children placed in care are placed in kinship care or foster care arrangements. What support is given to kinship or foster care providers to care for children who have been rejected or abused because of their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Ms Sadownik: Maybe I can just get some clarity on that question. I think there's an assumption being made that children are being – are you suggesting from a kinship or a foster caregiver?

Mr. Schmidt: No, no, no. Children are being placed into care with kinship or foster care providers. They are taken out of their homes because they're abused or neglected due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. What supports are given to foster care or kinship care families, who are caring for those children to look after them because they've been abused or neglected due to their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for clarifying. I understand the question now.

Our fostering caregiver providers are all required to take training. In fact, when it comes to foster caregivers, it's approximately 160 hours of training with a number of modules that speak to a range of considerations that they may come across and need to support for children. One of the instructor-led training modules is around supporting sexual and gender-diverse children and youth. We have also invested in fiscal year '23-24 \$500,000 to support two organizations, Fyrefly and the Centre for Sexuality, to support training for individuals who work in family resource networks.

When it comes to child intervention, we don't always do a child intervention intake that results in a child coming into care. We often will refer them to other community supports, and that can include the types of supports they would get at a family resource network. We're looking across the system, the whole continuum of prevention, earlier intervention, and intervention to ensure, regardless of the circumstances, that there are appropriate supports in place, regardless of the needs of the child or the circumstances that brought them into the child intervention system.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Deputy Minister. Those learning modules: are those mandatory for kinship care and foster care providers?

Ms Sadownik: They are mandatory for foster caregiver providers. Let me just double-check that with ADM Wheeler. Foster caregivers receive caregiver training, which is mandatory and

consists of approximately 160 hours and includes – there's a long list of the types of training, including nurturing child and youth connections, change in transition, supporting sexual and gender-diverse children and youth. Yeah. It goes on and on. Suicide awareness. These are all mandatory.

Mr. Schmidt: The deputy minister noted that that was for foster care providers. Is the same true for kinship care providers?

Ms Sadownik: Kinship care providers are a bit of a different situation in that we have an e-learning approach for kinship caregiver providers. It is much less, I would say, rigorous in terms of the number of hours and the range of modules. That said, kinship care providers can choose to take the foster caregiver training. If there is a specific situation or circumstance that would lead them to wanting more information and supports for how to work with a child that's come into their care, we do support them to take that increased training.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Deputy Minister. The vast majority of children taken into care are set up in kinship care. They are not required to take these training modules; it's optional. How many of them choose to take these models, and do you track the number that are taking specifically the learning about caring for sexual orientation and gender-diverse children?

Ms Sadownik: I wonder if we can hold on that question for a bit because I think there's a little more information that David can provide that will help get to the answer you're looking for beyond the training. And it comes into: what are the considerations that must always be factored under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act when it comes to the child intervention system and all children? So I'm just going to pause and ask David to speak to that, and then we can go back to your question if that's all right.

Mr. Wheeler: Thank you, Lisa. As Lisa said, within our guide . . .

The Chair: Please introduce yourself for the record and then . . .

Mr. Wheeler: Pardon me?

The Chair: You need to introduce yourself for the record and then answer the question.

Mr. Wheeler: Okay. David Wheeler, assistant deputy minister, child intervention delivery. As Lisa mentioned, from a broader perspective within our guiding legislation, CYFEA, the matters to be considered include a number of factors, which include gender expression, gender orientation, and a number of other things, and that guides all decision-making throughout the act. So at all points that we're looking at, whether it's through procurements that we do, training, we're considering those things. It's also ingrained within our enhancement policy manual as well in terms of guiding the day-to-day decisions that our child intervention practitioners make when we are working with children and youth in care.

Ms Sadownik: So going back to your question, it was: how many kinship care providers have taken the training that is available to the foster caregivers?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes.

Ms Sadownik: It would be individual, depending on the caregiver. I don't believe that we have that data rolled up. We could try to assess approximately, looking back at our files, if that would be helpful.

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. Thank you very much. I would appreciate a response in writing. Can the deputy minister commit to that?

Ms Sadownik: Yes. We'll provide what's appropriate.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

So the Youth Empowerment & Support Services centre located in Edmonton-Gold Bar states in its latest annual report that almost half of the youth that it serves are LGBTQ2S-plus. What planning did the department undertake after the Premier's YouTube video was released to strengthen youth emergency shelters like YESS to provide safe places to live for youth who are rejected because of their gender identity or sexual orientation?

Ms Sadownik: Thanks for the question. We're just finding our information. Thank you for your patience. Youth emergency shelters are one of the areas of interest or programs that came into this ministry in the fiscal year '23-24. So for the time that we have had responsibility for youth emergency shelters, we have done a significant amount of work building or working with a group of individuals who deliver shelters across the province – there are seven in seven major urban cities – to talk about: what are the most appropriate supports we can provide through funding? What are their specific roles relative to the sorts of wraparound supports that are also important for all children accessing shelters?

I know your question is in the context of a specific subset of the population. However, when we look at the role of shelters and those supports, you know, all children and youth who are seeking these sorts of supports have their own unique needs, and we definitely look at the range of interests that need to be supported. So, absolutely, Indigenous children is one area where we may have to provide specialized supports, and we're aware that sexual, gender diversity is also an issue, an area we need to look at more greatly.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to the members from the government side for another 10 minutes.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the department officials for joining us this morning and, of course, for their hard work on this very critical file.

9:20

I'd like to begin by asking a couple questions on the advancing futures program. I noted this is one of the key highlights in the annual report on page 12. It mentions that the ministry "approved 989 young adults to receive a bursary to pursue post-secondary studies," and I was looking at performance measure 2(a), which is the percentage of youth receiving supports from the advancing futures program who successfully completed their planned studies. So on page 41 the 23-24 target was 89 per cent. The actual result was 89.5 per cent, so I think that's a promising result, to see that we have so many young adults pursuing their postsecondary studies and achieving their educational goals. This, of course, will help with their long-term career planning.

Through the chair to the deputy minister I would also note that advancing futures is the only program of its kind in Canada. Could the deputy minister please provide more details about this program? Who is eligible to apply? What percentage of students enrol in degrees, diplomas, and trade programs respectively?

Thank you.

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. Established in January 2004, the advancing futures program is a social and emotional transitional support and funding program that assists with access to

postsecondary education for youth who have been or continue to be in care or are receiving services from Alberta Children and Family Services. Individuals may receive up to 60 months of funding toward upgrading and obtaining a degree, diploma, trade, or certificate. Young adults can apply up until the day before their 25th birthday.

In terms of eligibility to be eligible, applicants must have had a permanent guardianship order or agreement, a PGO or a PGA, between the time they were 13 and 18 years old, in the care or subsidy of Alberta Children and Family Services, or have been receiving services for at least 546 days, or 18 months, between the time they were 13 and 24 years old. Applicants must be between 18 and 24 years old at the time they apply to advancing futures. Applicants are also eligible if they were adopted and they were the subject of a permanent guardianship order between the ages of 13 to 18 years of age and meet the other advancing futures eligibility requirements. Applicants who were subject to a permanent guardianship order prior to the age of 13 and received supports for permanency for more than 546 days between the ages of 13 and 18 years old are eligible to request an exception to the above eligibility criteria.

In 2023-2024 there were 989 young adults who received funding and support from the advancing futures and were enrolled in over 100 institutions and campuses. Over half of the recipients were enrolled in degree programs, so that's 31 per cent, or diploma, 35 per cent, so together more than half. An additional 14 per cent were enrolled in upgrading, and 20 per cent were in certificate or trade programs.

I'm glad you asked the question about that area. It's an area we're very proud of, and having children that age myself, I know getting them through postsecondary education is a big win.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, through the chair. I think the entire committee can certainly see the value of that program and the importance of education to long-term success.

I would like to switch gears, just maybe drill down a little bit more on a topic that has come up today so far regarding services and care. On pages 15 and 16 of the annual report is, of course, where those services and care are outlined, which is where children and youth are provided safe temporary living arrangements in kinship care or foster care due to safety concerns if the child was to continue living with their parent or guardian. As stated in the '23-24 report, 7,722 children and youth were receiving services and care on average each month. Of all children and youth in care, 85 per cent were in family-based placement.

So, again through the chair, could the deputy minister please describe: what are some of the advantages and differences between placing children in family-based care compared to other types of care?

Thank you.

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. Yes. As we've talked about several times this morning, when children are unable to remain in the parental care due to safety concerns, every effort is made to place the child in kinship care with extended family members as the first placement option. Kinship placements support the maintenance of important cultural, family, and community connections, which further support the child's identity and stability. We know these placements are less traumatic for children and result in better long-term outcomes.

When kinship placements are not available, CFS seeks foster care placements, as family-based care better meets a child's needs for building security and trust with consistent caregivers. In family-based settings children and youth have the opportunity to form

stable, nurturing relationships and caregivers who can provide personalized attention and support, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity in their lives. Family-based care also allows children and youth in care to experience daily routines, activities, and traditions within a family context. This can be crucial for their emotional well-being, development, and ability to heal from past trauma.

Other care settings, including group homes, campus-based care, and personalized community care, are necessary for children and youth with more complex needs that may require specialized therapeutic supports outside of a family setting.

Mr. Lundy: All right. Thank you. Through the chair, thank you for that information.

As we have time, I think I'd like to change gears again and maybe ask about a performance indicator in relation to delegated First Nation agencies. I'd be looking at page 43. I note performance measure 2(c), which measures the number of First Nation children and youth served by delegated First Nation agencies, or DFNAs. I note that the number of First Nations children and youth receiving child intervention services from a DFNA and the overall proportion of First Nation children and youth served by a DFNA have risen. Through the chair, Deputy, how does this performance metric reflect on the ministry's adherence to the guiding principles under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act?

Thank you.

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. Just as a little bit of context we do have 20 delegated First Nations across the province. They serve 38 of the 48 First Nations. Children and Family Services supports all First Nation children through relationships with DFNAs who serve their nation members, ensuring their children have lifelong connections with family, friends, and caregivers as well as community and culture. Children, youth, and families receiving services from DFNAs ensures Indigenous involvement in planning, decisions, and delivery of services. The guiding principles of CYFEA identify that the best interests, safety, and well-being of children are paramount to all decisions under the act. The well-being of families and communities is crucial to the well-being of the child.

In addition, children benefit from permanent relationships with family, friends, community, and culture, and they should be provided with the opportunity to form and maintain those connections. Finally, Indigenous people should be involved with the planning and provision of services to and decisions about Indigenous children and their families.

Mr. Lundy: Through the chair, thank you very much.

I see we're encroaching on one minute left, so I might try to get one last question in on the virtual opioid dependency program. I noticed that in 2023 it served 100 to 120 children. Through the chair, could the minister please outline the number for children and youth accessing the youth virtual opioid dependency program as compared to the previous year?

Thank you.

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. I apologize for the delay. Just finding that information. As of March 31, 2024, there were 88 total admissions to the youth virtual opioid dependency program with 49 youth, or 56 per cent, having had some level of Children and Family Services involvement, and more than half of those were under permanent guardianship.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to the Official Opposition for another 10 minutes of questions.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of questions about the family resource networks. The '22-23 children's services annual report notes that the ministry funded 70 networks with 136 partner agencies, but the next year's report shows that we are down about six in the network. So there's only 130 partner agencies. Could you tell me what happened or which partner agencies were lost? If not, you can just table it for the committee if you don't have that information.

9:30

Ms Sadownik: May I ask for the reference in the annual report again?

Ms Renaud: It would be where you reported that there were 70 networks with 136 partner agencies in last year's annual report. In this year's annual report it's 130 partner agencies. So there are six less than the previous year.

Ms Sadownik: A page number of the annual report if you have it.

Ms Renaud: Okay. We'll skip it. I'll get you a page number.

In '22-23 48,600 children and youth were supported by partner agencies in the family resource networks, and in '23-24 we see the number of children and youth close to doubling. So we've got 77,000, an increase of 45 per cent. Yet, the FRN budget only went up 2 per cent, or \$1.5 million, which you talked about in the report. We know: population growth, about 4 per cent; inflation, about 1.5. So can you explain how that budget number is sufficient given the enormous growth of the number of children using the supports?

Ms Sadownik: I'm going to start this question. Then I'm going to ask ADM Brodziak to add to it.

You are correct, and we were very happy to see an increase in the use of FRNs by both families and children on both universal programs as well as focused, more complex programs such as child visitation. That was a relatively new program, FRNs, where we shifted. Part of the increase in use has to do with increased awareness and knowing that these programs are available and people are now accessing them.

In terms of the budget I'm going to ask Joni, or ADM Brodziak, to just speak to that change in where the money was allocated.

Ms Renaud: Actually, I don't need to know where it was allocated. My question really was around – and what we're demonstrating, if you look on page 33 of the report: you're listing the number of children, zero to six, seven to 13, 14 to 18; then you talk about caregivers. Now, if you go back to last year and look at the numbers, we're seeing massive increases in the number of children. That might be due to advertising; people are aware. But these networks are hugely important to prevent people from entering the child intervention system, of course. We see these numbers exploding. I think we see just the francophone number itself. The francophones accessing services almost tripled. So the budget did not meet the need based on the numbers that we see published.

Instead of telling me where the money went, I'm just wondering if you could explain, with such a small increase, which clearly doesn't meet the need, how you're managing or how these networks are managing, also given that when these changes were made, the services were increased to up to 18 years of age. So I'm assuming there's a bit of dilution going on.

Ms Brodziak: Joni Brodziak, ADM, youth and preventive family services. So in 2024-25 we did invest an additional \$3.3 million to

address a few things, including where we did see pressure. Where FRNs have expressed that there's pressure is in intensive services, which, as you articulated, help us reduce the incidence of maltreatment. So we continue to work with the family resource networks in an external evaluation to determine where investments need to be made. The \$3.3 million this past year was to address some of those pressures.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you for that.

I did have a look at the evaluation that was available to the public. So the preliminary reporting or evaluation really sort of did very little to evaluate the need. The narrative of the evaluation was really anecdotal. We got some stats, but there weren't any targets actually to measure. So what were these investments doing? What was the cut-off? I mean, where can the public understand if the budget is meeting the need? All we're seeing are these numbers exploding, and the evaluation does really very little to explain how, you know, we added up to 18 years of age, we see these numbers exploding, but we really don't get a sense from the reporting or the evaluation that was published. Is it working?

Ms Brodziak: So the first couple of years of the evaluation were really about: are we developing consistent programs and services? Do we have the right categories of services? Do we have the right portion of funding going to the right places in communities? It is this last year that I think you're referencing what's available online that we started to drill down to. Then, okay, so how are they making an impact? I think that you will see that caregiver capacity is improving. Parents are reporting improved well-being; improved ability to parent; better, stronger connections to other community supports and services.

Ms Renaud: Children in care aren't really changing, right? They're not getting that much better.

Ms Brodziak: I'm sorry. I didn't hear that.

Ms Renaud: I'm just saying that there's a real connection between the number of children that are taken into care and the success of family resource networks. Really, that's a prevention-type program, so the evaluation is really sharing anecdotal information and some data, but, you know, we're really not seeing any significant changes in the number of kids going into care or youth going into care and the complexity of the care. I'm wondering if there's not a link between – you know, maybe we need to fund this a little better. Obviously, the numbers are exploding for whatever reason.

Ms Brodziak: As we continue to roll out the year-over-year evaluation, those questions will become more and more precise, the ability to answer those questions becomes far more – far more – precise. Thanks.

Ms Renaud: I'm going to move on to youth in transition. TAP is made up of four pathways. We've got the adult support services, stability, employment, and career and education, noted on page 29. The ministry notes that the adult support services pathways supported 12 per cent, or 239, young adults. This pathway, according to the report, is made up of young adults enrolled in provincial or federal adult disability services and can receive soft supports through TAP. So, number one, which are the federal disability supports that these youth have access to? And maybe I could just double up. My next question is: what, precisely, are soft services?

Ms Sadownik: I can start. We may not have the full answer to that question, but I'll answer it to the extent possible. The disability services referenced include those provincial programs that you would be well aware of, FSCD, et cetera, with federal funding contributions as well. I'm not aware of federal specific programs, but we are . . .

Ms Renaud: I wasn't either, so that's what I was confused about. So you just mean federal in terms of: it's federally funded?

Ms Sadownik: There is federal contribution. Yeah, absolutely.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Fair.

Ms Sadownik: Soft supports – sorry. You asked as well about soft supports. Maybe it's not the best name because – and we always say this back in the ministry – it's some of the hardest work we do, soft supports being the connections we make with those youth and young adults. All of them are matched with a practitioner. They have somebody they can talk to on a daily basis who gives them guidance, answers questions, provides them access to the supports they need. That is regardless of stream, whether it's an education stream, an employment stream, those who are looking for stability and will be accessing some of the adult social service programs that we offer within the province. We also offer psychological support, so counselling. There are many things that are done, mentoring, that extend beyond the more financial supports, and that . . .

Ms Renaud: Do you have any data on how many of the youth access psychological supports or counselling or mentoring?

Ms Sadownik: We have data on the number of youth who are in – yeah. We talked about that. We have data on the number of youth who leave child intervention and enter the TAP program, so that's over 90 per cent. We have data on, as you just said, the percentages that go into each of the programs. Really, their individual program plan and supports they require would depend on the individual, and some may have a one-time session. Some may have multiple. We wouldn't have a roll-up of all of the psychological services.

9:40

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to the government side for another 10 minutes of questions.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you very much, Chair. And through the chair to the deputy, to the ADMs, and all the staff, thank you for your time here this morning. I know you are appreciated and recognized for the critical work that you're doing on this file and these matters that are so close to all our hearts. So thank you.

Jumping into the annual report, on pages 16 and 17 I read that there are 3,022 children and youth that were placed with foster caregivers on an average each month this year compared to 3,113 that were placed with foster caregivers in 2023. Could the ministry officials please outline what are some of the factors that may account for that difference?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for the question. The decrease is reflective of fewer children and youth in care, with a 3 per cent decrease in temporary care and 1 per cent decrease in permanent care. This combined with an increase in facility-based placements accounts for the reduction. As of March 31, 2024, there were 1,505 foster caregivers providing care in their homes.

Ms de Jonge: Through the chair, thank you very much. On page 17 the report explains that Children and Family Services introduced

three foster care initiatives in December 2023 to enhance the foster care system. Can you please provide more details about what these initiatives were and how they have been promoting placement stability and the retention and recruitment of foster caregivers across Alberta?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for that question. As you know, Minister Turton had a mandate item around reducing the number of placements and placement moves, so these were programs designed to support foster caregivers and reduce the need for children to move and ideally to keep those foster caregivers in our system. In December 2023 three new foster caregiver initiatives were introduced. Caregivers know what it takes to be a foster caregiver, which is why the ministry introduced the refer a foster caregiver program. The program provides \$500 to current caregivers for each new caregiver they refer and who successfully becomes a licensed foster home provider. The program supports the recruitment of new foster caregivers, expanding the pool of available foster homes and ensuring that more children in need have access to safe and nurturing environments. Referrals are currently being processed and are expected to increase in the coming year. We know that is a program that other jurisdictions also use, and we're happy to see that we're starting to see some success from that referral program.

The next one is the foster caregivers caring for young adults program, and this one provides support for foster caregivers who continue to provide support to young adults, 18 to 22, enrolled in the transition to adulthood program. This support enhances stability and connection as young adults transition from care. As of March 31, 2024, 14 TAP clients had signed an agreement, with 35,472 being allocated through the initiative. So that was one that – it seems like a small amount; however, it was rolled out late in the year. There were only a few months left. But we are seeing again a significant amount of uptake in the ability for youth or young adults who have transitioned out of care to stay with that family they know and where they get the supports and have a trusted place to ask questions.

And the last program is the easily accessible mental health supports program, which provides licensed foster caregivers with access to up to five one-hour counselling sessions per year. This supports improved emotional and psychological well-being of foster caregivers, leading to reduced burnout, better caregiver retention, and enhanced placement stability for foster children. As of March 31, 2024, 10 foster caregivers had accessed mental health supports. With 5,117 allocated for this initiative, the foster caregiver enhancement initiatives, all of them together, promote placement stability by supporting recruitment of qualified caregivers, providing additional supports to current caregivers while also addressing risk factors associated with placement disruptions. Use of these initiatives by foster caregivers continues to grow. As I mentioned earlier, as they were rolled out late in the fiscal year, the uptake seems low, but I can say that these are programs of interest, and they are starting to show us some results.

Ms de Jonge: Through the chair, thank you for the additional information on those initiatives. There's a family in my constituency that has been a foster caregiver for over 20 years, and I've met some of the children placed in their care, and I've really seen first-hand the impact that the stability and the love and the care of that family have had on their lives. It's incredibly meaningful. Yeah. These initiatives are important. I thank you for that.

Now, looking again back to page 14 and 15 of the annual report, child intervention services made over 23,000 initial assessments into the well-being of children across Alberta. We've already discussed some of this this morning. These assessments were made

to ensure children were safe, healthy, and taken care of by their legal guardians. Of these assessments, 3,381 children and youth had an intervention file opened because of their safety, security, or development that was determined to be at risk.

Again, I know we've discussed this, and the ministry staff were interrupted when trying to provide context here, but I'd actually like to learn more about the context. I'm very interested in that. So through the chair, can the ministry please expand on how the process of calls and referrals starts, and what are the criteria for determining if a child is in need of intervention?

Ms Sadownik: Thank you for that. When Children and Family Services receives a referral regarding a child or youth, the information is assessed to determine if the information provided meets the legislated definition of abuse or neglect under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. If there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe a child or youth is at risk, an intake report is used to gather information to understand the child and their family and the supports required. If it is determined that there are safety concerns at intake, safety assessments, also known as investigations, are opened. These two processes, intake and safety assessment, form the initial assessment in public reporting.

Maybe just to add to that a little bit in some of the context I was providing earlier. Over the past few years we have made some significant changes in that intake process for some of the reasons discussed: the importance of ensuring that if we are taking a child into the intervention system, it is done consistently across the province, it aligns with the criteria and the authorization we have under the legislation. If there are alternative supports that can be provided to keep the family intact, of course always with safety in mind and the best interest of the child, that is what we would prefer to do. In that consistency and centralization of the intake, the rigour around the documentation collected, the number of conversations we have has really increased, and understanding from the families: what do they need? What do they need, if we can support them to keep their family intact before we make those decisions about opening a file from a child intervention perspective?

Ms de Jonge: Thank you very much for that important context. I'm glad you're able to provide that for the record without interruption.

Through the chair, can the ministry please share: what is the number of child intervention services assessments made in 2022-23 in comparison to 2023-24? Of those assessments, how many intervention files were opened due to safety, security, or developmental concerns?

Ms Sadownik: In 2023-24 CFS completed 23,325 initial assessments to determine whether a child or youth needed intervention. That's an increase of 11 per cent as compared with the 20,936 assessments completed in 2022-23. Of these assessments, 3,381 or 14.49 per cent of children and youth had an intervention file opened because their safety, security, or development was determined to be at risk.

Ms de Jonge: All right. Thank you, through the chair. I see I have 19 seconds left. I don't know if I'll be able to get in another question, but again through the chair, just want to thank you and your team members for being here this morning. Yeah. I just want to again recognize the important work you do and note our appreciation for that. With that, I'll cede my one second.

9:50

The Chair: Thank you. Now we'll move to questions from the opposition members, another 10 minutes.

Ms Renaud: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 29 we note the ministry spent \$38.3 million to deliver the transition to adulthood program to 490 youth. Obviously, of those identified, 260 accessed the program via delegated First Nation agencies. How many of those 490 youth now have accessed AISH or assured income?

Ms Sadownik: We would have information about the youth who enter the transition to adulthood program, which stream they choose, and which supports we then connect them to. I do not have that today.

Ms Renaud: If you would agree to table that number, how many of the 490 youth are receiving AISH and maybe I'll just add on also income support.

Now, the annual report – I mentioned in the last block a number of youth, just in the report it said, accessing disability supports, provincial disability supports. I'm assuming that is PDD. Can you tell us how many of those youth are now accessing PDD and when that application was made and how long that took for them to be assigned a caseworker?

Ms Sadownik: I do not have that information. I would suggest Seniors, Community and Social Services would be a better ministry to have that data. They would have all information about the clients that they serve through their programs.

If I might go back to the question you had earlier about a federal program, I do have some information now, so I can clarify that. The child disability benefit is a tax-free monthly payment made to families who care for a child under 18 with severe or prolonged impairment, mental or physical. Any of these disability programs would be administered through Seniors, Community and Social Services.

I also have a little bit more information, through the chair, if I might, just to address an outstanding question. There were discrepancies in FRN numbers. There were 136 partners in '22-23, 131 partner agencies in '23-24. It's down by five. Two were lost of their own accord. They shut down of their own decision. Three were a double count in '22-23. So it is a net reduction of two, and those were decisions made by those organizations.

Ms Renaud: I've been around long enough to remember when these changes were made to the FRCs and all of that. Also, at that same time, we started talking about youth in transition, and we were assured by the ministry at the time, you know, not to worry, that the reduction in the age from 24 to 22 really wouldn't be that significant because ministry staff would assist with applying for AISH and applying for PDD. We asked those questions of the other ministry and really didn't get any clarification, so now I'm asking again here. These youth in transition: how many were assisted or supported to get onto income replacement of some kind, which would be AISH or income support? Then, how many are receiving PDD staff supports? Because it's really tough to get out in the world. People are waiting on lists, wait-lists for years sometimes. So my question is: are the youth in transition being supported, and how long did that take?

Ms Sadownik: Yeah. As we've discussed and you see in the annual report, we have the four streams for the youth in transition. I think what you're referring to likely is those seeking stability or adult support services, maybe the 20 per cent with adult support services. For those who are more I'll call complex needs, I think the stream toward education, advancing futures is pretty clear. The stream toward employment is pretty clear.

Ms Renaud: I'm sure there are some with some employment and education that are also AISH recipients, right?

Ms Sadownik: That's right.

Ms Renaud: So there is some crossover.

Ms Sadownik: Yeah. Absolutely, we do have a separate program, actually, for employment for youth, young adults with a disability, and we actually work with SCSS, who is the lead for that portion of the program.

Ms Renaud: So who assisted the youth to apply for these programs?

Ms Sadownik: We do have youth practitioners who, as we talked about, the soft supports, work daily with these individuals. They connect them to the supports needed, and we have multiministry teams that work together on case planning and implementation. We can go away and see what is possible to provide when it comes to transition into adult programs that are provided by the province where appropriate.

Ms Renaud: That'd be great. So we can check on how long that is taking to receive supports, income replacement, and disability supports.

Ms Sadownik: We may not have information on timing, but we can look at the numbers. Again, there are a lot of complexities in how long it takes to get into certain programs that may be really individual circumstances for each of the youth we're working with.

Ms Renaud: I would suggest that knowing if the youth in transition have an income is pretty important, to know when that happened. If there was a gap in service and in income, that would be pretty important, so I hope there is some information on that.

I'm going to ask another question about this. I note in the annual report, again, same page, that the first meeting of the youth advisory task force occurred in May of 2024, which is great, to respond to and identify issues surrounding youth transitioning from care. How many of the members of this task force have lived experience to speak to disability issues and related barriers?

Ms Sadownik: As of the end of the fiscal year we're here talking about today, we had just selected the members for that task force, and I know we have some ongoing recruitment. I do not have with me information about the diversity. All individuals who are on that task force would have experience in the intervention system.

Ms Renaud: My question is very specific about disability. Again, I was going to reference the OCYA report of January '24 that calls on the government to improve services and supports specifically for people with disabilities, children and youth with disabilities. My question is just related. Now, rightly, people may not want to identify; that's a hundred per cent fine. I'm just wanting to know, you know, the other form or the other evaluation – you had some disclosure that people could disclose. I'm just wondering: are there people on this task force, which seems like a very important task force, who have lived experience with disability? Just if you have that, that's great. If not, I understand.

Ms Sadownik: It certainly would be part of. I talked earlier about a pilot survey we were doing to collect better information about the children and youth in the child intervention system. That would be part of the information we would be collecting about their individual circumstances. For the task force, all have been in the child intervention system at least one year. Many of the children, as

you know, in the child intervention system have a range of conditions and diagnoses. Highly unlikely that there is no one with a disability. I don't have those numbers here.

Ms Renaud: I'm going to skip a little bit to . . .

The Chair: Members, if I may.

Ms Renaud: Sorry. Sure.

The Chair: It looks like we will need more time to go through this agenda, and unless we want to extend it, we will not be able to finish, so I will ask one question. The committee can extend the time to finish the remaining items on the agenda with unanimous consent, so I will ask one question. Is anybody opposed to extending the time to complete the remaining items on the agenda? Seeing none, we will proceed. Thank you.

Ms Renaud: I don't think the timer stopped.

My questions are about community group care. On page 18 I note there are 249 community group care providers. Two things: could you tell me who is the accrediting body, and could you tell us about the procurement process for these community group care providers?

Ms Sadownik: Just pulling some information. I believe we have three accrediting bodies. Do you have that handy? We have three, and we just have to find their names here.

Ms Renaud: You could table that, too, through you, Mr. Chair. They could table it.

Maybe I can piggyback on that. Could you tell us if all of the 249 providers are accredited?

10:00

Ms. Sadownik: Part of the procurement would be a requirement for accreditation. Is that accurate, Dave? Do you want to speak to that, for the procurement?

Mr. Wheeler: Yeah. So licensing is also . . .

The Chair: You can always introduce yourself. You can introduce yourself and answer.

Mr. Wheeler: David Wheeler, assistant deputy minister, child intervention delivery. Yes. In addition to what Deputy Minister was saying, there are a number of factors that the team looks at in accordance with the RFP that gets put out. Some requirements are mandatory; others are desirable. A notable one that I was mentioning was that we would look towards licensing and, you know, there can sometimes be a delay between contracting and when a licence goes in but before children and youth would be under the licence.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move to a 10-minute rotation of questions from the government members.

Mr. Rowswell: We will cede that time.

The Chair: Thank you.

That leaves us with a final rotation of three minutes of questions that can be read into the record, starting with the Official Opposition.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My first question. Homelessness is rising rapidly under the UCP government. How

many spaces for homeless youth were needed in Alberta at the conclusion of '23-24, how many spaces were there, and how many new spaces did CFS create in '23-24?

Communities that are home to youth shelters are growing concerned about public safety. What supports did CFS provide to youth shelters to enhance and protect public safety in the neighbourhoods where these shelters are located?

And my final question. The minister's mandate letter issued in 2023 directs the minister to create four new youth mental wellness centres. Aside from expanding the virtual opioid dependency program, what work did the ministry do to make progress on the creation of these four new youth mental wellness centres?

I'll pass it over to my colleague Marie Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. The Family Violence Death Review Committee was under FCSS. Their practice was to publish recommendations and response tracking. The last publication was January 21. When will Albertans have access to the next reporting period, and where will we find future recommendations and response tracking?

Page 12, key highlights, first bullet discusses easily accessible mental health supports for licensed foster caregivers, but we don't have accessibility legislation, so there are many different definitions for accessibility. How specifically are these supports accessible?

Page 17 talks about easily accessible mental health supports, five one-hour sessions at \$220 per hour. This was rolled out in December '23. With only 23.3 sessions delivered, total of about \$5,000, it seems the program is not very accessible given the massive need for mental health supports in Alberta. What is the ministry doing to improve accessibility, to make alterations or improve usage?

What was the total spent on foster care awareness and advertising in this fiscal year? Other than the anecdotal information in the annual report, what targets have been established for this spending, and when will Albertans see results?

Page 31 notes that the ministry assisted in the creation of 7,000 RESP program accounts. What is the total value of the 7,000 accounts? Does the 7,000 number go back to 2004? How many youths have withdrawn from the RESP accounts? How many RDSP accounts have been opened, and what is the total value?

Let me just keep going. Page 12, key highlights, first bullet – oh. Actually, I already said that. Then my final question is on the chart that lists the number of shelters and second-stage housing. How many of those units are accessible?

Thank you.

Mr. Rowswell: We will cede that three-minute read-in time.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Rowswell.

I think that concludes our meeting insofar as the ministry of children's services is concerned. We request that outstanding questions be responded in writing within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk. Thank you, all.

Moving on to other business. I do have brief comments to make, but before that, if any members have anything to add, we will proceed with that.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have two motions to move with the intent to bring Jobs, Economy and Trade to the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I am taking the motions in the order that they have been suggested to me by the committee clerk. In order to move up the date for Jobs, Economy and Trade, I first need to move that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts rescind the following motion carried on May 28, 2024, that “the Standing Committee on Public Accounts invite the following ministries in the order listed to appear before the committee to respond to questions regarding the relevant ministry annual reports and the reports of the Auditor General: one, Children and Family Services; two, Forestry and Parks; three, Technology and Innovation; four, Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction; five, Agriculture and Irrigation; six, Jobs, Economy and Trade.”

The Chair: Any comments, discussion?

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to argue against this motion on a couple of points. All of the ministries that we have scheduled, the majority of them are either a new ministry or we have not heard from them since 2021 in Public Accounts. So it's extremely important that we get a chance to hear from those ministries. Specifically regarding Jobs, Economy and Trade, as we can see on the schedule, they are the first ministry to be scheduled in the spring session, which of course would mean that they would still be under the same annual report and same timelines that would be considered were we to move them up, and I would certainly look forward to hearing from Jobs, Economy and Trade early in the spring session under the time that is being proposed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to recap for the committee what happened here this morning, that Children and Family Services knew full well that we were going to ask questions about an E coli outbreak in daycares. They refused to answer questions. When I persisted in asking questions, the government members blocked me from asking questions. They assured us that we would be able to meet with Jobs, Economy and Trade at our earliest convenience. It looks like our earliest convenience is some point in the future. Mr. Lundy suggests that there is a date set for a meeting with Jobs, Economy and Trade. That's not true. There is no date yet set for the meeting with Jobs, Economy and Trade. We don't know when the spring session will begin, nor do we know when the spring session for Public Accounts will begin.

So for this government to say that we are going to get the opportunity to discuss the issue of the E coli outbreak with Jobs, Economy and Trade is completely false. And if government members vote against this motion, they are voting to avoid accountability for Jobs, Economy and Trade.

The Chair: On this motion, I will put the question before the committee. All those in favour of this motion? All those opposed? I think

this motion is defeated.

Some brief comments I have to make. As members will recall, the committee passed a motion at our meeting on May 7 for the chair and the deputy chair and two LAO staff to attend the 2024

Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees conference held in September in Quebec City. The deputy chair and I attended the conference along with Dr. Philip Massolin, who served as the executive director for CCPAC from September 2020 to September 2024, and Mr. Huffman, our committee clerk. It's a joint conference with the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors, which was attended by our Auditor General, Mr. Doug Wylie, and a number of his staff.

The conference was very interesting and educational. We learned how public accounts committees in other Canadian jurisdictions operate, and we networked with PAC colleagues. There was a panel discussing public responsibility and oversight as well as a presentation on the impact of new technologies on public administration. I also participated in a panel discussing governance and sustainable development.

I think the deputy chair would agree that attending the conference was a beneficial experience and we look forward to the next conference, which happens to be in Regina. If the deputy chair wants to add anything to that.

Mr. Rowswell: Yeah. I think it was a great event. We gained a lot of insight on how other provinces handle their Public Accounts Committee and how they work very directly with their Auditor General. I'm looking forward to if we can see our way forward to copying some of that, I think we'd have a very productive Public Accounts Committee. Looking forward to that discussion in the future.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Chair.

Since our last meeting written responses to questions asked during meetings from spring session were received from the ministries of Seniors, Community and Social Services; Treasury Board and Finance; Mental Health and Addiction; Public Safety and Emergency Services; and Affordability and Utilities. These responses were made available to committee members on the internal site. Following our established practice, the responses will be made publicly available on the Assembly website.

Are there any other items for discussion under other business?

Seeing none, the next meeting of the committee is on Tuesday, November 5, 2024, with the Ministry of Forestry and Parks. I will call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member move that the meeting be adjourned?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: I move the meeting be adjourned.

The Chair: Thank you. All in favour of the motion? Anyone opposed? The motion is carried and the meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:11 a.m.]

