



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, March 14, 2024
9 a.m.

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

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),* Acting Deputy Chair

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Also in Attendance

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services

Hon. Mike Ellis, Minister

Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Deputy Minister, Public Safety and Emergency Services

Fiona Lavoy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Correctional Services

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

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

Curtis Zablocki, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Security

Alberta Emergency Management Agency

Stephen Lacroix, Assistant Deputy Minister and Managing Director

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 14, 2024

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

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

The Chair: All right. Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration estimates of the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

I'd ask that we go around the table and introduce ourselves. Minister, when we come to you, if you would kindly introduce the officials with you on the left and right side of you, that would be great. We'll start to my right. Mr. Lundy.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Chelsae Petrovic, MLA for Livingston-Macleod.

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

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

Mrs. Johnson: Good morning. Jennifer Johnson, Lacombe-Ponoka. To my right is Beki Lees, my assistant.

Mr. Ellis: Great. I'm Mike Ellis. I'm the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services. We'll go left to right. First, I have Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister of financial services and senior financial officer; Ms Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services; Mr. Stephen Lacroix, assistant deputy minister of Alberta Emergency Management Agency; and, last but not least, Mr. Curtis Zablocki, assistant deputy minister of public security division. That's it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Please proceed, Opposition.

Member Hoyle: MLA Rhiannon Hoyle for Edmonton-South.

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

Member Eremenko: Member Janet Eremenko for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Eggen: Good morning. I'm Dave Eggen, MLA for Edmonton-North West.

The Chair: And we'll head over to the . . .

Mr. Boitchenko: Andrew Boitchenko, MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon.

The Chair: Thank you so much, everyone. I'm Jackie Lovely, MLA for the Camrose constituency and chair for the committee.

Just a few housekeeping notes here. Hon. Mr. Eggen is substituting for Ms Goehring.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audiovisual stream and transcript of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely: we don't have any today, but if we do have someone joining, you are encouraged

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

Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services shall be considered for three hours. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates in the legislative policy committees. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the meeting blocks of speaking time will be combined only if both the minister and members speaking agree. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the main estimates schedule and the committee will be adjourned. Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or rotation, please e-mail or message the clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having a break? All right. We'll have a break, then.

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

Pages are available to deliver notes or other material between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

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

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

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

I now invite the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to begin with your opening remarks, sir.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. Good day, everyone, and thank you all for being here. I want to first begin by acknowledging that we are today gathered on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional gathering place of many diverse First Nations and Métis people.

Today I will be presenting the Public Safety and Emergency Services business plan and estimates. I know that I've already introduced my staff up front. I'm going to do it again as well as a few other folks here. Of course, we have Ms Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services; Mr. Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister of financial services and senior financial officer; Mr. Curtis Zablocki, assistant deputy minister of public safety security division; and, of course, Mr. Stephen Lacroix, assistant deputy minister of Alberta Emergency Management Agency. We have a few folks in the gallery. I know that I'm going to miss a couple, but I know we have a couple of other assistant deputy ministers: Ms Fiona Lavoy, assistant deputy minister of correctional services division, and Mr. Ross Nairne,

assistant deputy minister of strategy, support, and integrated initiatives division.

Public safety, as we all know, is foundational to any thriving and prosperous society. Each one of us has a fundamental right to be safe in our communities. As a former Calgary Police Service officer that commitment to ensuring public safety was my duty and certainly a priority for me each and every day. Now as Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services my focus has expanded, but that commitment is stronger than ever. When I received the mandate from the Premier last summer, it directed me to ensure that Alberta is a role model for safe and secure communities because government has a fundamental role to play in protecting Alberta from crime, violence, disasters, and any other unlawful and life-threatening risk to health and safety.

Alberta already has a strong foundation of safety and security mechanisms in place across the province. Over the past year we've worked hard to strengthen this foundation with new tools and supports designed to make Alberta's communities safer, providing law enforcement with the tools they need to combat crime and violence, support victims of crime, and protect our communities from the impact of disasters such as floods and wildfires.

Today I'm pleased to present a budget that builds on the great work already being done by continuing to meet current needs while finding new ways to approach public safety in Alberta. Budget '24 is not just a financial plan; it is a responsible blueprint that lays the foundation for a safer Alberta over the next three years.

To this end, Budget '24 includes an additional \$22 million in funding dedicated to enhancing public safety measures across the province. That means that the consolidated budget for the ministry is \$1.28 billion. We all know that crime and violence continue to be serious concerns for Albertans. We're going to do everything in our power to drive down the trends of increasing violence, and that needs to start with a paradigm shift in Alberta's approach to policing.

As I've said many times before, no longer will police be seen as an arm of the state but, rather, an extension and reflection of the community that they serve. I envision an Alberta where every police officer reports on duty with the belief that they can be a leader for the public safety in their community and, on the other side of that spectrum, community members view the police as the community members and leaders also within, of course, their community.

We have a lot of work ahead of us to tackle some of these very complex and nuanced challenges that our communities are facing, but I know that by working together, we can drive forward meaningful change that will make our communities safer and life better for all Albertans. This includes all levels of government, health care providers, first responders, law enforcement, Indigenous partners, social service agencies, and community groups. On that note, this year's budget for the public security division is \$764.9 million, and a key portion of this budget will go towards improving public safety through increased resources for law enforcement agencies and communities.

Working with policing partners, the ministry is developing strategies to address urban crime rates, including adding patrol officers in Edmonton and Calgary and other communities to assist policing partners with street-level law enforcement. Specifically, we're allocating \$10 million in new funding to both the Edmonton Police Service and the Calgary Police Service. We know that the most effective deterrent to crime is a visible presence of uniformed officers patrolling the streets. This funding is aimed at hiring, training, and deploying 100 new officers to police core transit and to identified high-crime areas in each city.

Furthermore, we're allocating an additional \$20.9 million to the provincial police service agreement. Our historic investment in policing has added more than 500 civilian and officer positions at the RCMP detachments throughout rural Alberta since the new police funding model was implemented in 2020. Together these investments mean more resources for law enforcement to help ensure the safety of Albertans, no matter where they live.

We're also going to tackle increasing rates of organized crime with an additional \$10.6 million to address issues such as gang and gun violence and drug trafficking. This funding is part of Alberta's \$53 million allocation through the federal gun and gang violence action fund. Over the next several years this funding will support 31 initiatives that focus on prevention and enforcement as well as engagement with municipalities, local law enforcement partners, and Alberta's law enforcement response teams.

9:10

We're also working on several fronts to ensure law enforcement agencies and the justice system have the tools and expertise needed to prevent violent crime and gang members from targeting communities while also continuing to work with our colleagues in the Ministry of Justice on a strategy to detain and prosecute violent criminals and gang members.

While preventing crime is a priority, there are some who will unfortunately find themselves in the corrections system. Our goal is to support corrections in a way that promotes public safety while also reducing recidivism through supports to offenders. Budget 2024 provides a total operating budget of \$350 million for correction services division. This funding guarantees Alberta's hard-working correctional staff can continue to be on the front line every day, working for the safety and security of Albertans and for those they oversee.

We're also moving forward with a modern ankle bracelet monitoring program to provide a closer supervision of certain bail and community-sentenced individuals who require monitoring in the community; \$3 million in new capital funding is being provided to establish dedicated space for a 24-hour electronic monitoring ankle bracelet program.

While there are some public safety challenges we can predict, it's not as easy to predict the ways that we will be tested, of course, by Mother Nature; floods, wildfires, tornadoes, and other emergencies can strike, of course, at any time. The scope and scale of complexity of the 2023 season was unprecedented, and all indicators point to the intense wildfire season possibly this year, and we must be ready.

Through Budget 2024 the Alberta Emergency Management Agency will receive an additional \$3.1 million in funding for a total budget of \$108 million. This additional funding will provide the staff needed to sustain 24/7 access to provincial emergency management support. We will also deliver evidenced information emergency management training: the preparation of implementation of emergency and business continuity plans, training and program supports for emergency and social service planning and processes, and incident management support during response to widespread emergencies and disasters. Ultimately, it's an investment in making sure that we can support Alberta's municipalities, Métis settlements, and First Nations in emergency events which occur in their communities. This collaboration ensures the province is prepared for resilience to the impacts of disasters.

Today I've outlined some of the details for how this year's budget will move us even closer to ensuring Alberta is a role model for safe and secure communities. We've made a lot of progress over the past year on the mandate, and we know that there's a lot more work that needs to be done. Budget 2024 supports us in continuing that work

through the responsible targeting investments and strategic initiatives. We're working tirelessly to build safer communities so that all Albertans can feel secure in their homes, work, and out in their communities. That means finding a new approach where communities are able to find solutions to their unique public safety concerns, with government standing beside them as a partner in those efforts. We're continuing to forge new paths in Public Safety and Emergency Services in this province, and Budget '24 continues to move us forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to take questions.

The Chair: Well, thank you, Minister.

We'll now begin the question-and-answer portion of the meeting. For the first 60 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. However, members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaker block, both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams. Okay. Member, would you like to combine your time? Who's speaking first?

Mr. Sabir: Yes. I will if the minister agrees to it.

The Chair: Minister, what's your choice? Combined? Okay.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. You're talking about back and forth, right?

The Chair: Back and forth. Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. That's fine. Sure.

The Chair: Okay. Well, let's proceed.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to be here to discuss Public Safety and Emergency Services estimates. Thank you, Minister, for being here, and thank you for agreeing to go back and forth. That's more effective. Also, thank you to your staff for being here and for the work you do.

I will go through questions, put different documents. I will start with the business plan. Most of these questions are pretty basic just to get a better understanding of these estimates. My first question relates to the business plan, page 115:

Working alongside other ministries, law enforcement and other community and Indigenous partners, the ministry is part of the justice and public safety continuum and supports the unique needs of Albertans, while ensuring the sustainability and resilience of the system.

In your opening remarks, Minister, you also mentioned that all of us have a fundamental right to be safe and that the goal of the ministry is to be a role model for safe and secure communities. However, in the business plan it's mentioned that violent crime has gone up both in rural and urban centres. There is a lot of talk about recovery, but the fact remains that there are six Albertans dying every single day from illicit drugs in our communities, and there are concerns about lack of consultation with Indigenous communities, community partners on programs such as victims of crime services. Through the chair, the ministry is failing to meet the basic safety needs of Albertans and its mandate to keep Albertans safe in their communities.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, Member. I thank the member for being here. Look, if you want to go down this road, Member, we're happy to go down this road. Bill C-75 has created an environment that has allowed organized crime to thrive. It is a catch-and-release program that has made not just Albertans less safe; it has made Canadians less safe. That is the consensus of every province. We are doing our best to try to keep Albertans safe. This is why you are seeing investments that are, I

would argue, unprecedented in law enforcement all throughout this province. This is why – you brought up our First Nations friends – you are seeing investments in First Nations that don't necessarily ...

The Chair: Minister ...

Mr. Ellis: Yes?

The Chair: ... if you could kindly direct your conversation through the chair, that would be so much appreciated. Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. I have bad eyes. I'm not even looking at him. I can barely see you, Madam Chair. Anyway, thank you so much.

This is slightly out of the scope, but you're the one that raised it. When it comes to the opioid crisis that is currently going on, you know, one of the things that I did under a previous ministry – but I'm happy to have this conversation – was that when I went to the Blood reserve, it was not the heavy-handed government trying to tell Indigenous people what to do. It was me saying: what do you want, and how can I help you? This is where we had an unprecedented investment in a recovery community on the Blood reserve. Other Indigenous communities have asked for that, and we are continuing with Siksika and Enoch and Tsuut'ina to help curb this.

There is one completely failed policy, and that is what is known as so-called safe supply. That is something that does not exist. That was proven in the safe supply committee, that we held in this particular building, quite frankly, and we will continue down that path of a recovery-oriented system of care, to the point where – and I think it's important for anybody listening to know this as well – the state of Oregon has actually reversed their policies. They've reversed their policies on defunding the police. They've reversed their policies on the way they were approaching the addictions crisis that they were facing in their area. They've actually criminalized drugs again in the state of Oregon.

We're proud of the work that we are doing. Of course we don't want to see anybody die when it comes to opioids, but what we're talking about here is an unprecedented amount of drugs that are flowing into this province from the United States, that are flowing into this province from British Columbia, and we have to stop that particular flow.

9:20

We've invested an enormous amount of money into ALERT as well; \$55.7 million annually the government provides to ALERT, which is joint operations between the RCMP and municipalities. We're trying to tackle this from a multitude of different fronts.

Madam Chair, I can tell you that this is no heavy lift, but I will say this. There is a reason why Alberta has received positive international recognition from Stanford University, from Harvard University, from Yale University, and it's because of the work we have done in this overwhelming – overwhelming – crisis that we are facing all throughout North America right now.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister. Through the chair, we will have more conversation about this recovery program within correctional facilities, and I will ask when I get there. But I do note that the Blood recovery community is yet to be built.

I will move on to the same page. The ministry's business plan talks about the prevention and recovery from emergencies in the province. Given the important role your ministry plays in preparation for disaster, there are some serious drought and wildfire warnings. Albertans are deeply concerned about it. Through the chair, can you please talk about specific initiatives that you are

undertaking, and how much money has been specifically set aside for those initiatives?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I mean, I'll get my assistant deputy minister Stephen Lacroix to supplement here, but I can tell you, Madam Chair, we actually work quite collaboratively with the federal government on this particular issue when it comes to emergency management. I know that I was recently in Ottawa at a federal-provincial-territorial meeting, and we discussed making sure that we have education and training for our communities throughout the province. You know, one thing I learned during the last wildfire season, quite frankly, even though I was born and raised in Alberta, is just really, truly how big Alberta is, from the top of the province to the bottom of the province. Making sure that we have resources that get there in a timely manner is important. That's why what Alberta Emergency Management does when it comes to local education and training of municipalities I think is something that is the consistency that we want to see throughout the province.

If you don't mind, if I can get my assistant deputy minister to supplement that, I'd appreciate that.

Mr. Lacroix: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. We are part of let's call it a broader system. Minister Ellis already touched on our connections with the federal government under the disaster financial assistance arrangements. This is a program that will, if approved, when approved – and it was approved for the events last summer, if we use that as an example – be up to 90 per cent of federal funding in the recovery from disasters, again, if they're eligible. Eligibility is usually around or interpreted around uninsurable losses. So that's the federal government's role and their governance in that piece.

We fully anticipate, actually, the federal government to update those disaster financial assistance arrangements when they table their budget later in April. We've been part of the conversations, that, of course, we're not privy to discuss yet as it's yet to be made official, but that's something that's on the way as well as a federal insurance relocation plan that is targeting at-risk flood areas. So that's Ottawa's role in all of this.

Now, if we look at what the government of Alberta is doing and what the Alberta Emergency Management Agency does within Public Safety and Emergency Services, we oversee a very robust and resilient emergency management system that leverages the talent of local authorities. To be quite blunt, if we had not built that system, we would not probably have – I hate to use the word “survived” – fared as well, albeit there were some tragedies last summer but no catastrophic losses. The reasons behind that is a decentralized system that is enabled, financed, resourced by the provincial government through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency.

Now, concrete actions that we're contemplating or that are being announced and are actually in the budget documents: we're increasing – well, when I say “we,” it's the Alberta government, Madam Chair, of course – through Treasury Board and Finance the contingency fund available to pay for the response to those disasters. That's \$2 billion, so from \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion. That makes more money available to cope with those disasters when they happen.

Also, there have been some investments in the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. You'll find in the documents that we've been privileged to see an uptick in spending in the agency of \$3.1 million, as was mentioned by Minister Ellis, Madam Chair. That translates into 29 full-time equivalencies to better serve Albertans. Essentially, what the current construct forced me to do was stop work on key strategic files to be able to respond to the

disaster. Of course, as you know more than I do, the wheels of government – governments, actually – keep turning, so this will be able to allow me to have folks that will be able to focus full-time on certain key strategic initiatives.

I was talking about the federal government tabling new legislation, new arrangements, new granting programs to the province, so we'll be able to provide more oversight on that. Our Be Prepared team – those are the folks that you would hear or see on social media informing, educating Albertans to be prepared – will be on there.

More work as well on hazard identification and risk assessment, so disaster risk reduction; improvements to the Alberta first responder radio communication system. Our logistics support in the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre will be improved. Our 911 oversights will be improved. Our granting agreements will also improve our field officer complement in Alberta. Without geeking out too, too much, we divided the province into seven regions. Each of them has field officers. We're increasing that. We're increasing as well our ability to liaise or communicate with industry to leverage their resources to respond to disasters. As you all know, Alberta is privileged to have some pretty big players in that sphere, with a lot of equipment and resources, so we'll be able to do a better job of doing that.

We're also doubling . . .

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Thank you.

Through the chair, this is just a quick follow-up. All the funds that have been set aside to deal with wildfires or disasters or recovery: they are in contingency and not directly in your budget right now?

Mr. Ellis: Go ahead.

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. That's correct, Madam Chair. Essentially, there are monies that we sought expenditure authority for. I'll give you an example: for the floods last summer, \$67.5 million, off the top of my head, and \$175 million for the wildfire disaster recovery programs. Those are drawn from the contingency, and then we administer those funds over the years it takes to get through the program. Correct.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Through the chair, the business plan also talks about youth correctional centres, so just pretty basic questions about: what's the total inmate population in all these centres, and what's the total number of staff there? Are there any vacancies?

A related question. There was also mention that there are rehabilitation opportunities that are available to inmates. Can the minister also talk about that and how much money you're spending specifically on rehabilitation initiatives?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Thank you very much. Excellent questions. I know the member would know this. I mean, the Youth Criminal Justice Act is certainly written in a way that kids are not to be incarcerated. We have our assistant deputy minister here as well, so she can give you some exact numbers. Maybe it's wrong that I speculate, but the numbers, I would say, are low. We'll get Fiona to come up and provide some averages on that.

9:30

One of the things that we will be doing is working with Mental Health and Addiction. I think a valid point that you're making and a point that I made, quite frankly, when I was in opposition regarding the buildings themselves: we're looking at creating what are known as youth centres of excellence in both Calgary and

Edmonton although I think there – I'll get Fiona to expand on this as well – are some challenges because I think that the facility in Calgary is being utilized a bit more than the facility in Edmonton.

Maybe, Fiona, would you mind just supplementing this, please? Thank you.

Ms Lavoy: Good morning. Fiona Lavoy. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the correctional services division. Just a point of clarification: is the question specific to only youth, Madam Chair, or is it about all individuals in custody, whether they're youth or adult?

Mr. Sabir: It was all.

Ms Lavoy: All. Okay.

If it's okay with the minister, I'll just speak generally about overall populations in custody at the moment. On average we have about 3,400 people in custody on any given day, and that fluctuates from time to time. We have 10 facilities in the province that house those individuals. There are approximately 3,000 staff members that support all correctional services division operations; that's inclusive of custody and community and supporting measures as well. Within our correctional centres that's in and around 2,000 staff members that support those operations.

In terms of the rehabilitative components, certainly, there are a number of rehabilitative interventions that occur within our facilities. If that's specific to custody, that's inclusive of educational opportunities. We have contracts with a number of providers, mostly postsecondary institutions, to support rehabilitative efforts in that space as well as, as the minister had spoken about earlier, therapeutic living units that operate in three, soon to be four, facilities that support the recovery-oriented system of care model.

I can't recall if there were other questions within there. If that's okay, Minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry, Member. Through the chair, I can supplement a little bit more if you don't mind. Thanks.

Sorry. I apologize, Madam Chair. I thought the member was talking about youth; I didn't quite hear the adult component of that. If you don't mind, I wouldn't mind expanding slightly a bit on the therapeutic living units. This was certainly identified by me several years ago. I have no desire to watch anyone suffer while in custody, especially if they're facing some sort of, you know, neurobiological illness, which is, of course, addiction, so having a place for them to start the healing process was something that was, I would say, near and dear to my heart.

We have currently four TLUs in adult centres. The first one was opened up in in Red Deer, and we do have one, I think, that is going to be opened up later this month. We have Red Deer, Lethbridge, Fort Saskatchewan, and Calgary, right? Okay. The last one is going to be opened up later this month. Really, it's about having people that start a pathway and a journey to healing as opposed to just releasing them from a correctional facility, giving them an LRT ticket, and then sending them into downtown where the cycle of abuse and recidivism continues.

I'll leave that there. Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister. Through the chair, we will have more questions about these programs. My colleague will be asking that.

I will continue with my questions. The same page, page 115, of the business plan also talks about policing agreements with the

RCMP and other specialized policing programs to tackle crime, domestic violence, and human trafficking. The question I have is pretty basic. What's the total cost of these agreements to the province, and what's the cost that the federal government provides as subsidy for these agreements, through the chair to the minister?

Mr. Ellis: Brad, do you have that number?

Mr. Smith: I think I have the RCMP number.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Go ahead.

Mr. Smith: Good morning. Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister, financial services division. Through the chair, the province's cost for the provincial police services agreement with the RCMP is \$358 million. There are also cost-shared agreements with the federal government for policing services on First Nation communities, where Alberta pays 48 per cent and the federal government pays 51 per cent.

Mr. Ellis: Just for clarification, it's 51-49, not 48.

Mr. Smith: Fifty-one and 49.

Mr. Ellis: Small but big.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

A follow-up question. Through the chair, those 48-52 or 49-51: these are the 22 First Nations who have stand-alone agreements, right?

The Chair: No need to touch the button. The microphone system is operated through *Hansard*. When you are going to speak, it'll automatically come on because we have our wizard back here taking care of everything for you.

Mr. Ellis: Madam Chair, if you don't mind, please. Okay. Thank you. Sorry. Again, I can't even see you nodding your head, so I apologize. That's my issue.

I think I understand where the member is going with this. For example, if we use Siksika Nation, which is the first Indigenous community to go down the path of creating their own police service, we'll say, independence in 14 years, actually, in Canada, under the agreement that they would have had with the RCMP – and I stand to be corrected by Mr. Zablocki – it was 70-30. Is that correct, sir?

Mr. Zablocki: Yes, it is.

Mr. Ellis: Yes, it is. Right.

Then, obviously, they are wishing to have their own police service, and then that would be a 51-49 split with the country. Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

I guess on a related question that will bring in Bill 11 as well, that was introduced in the Legislature yesterday, Madam Chair, this bill is clear that it's creating another police force, and what's not clear is what its mandate will be and how that new force will work or fit in with existing police forces. Municipalities, Albertans: they have been pretty clear that they do not want another police force. Before the election and during the recent election we didn't hear anything that the province will be moving ahead towards creating a new police force.

The question, through the chair, is: who was consulted about it? Who was asking for it? What will its mandate be? How will it work with other police forces that are existing in the province? What kind of money is set aside for that? I guess once we have answers to those, I can ask some other questions.

Mr. Ellis: Well, I guess my first question back, Madam Chair, is that this is certainly something that is before the Legislature. It's not a line item budget, so, like, I would argue and question whether it's even in scope.

Mr. Sabir: That's okay. If nothing has been set aside for it in the budget, that's fine. We can move on.

Page 115, again, talks about developing strategies to address urban crime rates and adding patrol officers in Edmonton and Calgary. Through the chair, Minister, there is a lot of talk, but the fact remains that crime rates have been going up for the last four, five years, whatever the stats were that were included in the business plan, in urban centres and rural communities. Clearly, whatever the government is doing is not working since the crime rate is going up. The question I have for the minister, through the chair, is: what do you intend to do differently to bring that violent crime rate down in our communities?

9:40

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Well, there are a couple of things. First of all, I'm going to continue to advocate along with many other colleagues right across this country to have Bill C-75 repealed. C-75 has made it virtually impossible to keep somebody in what is known as pretrial custody. So what happens is that you have somebody who has committed an offence. That person may be a violent repeat criminal offender. C-75 is releasing that individual onto the streets, or in the case of many places, even in rural Alberta, as an example, people who are repeat criminal offenders when it comes to property crimes or thefts or whatever the case may be: those people are continuously being released into the streets. So, first of all, we can start at that basic level.

Obviously, I have said on many occasions that officer presence matters. When people are getting randomly stabbed in the streets of Calgary and Edmonton, when people do not feel safe walking down the streets, when people can't even take an LRT for fear of something horrific happening to them, we have to ask ourselves: why is this happening, and how can we stop this from happening? So number one is – look, I have no control over the federal government other than to continue to advocate for this. However, what I can do is help to support our local police services to ensure that we have an officer presence.

As I have said many times before to police officers, do your job, right? If somebody is committing a crime, arrest them. If the person is released again and they commit another crime, arrest them again, and keep arresting them if they keep committing crime up until the point they stop committing crime or, quite frankly, they leave the province. But I don't want anybody to look at law enforcement in this province and sit there and say, "Yeah, but you guys aren't doing your job" because I know that they are. I have nothing but the utmost respect for every police officer in this province, the hard work that they do. I get the frustration. I was on the street. I get the catch-and-release program that, unfortunately, has been plaguing our justice system.

We have to make sure that we support our law enforcement, and that is one of the main things that we can do for them.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister.

Through the chair, I do have a lot of respect for law enforcement and the work they do, but it's law enforcement who is telling us that you cannot police your way out of this crime, whether it's urban or rural. What needs to be done is that we need investment in housing, we need investment in mental health, we need investment in addiction, we need investment in social determinants of crime.

I will move on to page 115. Again, it talks about modernizing police standards and legislation to improve public trust. Through the chair, the question I have, Minister, is: can you talk about these standards, how they were developed? Are they uniform across the province, and are they public. What measures are you using to evaluate public trust in law enforcement?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Member. Through the chair, I'll talk very broadly, and then I'll ask Mr. Zablocki to supplement here. You know, one of the things I do talk about quite often is consistency and, for me, ensuring that there are standards right throughout the province. Essentially, there should be no difference in the level of service that you get in Calgary than what you would get in the most northern part of Alberta or the most southern part of Alberta. These are things that we're continuing to work on. I know that this type of consistency and predictability, I think, is part of something that helps to improve public trust and really stabilize a system all throughout this province. But if I can ask Mr. Zablocki to supplement, please.

Mr. Zablocki: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair. Curtis Zablocki with the public security division. Just following up on the minister's comments, public trust is really, I'll say, enhanced or emphasized with consistency in the application of law enforcement. It's important that across the province consistency is present, is very relevant, and our branch continues to work on building consistency. We have a specific team dedicated to policing standards followed up by regular and frequent audits of existing policing services. I'd also add that any other police services that may be created within the province of Alberta would be subject to these high standards, these high benchmarks for police service delivery within Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Through the chair, moving on to page 117, outcome 1, that talks about: Albertans are safe and secure in their communities, and it also talks about some focused work on hate-motivated crimes. A couple of questions. Through the chair, Minister, can you confirm if you're overseeing the hate crimes co-ordination unit? And, if so, what's the budget for it? What does its structure look like, and if you can talk briefly about the work they are doing? My second question is that there are many Albertans – many Albertans – in Indigenous communities, person-of-colour communities, and gender-diverse communities who do not feel safe in their communities. In particular with the recent UCP transgender policy, many have shared those concerns that it may give rise to hate-motivated crimes. So I would also . . .

Mr. Singh: Point of order.

Madam Chair, the point of order is under Standing Order 23(b), the member "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." I think the committee has convened for the purpose of considering the ministry's 2024 budget, including estimates, fiscal plan, and business plan. The matter that has been raised by the member about the transgender policy is not within the boundaries of these said topics.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks, Madam Chair. In fact, as we've been discussing up till this point for the last hour, each, you know, different elements of security for Albertans, which are budgeted and paid for and supported by the budget of this current year, so the

hate crimes or different kinds of crime, whatever they happen to be, are under the umbrella of this current budget.

The Chair: Thank you so much, members. I don't find this to be a point of order, so we'll get back to the discussion.

Please proceed.

Mr. Sabir: I think I've wrapped up my question of what impact, through the chair, the minister is seeing or likely to see from that policy on hate-motivated crimes.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Maybe I'll get Brad to supplement on the money and the budget component of it. But, look, the hate crimes co-ordination unit is, I would say, vitally important. I know that many police services throughout Alberta, Calgary, I'm sure the RCMP as well, have hate crimes co-ordination units embedded within their organizations, and then, of course, having that provincial component is just kind of a secondary oversight, which I think is fantastic. I think the more eyes, the better to look at these complaints that essentially come in, to have them reviewed and then reviewed again, and to ensure that the public has, of course, a right to feel safe and secure. Regardless of where they learn, worship, or socialize, I think that is extremely important. I think you touched on this, and if you didn't, I apologize, Member, but one of the other things is that we have that Alberta securities infrastructure program, which I would say has been enormously successful.

9:50

Through the chair, of course, you may recall that we expanded the scope of that for faith-based communities, especially those who are Muslim and Jewish, in light of the circumstances that are going on overseas. You know, I'm proud to say that that program is in place, that we've had members from both communities that have taken us up on that, and even – we talk about expanding scopes. As an example, we've allowed our sheriffs to expand that scope, again, to be utilized as an officer presence or a deterrent for some of our faith-based communities, especially those who may feel unsafe. So, yeah, very impressed and proud of the work that we're doing, but maybe we can get Brad. Can you touch on the money component of it?

Mr. Smith: Thank you. Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister of financial services. Through the chair, in the budget on the voted estimates, page 180 of the government estimates, in element 5.2 there is \$5 million for a hate crime grant, and that is supplemented by approximately half a million dollars for a hate crime co-ordinator.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister. Through the chair, I wasn't asking about the security infrastructure program, but I can tell you that it's a good program, and many faith-based organizations do appreciate that program. I do have questions about that later on in my documents, but I do remember writing something that I will ask about. How much the total grant is, and what is the update like? How many grants have been so far handed out?

Mr. Ellis: Sorry; \$2.5 million, is that the . . .

Mr. Sabir: Yeah. Through the chair, I thought last time it was \$5 million, but I will move on to the next question.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. It's just – sorry. Do you mind? Can I just supplement there? Yeah. I apologize. Again, my problem. I can't really see.

It has dispensed 253 individual grants, totalling more than \$2.5 million. So the total is not \$2.5 million. That's just what's been dispensed so far. Yeah. The budget is \$5 million.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Through the chair, Minister, in 1.5 of your key objectives, outcome 1, it talks about an ankle bracelet electronic monitoring program. My questions are pretty basic. Through the chair, who you have consulted with on this program. What other jurisdictions are using it successfully, and what the evaluation is? Where will you be procuring those bracelets from; how many? And what will be the total cost of the programs to Albertans?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Well, maybe we'll get you the numbers here because obviously this is a line item in the budget. Of course not wanting to presuppose any outcome of the House, but it's certainly something that we would be hoping to be able to put out there in the fall of this year. Yeah. I don't have the exact number, but almost every province is utilizing some form of electronic monitoring right now. I would say we were, very much so, an outlier in this particular field.

Look, I mean, I think to be honest with you, what really comes to mind is people who are victims – which traditionally falls on women who are victims of domestic violence – those are some of the most unpredictable things that a police officer can deal with on a regular basis and kind of some of the most unpredictable and dangerous things that courts, quite frankly, have to deal with. You know, having a tool in the toolbox for the prosecutors, the defence, for the judges is something that I think is extremely helpful. As I've indicated, the bail hearing system, I would argue, is still broken. We're seeing domestic offenders that are clearly being released and revictimizing their victims again and again to the point where, in some cases, some of these victims have been murdered.

You know, you asked me and what the public asked me is: "Let's try and think outside the box. Let's try to do something different." We're aware that these programs exist in other jurisdictions. We know that they're being utilized. We know that they're being successful, so let's get this going, and let's try and establish this. I think that's going to make a real difference in the community, especially for violent repeat criminal offenders and, I would say, on another note, especially those victims who might be victims of domestic violence.

The deputy minister will do the numbers.

Ms Lajeunesse: Thank you very much. The funding for electronic monitoring was initially given some funding in last year's budget, so we have \$2.8 million in this year's budget from last year to do the partial implementation, starting later this fall, and then full funding for the initiative is in next year's budget of \$5.3 million. In addition, this year we've received \$3 million in capital to support the rollout of the program.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Through the chair, initiatives supporting key objective 1: \$10 million has been allocated to support Edmonton and Calgary. The question I have is: what will this money be spent on? Is that money for hiring those 100 police officers? If so, how many have been hired so far? A related question is that this initiative is focused on Calgary and Edmonton, while stats show that violent crime and property crime are increasing in rural areas as well, so what's specifically being done to address that?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I will get Mr. Zablocki here to supplement a little bit if he has some of the exact numbers. But I think, Member, you hit the nail on the head. This is money that is going towards the

recruiting and hiring and, of course, the deployment of these officers on the streets of Calgary and Edmonton. Again, that visible presence matters. This is a commitment that this government made. As I have said in the House before, quite frankly, I don't do the hiring, I don't do the recruiting, and I certainly don't do the training. But I can tell you that we are in constant communication with both Edmonton and Calgary. They tell me that not only is work on the way, but there are members that they can say are deployed on the streets that they directly attribute to the funding that we provided.

Curtis, do you have anything you can supplement on that?

Mr. Zablocki: What I would like to add is that both Edmonton and Calgary police services aim to have 25 of those police officers on the ground in the first year of this initiative.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you.

You talked about rural. I mean, this is why, you know, there's an additional \$20.9 million being given, at least, to the RCMP for the police service agreement to, again, help ensure that folks in rural Alberta are being protected, and I have expanded also the scope of the sheriffs, allowing them to back up RCMP on calls for service currently.

Again, Alberta is extremely big. Many of our officers right now are, you know, doing the best that they can. As I've stated before, I do not care what the uniform is. When somebody calls 911, I expect somebody to show up to the call. If there's a sheriff that is two minutes away from a call, I am very certain that when you are facing a crisis, especially if somebody, God forbid, was breaking into your house, knowing that a sheriff was two minutes away and could have done something, I'm not entirely sure how you can explain to somebody, spending 20 minutes explaining how they don't have the power and authority to do that: that to me is completely unacceptable. We are just trying to supplement and augment the support of the RCMP right now.

Go ahead, Curtis.

10:00

Mr. Zablocki: Madam Chair, augmenting the RCMP, I would say over the last four years, has been under the police funding model, a great initiative that started in 2020 and has run up to this year inclusive and has added over 500 staff and almost 300 fully trained police officers to rural Alberta. A number of civilian staff as well are, obviously, necessary to support those front-line policing efforts. The focus, you know, I can add, has been on rural Alberta in the context of enhancing visibility, for example, as well as reducing response times.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Through the chair, Minister, I do understand that you don't do hiring. All I am looking for is: how many of those officers have already been hired? I got some answer: 25 each in the first year. Did I get it right that they are yet to be hired and that by the end of this year there will be 25 each in Calgary and Edmonton?

Mr. Zablocki: I don't think we're aware of exactly where each service is with their exact numbers, but, yes, sir, that's the goal, to have 25 in each agency by the end of the first year.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Through the chair, a follow-up question. That you're augmenting it with sheriffs may work in certain circumstances, but some people have raised concerns about the level of their training in comparison to other professional forces and that that may not work in many cases and, second, that it may put their lives at risk if they are not

trained to do something that other forces are trained to do. So the question is in relation to their effectiveness and their safety.

Mr. Ellis: Well, I'll get Curtis to supplement this. I mean, maybe I can't speak, too, because I don't want to speculate, but as far as the highway patrol for the sheriffs: no different than our fish and wildlife officers. They are the closest thing, from a peace officer perspective, to being a police officer. They are trained in use of force. That's why they have use-of-force weapons, right?

I would caution anybody to say that they may not be trained to a certain level, because I would say that, you know, they wouldn't be allowed to carry a handgun, wouldn't be allowed to have any other use-of-force weapons if they were not trained. They do not have the full scope and powers of the Criminal Code the way a police officer would have. However, what we're talking about here are exigent circumstances.

As I've indicated before, in exigent circumstances, where somebody's life might be at risk, where somebody is fearing for their life, or where we have a situation which is a catastrophic incident that might be occurring on a highway, as an example, I would say that it would be completely negligent to have that officer stand by or not attend or anything, to not at least assist the RCMP. As I've stated before, the RCMP would still become the primary on that call, and I can get into details on police operations with primary, secondary, and what all that sort of stuff means.

However, I can tell you that when somebody is having their house broken into, they want somebody to show up. They're not going to be waiting a half-hour, hour, hour and a half because of the geographical size of this province and where an officer happens to be sitting at a particular time. If somebody is close by, I'm trying to get somebody there, and that's what we're trying to do. Again, we're trying to augment and support the RCMP and support the work that they're doing.

Do you want to supplement that, Curtis?

Mr. Zablocki: If I could, please. Madam Chair, I would just add, you know, to the point of the question, that training is absolutely critical for police officers and peace officers. We absolutely ensure that as duties and functions are assigned, the training is commensurate with the activities and the functions that we're asking those individuals to complete.

I'll give you an example. The rural Alberta provincial integrated defence, or RAPID, I think is a good example of how the government has enhanced the training of certain sheriffs, starting with fish and wildlife, moving to the sheriffs highway patrol as well, to enable them to assist and support the police of jurisdiction, most often the RCMP in rural Alberta, and augment and support them as they go about their duties. We did absolutely ensure that we provided this additional training to the sheriffs and to the fish and wildlife officers so that they could do that function safely for themselves and safely for the public.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Through the chair, outcome 2, "Albertans are supported in their interactions with the justice system," talks about the recovery-oriented system of care and also talks about programs to stop drugs from entering the province. The question I have is specific to that program. What specific action is this ministry taking to stop drugs, illegal guns, and those things from entering the province?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I mean, I know Curtis is intimately familiar with this, so I'll get him to supplement, but certainly from a very high level we have supports for Alberta law enforcement response teams, which include, of course, members from all police agencies,

you know, everything from the RCMP to Edmonton and Calgary. It doesn't matter what the police service is. Sheriffs: actually, I think we have them embedded into our Alberta law enforcement response teams.

To your point, Member, yes, we have significant concerns that drugs, guns, human trafficking are coming across the border from the United States. Certainly, ALERT has been given not just the funding but the ability to deal with that. They work with the Canada Border Services Agency. I know it's extremely important, obviously, with the RCMP being a federal police service, the ability to build those relationships with friends in the United States to help us provide information and intelligence on what sort of things are at least attempting to be smuggled across the border.

Curtis, I don't know if you can supplement more on what ALERT is doing.

Mr. Zablocki: Minister, I might just shift it to speak about, you know, some of the plans that we have in place within the sheriffs branch and maybe more specifically in that context. We are planning to create, through our sheriffs highway patrol, specific interdiction teams, Madam Chair. This unit is targeted to receive funding of approximately \$2.9 million, beginning in the '25-26 fiscal year, to create these teams, plus additional ongoing funding per year after that.

Guns and gangs entering the province: it is front of mind for us. As the minister indicated, ALERT plays a very significant role in working within the province, but they also work interprovincially as well, collaborating with other police services. We know it doesn't all generate or start here within our province.

I'll maybe stop there. Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Actually, do you mind if I supplement one thing, Chair, if the member is okay with it? Yeah? He talked about interdiction teams. I think it's important to know that our sheriffs are commercial-vehicle trained, and that is no easy course and no easy feat to be trained in. When we're talking about commercial vehicles, that is the ability to not just stop a commercial vehicle – i.e., a semi that is carrying large goods – but the intelligence that, of course, we receive from ALERT as well as other policing agencies, both in the United States and across the country, is that a lot of this illegal stuff such as drugs, guns, and, unfortunately, human trafficking are kind of coming across the border using commercial vehicles.

Their training on this is unique, I can tell you as a former law enforcement officer. I mean, you know, asking for a driver's licence, registration, and insurance on a commercial vehicle is really all I could do. Their unique training has been a huge asset. I know that they're working very well with the RCMP as well as the Alberta law enforcement response teams to help stop this illegal stuff from coming across our borders.

10:10

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister.

We'll move on to outcomes, key objective 2.5, "improve access to timely and efficient services and supports for victims of crime and tragedy." I have three questions on this one. First, through the chair, your own documents say that it took 54 days – 54 days – to get these services to victims and survivors of crimes last year, and the targets are not that great, either. It's still, the government is saying, around 40, 45 days. The question I have is: do you think that's the best the government can do to get the supports to victims of crimes?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Member, for the question, and, of course, thank you, Chair. Look, I mean, this is why we're doing an overhaul

of victims' services. What we're trying to find – and I know the member would appreciate this. We're trying to get consistency throughout the province. We're trying to get predictable and sustainable funding throughout the province.

You know, he talked about the delay. There are some jurisdictions – and I can name them: Athabasca, Boyle, Drumheller, Hanna, Oyen, Bow Island, Foremost, Carson, Jasper, Maskwacis, Redwater, Smoky Lake, Sylvan Lake, Wabasca, and Crownsnest Pass – that had no victims' services, right? Are there things that we need to do to improve? A hundred per cent. That is why we're doing a complete revamping of the system and making sure that we have consistency and predictable, sustainable funding and that victims' services is a top priority throughout the province.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Through the chair, Minister, the existing victims' services community boards are against this new four-zone, top-heavy model, and they have criticized publicly those changes. They also complain about the lack of consultation. The Rural Municipalities of Alberta have opposed these changes into four larger zones, and some of them have made the argument that while the government is restructuring AHS to go back to local health authority boards and giving governance back to the local communities, then why the double standard that you are dismantling those local victims' services community boards and turning them into four larger zones, which doesn't guarantee that it will improve services?

The local boards and local people who are working there: they knew their communities the best. The UCP MLA report also didn't find anything wrong with those boards. They even said that they are going above and beyond. So my question is: why fix something that's not broken?

Mr. Ellis: Well, it is broken. I just explained to you that there are many jurisdictions that had zero victims' services. Look, we're trying to alleviate pressure off some of the people. I mean, there are victims' services jurisdictions that were funded . . .

The Chair: And that's our time, Minister. Thank you so much.

That concludes the portion of questions for the Official Opposition.

We'll now move over to the independent member for 20 minutes. Member, would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Mrs. Johnson: Yes, please.

The Chair: Minister, what's your preference?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. That's fine.

The Chair: All right. Let's proceed.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the minister. On page 115 of the ministerial business plan Alberta sheriffs have been granted authority to investigate a wider range of offences, including impaired driving, in an attempt to reduce police response times, deter crime, and reinforce property rights. What measurable outcomes have been noted so far with our sheriffs and Alberta crime?

On a similar subject, in the 2024-25 government estimates, page 181, 2.1, the line item for Alberta sheriffs for 2023-24 is \$2,695,000 and increases to \$8,695,000 for '24-25. Can the minister explain this massive increase in the number?

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Well, I'll talk about the impaired driving one first, and maybe I'll get Brad to supplement the increase in the numbers. Member, thank you very much for noting this. The granting of the

additional powers to our sheriffs has alleviated a lot of pressure off RCMP, especially in rural Alberta; I think the number is about 4,000 that they have done, as far as impaired driving.

When you really think about that, you know, prior to giving them the authority to do an impaired driving – I used to be a certified breath technician for the province of Alberta. There is very much a time importance when you're doing an impaired driving. In the case of a sheriff who had stopped somebody for impaired driving, I had to find an RCMP officer to assist with that, and that may or may not happen. If it didn't happen, then unfortunately that person may get off with only an administrative penalty as opposed to the criminal offence for which they were stopped and possibly arrested for at that particular time. The fact that we have been able to alleviate pressure off the RCMP, allowing them to take other calls to service, I think is just another step in the evolution of what the sheriffs have been doing to augment and support our RCMP friends.

Sorry, Brad. Can you touch a little bit on the numbers increase?

Mr. Smith: Yes. Thank you, Minister. Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister of financial services, through the chair.

On page 180, the voted estimates, the line 2.1 for sheriffs has increased over budget by \$4.6 million; \$2.7 million of that is for the Alberta public security application software. It's a suite of software that supports front-line sheriff operations and general inflationary increases for sheriffs as well. Then you reference page 181 on capital investment. There is an increase in the capital investment for the sheriffs for the expansion of their communication systems.

Thank you.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister and staff for that answer. I'm glad to see that we're supporting our RCMP, our police. Communication is important; I think we would all agree on that.

On page 118 of the ministerial business plan it refers to violent and property crime rates per 100,000 populations, and I believe my colleague has already referred to this. Being a rural MLA in a rural constituency, this is very important to me, and I notice rural violent crime is continually rising since 2018, yet rural property crime rate, with one exception in 2019, has continued to decrease. Can the minister explain these trends?

Mr. Ellis: Yes. It really has to do with the lack of accountability. I, you know, continue to say this because this is what it boils down to, again. When C-75 came into play, it made it virtually impossible to keep anybody in what is known as pretrial custody. The lack of accountability in the justice system – I think this has been pointed out, whether it be here in Alberta, but right across Canada there's usually a small section of the population that are committing these types of offences, whether it be property offences or violent offences, and when they know that when they get arrested that they're going to be released, it emboldens them. It emboldens them to say, "Okay. Well, yeah. So what? It's going to inconvenience me, I'll get arrested, but I'll get out, and I will maybe make another poor decision" in light of the one that they had already made. We are continuing to see this rise in violence, again, because many of these offenders know that there are no consequences or little to no consequences for their actions.

10:20

As I have said before, especially when it pertains to organized crime, the federal NDP-Liberal alliance has created an environment that has allowed organized crime to thrive with little to no consequences, and we are seeing not just street-level gangs; we are talking about the big organized crime, the cartels that are coming from other areas of the world, that are setting up shop knowing darn

well that if they get arrested, they'll be out. This is why you are seeing the fentanyl explosion that is occurring right now. This is why you are seeing the preying upon – you saw this in Edmonton specifically, and I'll use this as an example. Many of the folks in Edmonton were being preyed upon by organized crime. Some of these encampments, as an example, were operated by organized crime. They were charging victims, I would say, or extremely vulnerable people for using water fountains, for walking past a bridge. I mean, it was essentially a form of extortion. Yeah. I mean, this is the type of stuff that is setting up when there are no consequences for people's actions.

These are the policies, you know, quite frankly, the NDP-Liberal policies, that over the past eight years have been an abject failure, and – I have been very public about this – we are less safe in Canada because of these policies. I am doing what I can within the powers that I have to try to keep Albertans safe, but it is a struggle when you have an NDP-Liberal government that is making policies that are making it virtually impossible to keep somebody in jail right now.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. The city of Lacombe currently manages their own municipal police force, and the feedback I get from constituents is very positive. As the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services are you responsible for overseeing municipal police forces, and if so, what budget line item would reflect the funding for this? How many municipal police forces exist now in Alberta, and can you explain their funding model? On a value-for-dollar basis how do RCMP, provincial sheriffs, and municipal police forces compare?

Mr. Ellis: There was a lot in there. I'm going to have to reflect on my memory while my staff here go and try and get some of the answers for you. Look, we have some wonderful police services in Alberta. Well, they're all wonderful, to be honest with you, and Lacombe is no different. You know, one of the things that we try to do is empower municipalities. Lacombe is obviously a long-established police service. Camrose is a long-established police service. These are small communities. Regardless, we must respect the people within their communities to say: "You know what? We're happy with our police service." That is, quite frankly, the feedback that I've been getting throughout Alberta.

You know, I reject anybody who says that all of Alberta wants to go down one particular path because that is not true. I mean, we have a very diverse and wonderful population all throughout the province. There are some folks that are completely happy with status quo, and that's totally fine. I respect that. It's not about a heavy-handed government. And then we have some folks that are looking for other options.

I can think of at least, I think, four Indigenous communities, as an example, that have indicated to us that they would like to move in a different direction other than the current policing model that we have. For us it's not about the heavy-handed government forcing something upon our First Nations people; we want to be able to empower them, listen to them, and respect their wishes. That's precisely what we're doing in Siksika Nation. That's precisely what we're doing in Enoch. That's precisely what we're doing for the entirety of Treaty 8, is listening to them, respecting them, and trying to meet the needs of their communities.

Regarding Grande Prairie: another perfect example. You know, they indicated to the province that they would like to go in a different direction. I think we gave them \$9.8 million over two years, which is a transitional grant. I can tell you that that process is well under way. They are doing an outstanding job. But that was,

again, listening to the people of Grande Prairie, listening to their leadership, and respecting them and the decision that they make. That is something, maybe a difference that we do as opposed to what, we'll say, others will do.

Curtis, do you have any specific numbers for the member?

Mr. Zablocki: I would add, through the chair, if I could, that there are seven municipal police services here in the province of Alberta: Lacombe, Camrose, Taber, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and, of course, Edmonton and Calgary. In due course, Grande Prairie will join that group. Three Indigenous police services: the Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service, the Lakeshore police service, and the Blood Tribe Police Service.

Just in relation to a question in the last session, the cost share between the province and the federal government is 48 per cent provincial, 52 per cent federal in the context of support for those First Nations services. And just in relation to the original question as well, I think as everybody knows and assumes, the municipal services are supported primarily by their municipalities but also provincially through grants and other mechanisms as well by the province.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: ADM Brad Smith would like to supplement as well.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Minister, through the chair. Municipalities: we also issued \$90 million of municipal police assistance grant; it's called the police support grant. That's in addition to the funding available for Indigenous and municipalities that wish to explore alternative policing models that the minister has referred to.

Thank you.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. Urban and rural crime prevention can be quite different, as you know, and require different approaches. Many rural constituents have formed rural crime watch groups. Next week the Red Deer-Lacombe rural crime watch is having their AGM, which I plan to attend. Can the minister explain how the ministry is supporting rural crime watch groups and where that is reflected in the budget?

Mr. Ellis: The answer is yes. In fact, if I – going off memory here; I know everybody is going to be looking feverishly for where it is in the budget line item. Look, in order to have a successful, you know, police service, regardless of where you are, it really is about public trust. With that public trust it's the engagement that you have – I'm looking at you, Madam Chair, right? – with the community, as an example, right?

When you have a community that trusts the police, then this is where you have, as the member indicated, this positive engagement, the rural crime watches because they want to support their law enforcement. They know how hard it is out there. They know that they're working as hard as they can and going call to call to call; they get that. They understand that, so they want to augment and support their communities.

When you put division into a community and that of a police service, then what happens is that's where you have this just disconnect. This is where you have this confrontation between the public and the law enforcement community. There's no greater example of that – and I don't want to pinpoint anybody specifically, but certain areas, we'll say, within the United States that you see. So this is why you see my overarching vision where the police are not an arm of the state but instead an extension and reflection of the communities that they serve.

With that building of the relationship – yes. As a government, sure; we absolutely support, you know, rural crime watch. We support those who are going to augment and support, from a volunteer level or even from a small-granting type level, the law enforcement. But we always have to be very careful that helping from an observe-and-report perspective – and then there's vigilantism, to be a vigilante, right? We have to be very careful of that. I've done rural town halls before myself, and a lot of times I get a lot of questions about use of force, which – I think for the record and so everybody is aware, use of force, especially in the Criminal Code is very, very subjective.

10:30

You know, there are a few folks at this table, including myself, that are trained in use of force, so understanding when it is appropriate to use, you know, kind of what we call a verbal mechanism as opposed to a use-of-force weapon all the way to lethal force. But you will never see a law enforcement officer advising anybody when to use force because, quite frankly, people aren't trained in it. We will always sit there and say to you: call 911.

However, I know that's not your question. Your question had to do with the supports, the volunteers, the people that are the rural crime watch type folks. The answer is yes. We do support them.

Curtis, do you have a line item on that one?

Ms Lajeunesse: I do.

Mr. Ellis: You do? Okay. Go ahead, Deputy.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. On page 180, under element 5.2, there are a number of grants captured there that support various associations, rural crime watch and the like. The total is just over about \$3 million, 3 and a half million dollars.

Mrs. Johnson: I missed that. What was it?

Ms Lajeunesse: Element 5.2 on page 180.

Mrs. Johnson: Three point five million?

Ms Lajeunesse: I think it's right around there, yeah.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you.

All right. In light of the time I'll just go to the next question. I think this might take up the rest of the time. The therapeutic living units support the priority of recovery, and the government has made it clear this is a high priority. Can you explain more about the therapeutic living units and how recovery is happening there and where this can be found in Budget 2024?

Mr. Ellis: Well, I'll go to Brad as far as where it's found in the budget. The therapeutic living units. I think I've said this already before, but, you know, I used to be a judicial interim release hearing officer. I used to deal with people that had come in with an acute form of addiction, whether it be alcohol or crack or whatever the case may be. I used to deal with them once they were sober and used to bring them in front of a justice of the peace. What I observed is that when I was reading the individual their charges, typically the response I was getting on a fairly consistent basis was one of: "Oh, my goodness. I can't believe what I did." There was enormous regret, and they knew at that particular moment that they needed help. Unfortunately, years and years ago there really was not that help to be found.

You know, when I had the opportunity to be in a position where I could actually do something, this is where I put in place what is known as the virtual opioid dependency program. We installed that

in pretty much every police service in Alberta to get somebody on evidence-based medication right away – right? – if they so choose. I mean, it was obviously an option. They didn't have to take it.

Now, for those people that eventually went on to remand and were detained in a correctional facility, you know, as I've indicated before, the goal is not to just incarcerate somebody and then release them after whatever that time period is and then give them an LRT ticket and send them back on the streets and have the whole cycle repeat itself.

Again, many people that are in there are going through a neurobiological illness, the struggles of addiction, so they look for that assistance. We've provided to them all the evidence-based medication that we can. There's Suboxone, and there's Sublocade, as examples. The unique thing about Sublocade – sorry. Let me get to Suboxone. Suboxone is a bit of a tablet that goes on your tongue, and then it's dissolved. Sublocade is an injection, but it gives somebody what is about 30 days of relief. So when you think about it as an addict, if you can get 30 days of relief to kind of set your head straight in order to start to move on and think about things that are better for you, that's a good thing.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes our time.

We'll take our five-minute break now. Thanks, everyone.

[The committee adjourned from 10:35 a.m. to 10:40 a.m.]

The Chair: All right, everyone. That concludes our five-minute break.

We'll now move to 20 minutes for the government caucus members. Please proceed, Member. But let's check in. Minister, do you want to continue doing back and forth, or would you like block time?

Mr. Ellis: Back and forth is fine.

The Chair: Back and forth.

Please proceed, Member.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you thank you to the minister and his team for joining us this morning. Obviously, public safety is an issue at the top of everyone's mind. I know that when I speak to my constituents, it's something that they're always concerned about, of course; you know, personal security and their property. Leduc-Beaumont is blessed, of course, to have the Nisku Business Park and the airport, so we have a lot of businesses and a lot of small businesses as well. Our office will often take calls about what we can do to make sure that when they make investments, their life savings, into their business, we can keep that property safe for them and that their employees, of course, are feeling safe and secure when they get to go into work. So, obviously, a really important part of your mandate.

I appreciated the comments from my fellow members about rural crime. I grew up in rural Alberta, and I've also lived in both big cities in Alberta, so I certainly appreciate the differences but also the importance of approaches for both rural and urban. Maybe I'd start there, on sort of a community level and, specifically, on what some future policing options would look like in specific communities.

I'm going to ask about objective 1.4 on page 117, and that references: "support municipalities and Indigenous communities interested in exploring different models of policing and public safety." Of course, a couple of pages earlier than that, on page 115, it talks about how, you know, the ministry provides provincial policing through an agreement with the federal government that establishes the RCMP as the provincial police service, but it also

supports municipal policing through policing grants. Through the chair, of course, to the minister: can you tell us a little bit about the plan for the RCMP in Alberta and also, then, how specific communities might be able to explore different policing options?

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Well, thank you very much, Member, for the question, of course, through the chair. We have established what are known as police transition study grants, I think \$6 million over two years. I think we've had well over 20 municipalities that have applied for these grants. They are certainly slowly coming in. Really, it's about empowering municipalities. As I've said before, this is not about, you know, the heavy hand of government telling somebody what to do; it's about empowerment.

I think it's been said in this room before, you know, that you who live in your community know your community the best, so we wanted to work with municipalities all throughout Alberta. Despite what some might say, there are varying opinions on this all throughout Alberta. I have had many a municipality indicate to me, as part of these varying opinions, that they're happy with the status quo, I've had some that are looking at combining grants to figure out some form of regional type of policing, I've had some indicate to me that they would like their own municipal police service, and, of course, everything in between.

Rather than throwing, we'll say, a problem my way and sitting there and saying, you know, "Impose something on me" – that's not what I want to do; that's not what I'm going to do – we've just asked for a completely independent study to be done in your community that we will pay for. The grant is about \$30,000, and the independent study will determine what is best for your community. You come back to me with that, and we'll figure out how to work with you to best suit the needs of your community. Again, there are a lot of varying opinions on this. Nothing of this is homogeneous in any way whatsoever.

Yeah. I mean, we're happy to continue to work with municipalities, and we're happy to make sure that we're meeting their needs from a public safety perspective, and we're happy to work with them regardless of what other options might be.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, through the chair, to the minister for that answer. It's certainly important that we, you know, allow our municipalities to consider what's best for them. Again, through the chair, of course, I'd like to touch on something that you spoke a little bit about earlier, this is, again, on page 117, the \$10 million investment that would support Edmonton and Calgary to assist their policing partners and street-level law enforcement in high-crime areas such as downtown cores and public transit. I think this is an extremely relevant piece of this business plan.

Again, having lived in both Edmonton and Calgary and now currently living in the capital region, it's been a concern of mine personally, as someone who would often take the public transportation in Edmonton, to see that deteriorate to the point where I never really felt comfortable doing so. Your back is always up. You're always trying to scan for the social disorder that you would see on the public transportation. I can only imagine. Well, I know that in Leduc-Beaumont people talk to me about that same issue all the time. I, of course, have family and friends in Edmonton and Calgary, as many of us do, and when they're looking to just go do their jobs, to take their kids to recreational opportunities, to enjoy their cities, it's disappointing that people can't feel like that's a safe option for them.

Through the chair to the minister: could you maybe expand on how this funding will be allocated and what benefits it will bring for Albertans? Specifically, if you wouldn't mind, Minister, can

you expand how this funding will be used to address transit concerns specifically? Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Member. Yeah. I mean, we actually didn't wait for budget; we actually accelerated this program to provide both Edmonton and Calgary the funding for these officers. But, look, policing itself is extremely complex. The justice system is extremely complex. Again, we are trying to tackle this from a multitude of different ways. You know, it isn't necessarily what people think. Policing has evolved. Remember? So think about the overarching vision, not an arm of the state but an extension and reflection of the community that we serve. You know, nothing was a greater example of that than the way that government came together in Edmonton, quite frankly, to dismantle these encampments.

You know, some of the proponents and activists, we'll say, were saying, "You're just arresting people, and you're throwing them in jail," and I can tell you that nothing could be further from the truth than that. In fact, the numbers that I got from Minister Nixon were in the realm of about 70-ish per cent of the people that basically, you know, once the police went in there and said "Hey; how can I help you?" they actually took us up on the offer to get them into the triage centre and get them on a path to wellness. Absolutely.

There are members that talked about this earlier, about housing. Housing is a component of that. There's no doubt about that, but we also have to make sure that we're addressing people that have severe mental health and addictions issues. There are some people that are out there that have brain damage, as an example. As I indicated earlier, many of these people are being preyed upon by organized crime. So getting those folks out of there – and I think I was telling one of the other members the story about my time when I was in arrest processing and when that person had that moment of: "Oh, my goodness. What did I do? I need help." That's precisely what I anticipated, and that's precisely what actually happened on the streets of Edmonton where 70 per cent of those people, who took us up on the resources, were guided into these triage centres.

When they knew that the organized gang member was not going to be there to influence them in any way, they had that moment where they're saying: yes; I don't want to live this life anymore; I want help, and please help me. This is why we had the success that we had. We utilized sheriffs in this to work with the Edmonton Police Service, to augment and support the Edmonton Police Service. We had sheriffs that were outside of some of the shelters here. Why? To stop the gang members from unduly influencing these people.

10:50

You know, I myself have, just in driving around, seen a marked improvement. I had heard stories from the business communities in Edmonton in a positive way saying: we're noticing it's better in Edmonton. I have heard people saying, "Hey, I was trying to sell my house or my condo," as an example, "but I couldn't do it because anybody that would come and look in the neighbourhood didn't want to buy in my neighbourhood" are now able to sell their real estate. So we're already seeing a marked improvement.

Despite the detractors that want to say it's all about throwing people in jail, actually, I was told by the Edmonton police chief that there was one arrest, and it was one arrest of somebody who had outstanding warrants. Regardless of whether that person, you know, was encountered in a tent or encountered on the street in a lawful way, that person had the outstanding warrants and would have been arrested anyway.

You know, you talked about transit as well. I mean, the spillover to that is virtually the same. We have to make sure that people feel

safe, and feeling safe means walking down the street. I've said this before as well, right? We all have rights. You have a right to walk down the street and not be stabbed. You have a right to walk down the street and not inhale second-hand crystal meth smoke. Quite frankly, many of these people that have severe mental health and addictions issues have a right not to be preyed upon by organized crime, so precisely that is what we're doing.

We are going after the gang members and the organized crime members. We are doing what we can from a law enforcement perspective, working collaboratively with Minister Amery in Justice to, you know, ask for detention when deemed necessary in law. Yeah. I mean, we're proud of the success that we had in this.

Mr. Lundy: Through the chair, thank you for that information, Minister, and for all your hard work.

I would like to cede my time to MLA Long.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Member. Thank you, Chair, and through you thank you to the minister and his team. You know, for me, I look at the signs of good leadership. Obviously, competency is a key component but also a willingness to surround yourself with people who have different perspectives and listening to those perspectives, and that's something that I see from this minister in this portfolio. I just really appreciate the sign of leadership that he has displayed.

With that said, we've heard a lot of things already today, Chair, and I can appreciate the efforts that are being made in particular around rural crime. I do echo the things I've heard from the minister around the federal bail system, commonly called the catch-and-release system. You know, in my communities I don't find a lot of defund-the-police movement folks. I actually often reflect on some signs I've seen in downtown Edmonton, and I know that I've seen them at city hall in Edmonton: the refund-the-police movement, where people are supportive of their officers and appreciate the efforts that are made to protect our community and integrate themselves into our communities. Yet a lot of those efforts that our officers are putting forward are met with little recourse once these folks that are being arrested enter into the justice system.

I have countless stories of people arrested 23 and 32 times, many of them on outstanding warrants, who are subsequently released with no financial requirement or little financial requirement and then go back out and are arrested the same day again. Little deterrent on crime. Unfortunately, for us it is a system that is largely left out of our hands from my understanding. But I do want to acknowledge the police officers themselves and the efforts that they are making to keep our communities safe.

With that said, rural crime rates do remain high, and communities are still left uneasy. I commend the ministry on focusing so much time and effort and understanding the issues in rural Alberta and attempting to tackle the issues head on.

On page 117 key objective 1.2 of the business plan reinforces the commitment to focus work on rural crime. With that said, you know, we've heard of about 500 staff and over 300 police officers being added in rural Alberta. I'm also wondering how the funding will be used to specifically deter crime in rural areas beyond the visible presence of law enforcement. Then what obstacles is the ministry facing in encountering and addressing rural crime, and with that how are you working with municipalities, specifically, who are still lacking law enforcement personnel?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. You know, as I've indicated, we are doing what we can to augment and support our friends in the RCMP, but, please, do not make – not that you're doing this, Member. But people need to understand that the challenges that we are facing are

not exclusive to Alberta. I have spoken to colleagues throughout this country – and I have been very public about this. I have said this at town halls, at certain opportunities I've had with the media. The RCMP have been facing a significant challenge when it comes to human resources and hiring. That's not to say that they are not putting their best foot forward in trying to rectify this. I certainly have assurances from the commissioner himself that that is an absolute priority of his, but that doesn't take away the reality that is currently ongoing throughout Canada.

From Nova Scotia and colleagues I have talked to in Nova Scotia, from colleagues that have contract policing all throughout Canada, they are facing considerable shortages in the number of officers that they should have compared to what they do have, right? That has been a challenge that B.C. and Saskatchewan and everybody else – I mean, Saskatchewan has gone and created their own marshal service at this time, marshal police service, again to try and augment and support the RCMP.

You know what? I'm going to pass it back to you, Member, while I cough.

Thank you.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Minister. I'll change things up very quickly if that's okay. As people around the province are aware, my communities faced significant challenges this past spring and summer with emergencies. You know, namely, I want to focus on the fire aspect of those emergencies. We're aware that our province has been divided into two main areas for forestry, specifically, the white zone and the green zone. I've been hearing from many constituents who, based on their experiences this past summer, specifically, are asking if the province and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency would consider, basically, when we're called in to face an emergency, just saying: "Hey, it doesn't matter what zone this fire is starting in or coming from. We have the expertise. We will take over this emergency." I'm curious, on behalf of my constituents, about that and if that is something that your ministry has the budget to do and has the ability to do. Then, also, what role can local folks contribute to helping out our emergency response efforts if we are limited in resources?

Mr. Ellis: Well, we have 15 seconds. I mean, the simple answer is: of course, we're supporting not only your municipality but other municipalities. I think if we get to the next block of questions, I'll ask ADM Lacroix to supplement with a more fulsome answer.

11:00

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the government's block.

Now we'll move to the second round of questions and responses. The speaking rotation going forward will be the same as the first round, starting with the Official Opposition, followed by the independent member and then the government caucus. However, the speaking times are now reduced to five minutes for the duration of the meeting. We'll begin this rotation with a member of the Official Opposition, who will have up to five minutes for questions and comments, followed by a response from the minister, who may speak for up to five minutes. Both individuals have an opportunity to speak. We will then move to the next caucus in rotation.

If the member and minister agree to share time, we can proceed.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Yes. I would like that if the minister is okay with it.

Mr. Ellis: Yes.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Through the chair, the question is about the strategic plan 2024-27. Page 23 talks about implementing the Alberta Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Roadmap. The question I have is: Minister, what specific role your ministry has in this project, if any, and can you talk briefly about it?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Great question. I know Minister Wilson, I think, is, we'll say, more of a lead on this, but certainly – maybe I'll get ADM Zablocki to supplement this from the policing perspective. But let me just say this. The missing and murdered Indigenous women's file is something that I would say is very near and dear to my heart. You know, this is why we had enormous investment in human trafficking, in creating the centre to combat human trafficking.

If I can just maybe add an example of this, while the police service in Edmonton was taking down the tents, they found a woman who was on the missing and murdered Indigenous women's list for five years, and she was reunited with her family. So, you know, I reject anyone who says that anyone wants to or is choosing to stay in this life. This particular individual was being trafficked, being fed drugs. As I've indicated, organized crime was running rampant, and we are continuing to provide all supports that we can to Minister Wilson and our friends in Treaty 6, our friends in Treaty 7, our friends in Treaty 8 to do what we can in what I would say true reconciliation to help them out.

Curtis, can you supplement that in any way?

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. Absolutely. I'd be happy to do that, Madam Chair. I'll just speak briefly about the FILU, so the family information liaison unit. Those are critical points of contact for families that have missing persons within their family units, and these are positions that have been funded for a number of years now, and we continue to fund them. This is an initiative that receives, you know, up to \$1.3 million on an annual basis. These roles, these positions, do some critical things. They update the family on criminal investigations, court proceedings. If there's a fatality inquiry involved, they make connections to counselling and spiritual resources, including elders and such, if that's what families wish and require. They're contacts with the police services, too, which is important for updates on the status of investigations, the progress of investigations in regard to their family members and their loved ones. So a very critical function that we continue.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, through the chair.

The next question is about the strategic plan page 20. It's about the precharge assessment system. Where is that program at? Are there any concerns about independence of the police work since they have to consult with and decide after talking to a Crown prosecutor?

Mr. Ellis: I think precharge is Justice, my friend.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. We'll move on to Public Safety estimates. On the first line items – minister, deputy minister, corporate services – the budget is going up from \$8.6 million to \$10.4 million. What's the reason for this increase, what it will be spent on?

Mr. Ellis: Brad Smith would like to answer that.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Minister, through the chair. Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister of financial services. The corporate services line on page 180, element 1.3, is increasing budget over budget by about \$1.8 million. It's primarily just a transfer from Justice with respect to changes to shared services to reflect the

previous Justice and Solicitor General department and now the two departments.

Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Thank you.

Line 2.1, 2.2, they are also increasing slightly. If you can talk about the reason for those increases.

Mr. Ellis: Again, we'll go to Brad Smith to answer.

Mr. Smith: Line 2.1 and 2.2, those are the sheriffs. We earlier spoke about that. Just bear with me. I will turn to that. So 2.1, Alberta sheriffs, is increasing \$4.599 million budget over budget; \$2.7 million of that is for the Alberta public security application. It's a software suite for front-line operations for sheriffs. There is approximately \$1.9 million in inflationary and salary increases in that line as well.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Through the chair, line 2.3, provincial security intelligence office. Last time around we did talk about the rural surveillance program. Is this one something different or does that program still come under this line item?

Mr. Ellis: It's different.

Go ahead.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you, through the chair. We might ask ADM Zablocki to supplement. The provincial security intelligence office is a centralized office that co-ordinates and assists with security intelligence across the province. The rural surveillance is a dedicated team being established in the sheriffs to support rural surveillance efforts in support of police.

Mr. Sabir: Through the chair, that program still continues?

Ms Lajeunesse: Yes.

Mr. Sabir: Where is the line item for funding for that program?

Mr. Zablocki: Element 2.3.

Mr. Sabir: Okay.

Line 2.4, through the chair, law enforcement oversight. Last time around the government came up with a piece of legislation that would create an oversight commission. What's the progress on that, and are the funds for that included in this line item?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Obviously, building that program and having that independent agency, I think you would appreciate, Member, is a bit of a heavy lift.

I will maybe ask my ADM Ross Nairne. Are you able to supplement the progress of the independent complaints commission?

Mr. Nairne: Ross Nairne, assistant deputy minister for strategic support and integrated initiatives. The police review commission was a creation out of the Police Amendment Act in 2022. Work to implement is ongoing at this time. In budget element 2.4 the increase is linked to the staffing of the Alberta police review commission.

Mr. Sabir: Through the chair to the minister. I think I just want a little bit about: where is that at? It's still in progress.

Mr. Ellis: It's still in progress.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Thank you.

I'll move on to line item 4, emergency management. I think generally speaking I don't see money here, and my understanding is that it will come from contingency.

Mr. Ellis: We did have an increase, and I think the total budget is \$108 million. Is that correct for you?

11:10

Mr. Lacroix: The increase is \$3.1 million.

Mr. Ellis: Right. But to a total of \$108 million, if I remember correctly. Yeah.

Member, I know where you're going with this, but I think it's important for you and everybody else to understand that it is very tough to predict a catastrophic event. And so, obviously, making sure the Alberta Emergency Management is prepared: absolutely. However, you know, we do have a contingency fund, and if there are exigent circumstances that require us to draw from that, that's why it's there.

Mr. Sabir: I do understand that, but this time around there are warnings about drought, there are warnings about fires, there are 54 or some wildfires going right now. So is government just playing with the numbers to show surplus and not providing money in the budget that should be there? Because we are expecting that. That was the reason that I was asking that question.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Simple answer is no.

The Chair: Thank you so much. We'll move back over to the independent member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the minister. Again, the government has emphasized the importance of recovery in addictions. Our youth, our minors, are facing great mental health challenges as well as addictions, and this must be approached with great sensitivity. Rock Solid Refuge is a recovery centre in Saskatchewan serving youth aged 13 to 18. They work closely with families and support systems to ensure the safety, well-being, and recovery for these vulnerable youth. Indeed, the vast majority of these youth are recovering and going on to live successful lives. They have served many Albertan youth and currently have two Alberta youth at their centre. Does Alberta have any centres like this for our minor youth that are focused on recovery, and where is this reflected in the budget?

Mr. Ellis: Well, that's a question for, obviously, Minister Williams. I think the only thing I would just add to that is that, of course, youth mental health is extremely important. I would just argue that there are many complexities and, I would almost argue, misunderstandings about people that have complex mental health and addictions issues simultaneously, whether it be youth or adults. There are many people, I would say, that the layperson thinks might have a mental health concern, who actually might be having an acute reaction to crystal meth, as an example, which displays signs that somebody might have a mental health challenge but don't necessarily mean that.

Ensuring that we, of course, have the appropriate spaces regarding, you know, detox and treatment and recovery: again, we are well under way. Again, not part of this ministry, but I would just argue that we are well under way in building a recovery-oriented system of care, which is, honestly, a bit of an envy for other areas in North America right now.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the minister. I apologize if this went into Mental Health and Addiction

a little too much. It comes out of the therapeutic living units, which are obviously for adults, and I'll come back to that. There are 87 per cent of available therapeutic living unit spaces that have been utilized since the first unit opened in July 2023. It hasn't even been a year. This is on page 119 of your ministry business plan, 2.b. I'm curious: how many quantitatively does this mean? What numbers are reflected in the 87 per cent? And has there been any data yet on how these individuals are doing today? Essentially, is this service effective?

Mr. Ellis: We'll get to Fiona, ADM, to come and supplement here. But, you know, I will just say this. From a very high level what I have been hearing from people who have participated as clients in the therapeutic living units, from staff at corrections, who have been excited to be a part of trying to stop that recidivism, I would say has been very much a game changer, and there's nothing like it in the world, quite frankly, to the point where it's becoming a bit of a beacon for other jurisdictions.

But when we're talking about specific numbers, if I can ask Fiona to come and see what she has for numbers.

Ms Lavoy: Good morning. Fiona Lavoy, ADM for correctional services. Through the chair, there are three therapeutic living units that are currently operational. Red Deer has currently 11 beds, Lethbridge has approximately 22 beds, and the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre, which is female focused, has 48 beds. The intention is to operate those as full of capacity as we can. The final unit will be at the Calgary Correctional Centre, and the number of beds there is just being finalized.

In terms of the facilities that are operating at present, there is high uptake and participation. There is a process of application for individuals to participate. As the minister indicated, it has been very positive to date. The program itself is designed for individuals that are in custody for at least three months in order for them to get the intensive treatment.

Thank you.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the minister and his team.

My final question here is actually very cold because there are numbers here. What is included in your investment income and other revenue?

Mr. Ellis: Investment income? Well, we're very service oriented and kind of human being. That's kind of our ministry here. I mean, it's like when people always look at police service budgets. As an example, to be honest with you, most of it consists of people.

You know, as far as revenues are concerned, I mean, let me just say this. One of the things I'll just say that we're looking at right now is actually civil forfeitures. Again, despite what some may think, I actually have some positive relationships with folks in the B.C. government, as an example, so conversations I've had with Minister Farnworth in British Columbia have been on the success of civil forfeitures. I know that Alberta was probably one of the first jurisdictions, if not the first jurisdiction, to do civil forfeitures. However, it has evolved throughout not just Canada but also in the United Kingdom and I think in Australia as well.

What does that really mean? Well, you know, as I've indicated before, there's been an environment that has been created by policies that has allowed organized crime to thrive with little to no consequences, so how do I think outside the box and do something to constrict organized crime? Part of that is using civil forfeitures. We are looking at expanding that. We're doing that internally, but certainly we're looking at expanding that. Really, for all the lawyers

in the room, it just provides a little bit more – we always want to get our lawyers employed, right? That was a bit of a joke. Sorry. It just provides a little bit more work for them and really for organized crime.

I mean, they're profiting off the backs of a lot of victims and people who are suffering right now. You know, as I've said in committees like this in the past, the fentanyl itself: a \$20,000 investment can net you \$5 million cash. That is why you're seeing the prevalence of organized crime all throughout Alberta and, quite frankly, Canada, and this is why you're seeing cartels coming here. So in order for me to think outside of the box, I have to use mechanisms that we have under civil forfeiture to try and go after and essentially use that mechanism to try and constrict organized crime. None of it is easy. We're trying to think outside of the box given the environment that we're in right now.

This is why we're continuing to support our police. This is why we're continuing to support, you know, organizations, as you mentioned, rural crime organizations. This is why we're trying to go after organized crime. This is why we're trying to invest a lot, quite frankly, in recovery. If we can try and, again, take clients away from organized crime, that further constricts them. This is why we're trying to supplement and support drugs and guns and human trafficking that is coming across the border. You know, this is why we have a concern about some of the policies.

11:20

Again, I do have a good relationship with my friends in British Columbia, but I don't a hundred per cent agree on some policies. I don't agree on the decriminalization that they have done in British Columbia. I do have some concerns of diversion in some of these drugs that are coming across the border from British Columbia that are impacting in a negative way people in rural Alberta, people on the streets of Calgary and Edmonton. You know, more drugs, I would argue, is not the answer to this very, very complex problem that is affecting not just Alberta but quite frankly all of North America. It's really a societal issue that we're trying to address.

I will say this: I mean, certainly, in my time as the minister in that particular portfolio we had success, which is probably why we had the international recognition that we have had. But I can tell you that those types of policies that I have seen – I've seen bad policies, and I've seen good policies.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll move now over to the government side.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Chair and through you to the minister. Being from Livingstone-Macleod, obviously the Alberta law enforcement response teams is near and dear to my heart. With us bordering on the U.S. border along with the B.C. border, we have two major intersections there as well and then just south of the major city centre. I'm happy to see that your ministry is focusing on, you know, combating Internet child exploitation, organized crime, human trafficking, auto theft, et cetera, et cetera.

I see on page 180 of the estimates document that there is an increase of nearly \$10.7 million to line item 2.8 for organized and serious crime. This is an important increase, as this item supports the Alberta law enforcement response teams, or ALERT, which has worked to build safer communities in our province since its establishment in 2006 by addressing various types of crime such as: organized crime, child pornography, gun violence, drug trafficking, and prolific offenders. I'm hoping that you can expand on the reasoning for the increase of funding and expand on how ALERT operates to address these areas of crime and find justice for the victims.

I also see that this funding supports the gun and gang violence action fund. Can you speak more about this fund and how this additional funding in budget 2024-2025 will enhance efforts to combat gun and gang violence?

Mr. Ellis: Great questions. You know, again, organized crime is continuing to thrive with little to no consequences. So we're having to do whatever we can. I mean, this is why we've had this investment in ALERT, and certainly we've had – you know, I would say this about ALERT, too, because not every jurisdiction has this type of response given the geographical size of Alberta, to have a co-ordinated effort between our federal friends along with police agencies, because communication is really part of a successful operation.

Certainly the increase in funding to combat organized crime, the – what is it? – \$10.6 million of Alberta's \$53 million allocation, is through the federal gun and gang violent action fund. Again, this is working collaboratively with the province to support our ALERT team. But just remember that these folks that are in ALERT are the front lines, right? They're the ones that are building the relationships with the federal government in the United States, as an example, the DEA, the FBI. We are trying to combat this from every single direction.

Then, of course, you touched on a little bit about the child exploitation. Yeah. I mean, that is something – certainly we have that part of it when it comes to ALERT. I can tell you that I've been to that centre. These officers there: full credit to them. They are working hard. It is not easy. It is an absolute wave that is coming towards them, but we are making sure that they are properly funded. We are making sure that they have all the resources to combat this. And, again, it's all about their relationships, because many of these crimes – not all but many – are occurring outside of Canada, although, you know, obviously, there are issues within Alberta and right across the country. But none of this is easy. Everything here is complex.

I am going to ask ADM Zablocki if he could just supplement on a more detailed level, if you don't mind.

Mr. Zablocki: Thank you, Minister, and through the chair. I'd just add, in the context of ALERT and let's say more broadly as well, too, to the recent guns and gangs violence action fund: we were just successful in securing \$53 million over five years to move over 31 provincial initiatives forward through that respective funding. So that's going to include, I'd say more broadly everything from prevention, education, enforcement and such, working, building programs to get folks out of gang life, gang activity as well, too. So it's a very comprehensive approach. It fits very nicely with our current Alberta law enforcement response and the subsequent teams of which, in the last couple of years, we've really increased the resources within that particular program; again, with ALERT. And that's not just focused on Edmonton and Calgary, let's say. We have ALERT regional teams. There are six regional teams across the province that support and provide prevention; again, education, enforcement to rural and smaller communities across Alberta.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Chair, and to the minister for that answer.

Minister, human trafficking is obviously a terrible and unthinkable crime that violates a person's most basic human rights and robs them of their safety and freedom. I get emotional on this. I used to volunteer my time for a program, and we actually helped bring children out of sex trafficking as well. So it's difficult to see that this is happening here in Alberta. Human traffickers prey on our vulnerable people. It's our duty as a government to protect the

vulnerable communities and all Albertans from this crime. By stopping traffickers and supporting survivors, we can work towards eliminating human trafficking in our communities. I see on page 117 of the ministry's business plan an investment of \$8.2 million to combat human trafficking, and this includes "the establishment of the Alberta Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons," which is supported under line 5.2 of the budget estimates, page 179.

Minister, would you be able to talk in more detail about the mandate of this office? And how will this funding be used to combat human trafficking, as well as what supports it will bring to the victims and survivors of this terrible crime?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Member and, obviously, through the chair. You're right; human trafficking is absolutely a despicable crime. It robs people, primarily women, of their dignity, their self-respect. And it's something that, you know, we were proud to put an enormous investment in. This was a four-year commitment of about \$22.8 million. It started in 2022 to fight human trafficking and protect vulnerable people and support survivors.

I'd say one of the unique things about this centre to combat human trafficking – that is, again, currently being built – we've, certainly, had a first selection of the two co-chairs; obviously, Mr. Paul Brandt is one of the chairs, and then the name eludes me on the second lady. Certainly a lovely lady, an Indigenous lady, that is the second co-chair. I think the other thing that I would say that is unique about this is that they're engaging survivors. So this is not a group of people or academics that are going to be providing advice or strategic advice or liaising with police services. You know, these are survivors of human trafficking who have such unique insight on how this crime is occurring: how these offenders are preying upon young people and how these offenders are, to a certain extent, kind of getting away with what they are doing. So we're excited to continue the development of that, very excited to continue that. If I recall, they've also issued about \$3.5 million in grants. I'm looking at my deputy here.

Is that correct?

11:30

Ms Lajeunesse: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. To various not-for-profit organizations throughout Alberta that, again, are doing absolutely just great work in supporting victims of human trafficking. I think, again – you know, I know my ADM alluded to this, too – I mean, there's a foundation here of education, prevention, intervention, and using the eyes of those people who have been victims of human trafficking, I think, is invaluable as we continue to establish this.

I will just say one final thing in regard to this. My goal in regard to the centre to combat human trafficking and the work that is being done . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll head back over to the Official Opposition.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to start just by following up on a question that was asked earlier but not replied to. Through the chair, can ADM Smith please identify where in Budget 2024 we can find information about the TLUs?

Mr. Smith: Thank you. It's in element 3.2 on page 180 of the government estimates. So the custody operations element of the correctional services division.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much.

My next question is in regard to crime in our urban centres and also across the province, frankly, that oftentimes are crimes of opportunity associated with mental health, addiction to illegal drugs, and homelessness. Through the chair, how is the minister funding and co-ordinating with other ministries to ensure people aren't discharged from corrections or remand into homelessness and right back into the environment and circumstances that had them incarcerated in the first place?

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. A hundred per cent. Absolutely. We're working very closely with Mental Health and Addiction. In fact, when I was the former minister of that portfolio, this was about building that relationship because that was, to your point, my concern. We cannot just release folks into the cycle of abuse, the cycle of recidivism. So that was part of the reason for the creation of the therapeutic living units, to help people on a path to wellness.

Member Eremenko: But postdischarge, Minister, through the chair.

Mr. Ellis: Well, I mean, postdischarge, if you're talking – are you talking about when the person is released? And then are you asking a question that is more appropriate for community and social services? Are you asking a question for Mental Health and Addiction? Or are you saying specifically corrections? When corrections has a release order on an individual, and that person has been released by a judge, they are released. We, of course, try to make sure that we provide every option to them, but – I'm not sure where you're going with that question.

Member Eremenko: Okay. No. I think you've answered it for me. Thank you.

I'll move on. Through the chair, I'd like to address the Auditor General's annual report from December 2023, that addresses a number of recommendations that were made to the Public Safety and Emergency Services ministry. A number of these – if I may, I'll just briefly list them off. One is a recommendation to develop and approve a business plan with measurable desired results for the victims of crime and public safety fund. Another is to implement a system to develop and maintain a provincial hazard assessment. And the third recommendation is to improve the monitoring and reporting of recommendations from postincident disaster reviews. It's my understanding that these recommendations have not been fulfilled, and I'm curious to know what the delay is.

Mr. Ellis: Well, the Auditor General's report is not a line item on the budget. Is there a specific line item you'd like to refer to?

Member Eremenko: Perhaps I can refer to my colleague for that information. I can't see time.

You know, the victim of crime fund is talked about a number of times throughout the business plan, as are emergency services, of course, when it comes to appropriate planning for the year ahead.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. The deputy minister would like to comment a bit on this.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you very much for that question. In terms of the recommendation related to the victims of crime fund, you will note that that recommendation was made prior to the changes being made to the victims of crime fund programming. We continue to work with the Auditor General in terms of how that recommendation would be reflected in the current state of business. So we're continuing to work on that.

In terms of the recommendation to conduct activities that will help the province be responsive to hazards, we are in the process of completing a hazard identification risk assessment, that is expected to be in place by the end of this summer, I believe, and then, of course, in a year's time we will do an evaluation of that.

I'm sorry. The last one again was . . .

Member Eremenko: The recommendation to improve the monitoring and reporting of recommendations from postincident disaster reviews.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. We're obviously following up from the situation last year with a comprehensive postincident assessment, as we do and have done with all large, major emergencies in the past, and we will look forward to the findings of that in about a year's time.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much. We look forward to seeing the results.

Through the chair, I have a quick question in regard to – we're going to pivot quickly here to the capital plan in fiscal plan 2024-2027. On page 114 there is a total of \$10 million earmarked for compassionate intervention implementation intake and assessment centres. For those who may not know, compassionate intervention is a term that is used to describe mandated or forced treatment for people with an addiction to illegal drugs. Through the chair, can the minister tell us today if his ministry will be responsible for overseeing all or a portion of this capital project that will force Albertans into treatment?

Mr. Ellis: That's a question for Mental Health and Addiction, Madam Chair.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed, Member.

Member Eremenko: Well, of course, when it's in the capital plan, there isn't that specificity, so I'll take that as a no. Thank you.

I have another question, then, moving right along, in regard to the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in our corrections system and in the justice system writ large. The proportion of Indigenous persons, you know, certainly between men, women, and youth, continues to tick upwards when it comes to their presence in prisons and remand and corrections. Can you specify what the ministry is doing specifically about this overrepresentation of Indigenous people in our justice systems?

Mr. Ellis: As you've probably seen very publicly, we work very closely with Treaty 6 and specifically Grand Chief Thomas as well as our friends in Treaty 8 and Treaty 7. Yeah. I mean, look, this is a very complex problem. I can tell you what has not worked, and it's Bill C-75. Bill C-75 has been an abject disaster that has actually had the opposite effect on folks, our Indigenous friends and communities. Those are not my words. These are the words that are coming from the chiefs and the elders that I've spoken to. When somebody is charged, especially in the case of a domestic situation, and that person is released, unfortunately, they tend to go and seek some form of retribution on the person who has accused them.

So, look, I mean, we are working with our friends in treaties 6, 7, and 8. We are ensuring that we are providing mental health and addiction supports. This is why we're building four world-class recovery communities on Indigenous community lands. We're working with Indigenous communities in Treaty 8, and we are trying to stop the cycle of abuse. We are trying to stop recidivism.

Quite frankly, the work we are doing – look, I'm going to say this as well. You know, I said this a couple of years ago, that I will not

be a government, unlike successive governments – and I’m not pinpointing any specific government. I would just say that there have been governments in the past, both provincially and federally, throughout the course of history, that have failed our friends in Indigenous communities, and I will not be a part of that. This is why I am helping them establish their own police services. This is why I helped them to get recovery communities on their reserves, because it’s important to help them up with some of the challenges that they’re facing right now.

Member Eremenko: Indeed, and, through the chair, to your point, those issues have been amongst us and have been, you know, plaguing communities for a very long time, long before Bill C-75 was ever on the table.

11:40

Moving on, though, I’ll try to sneak in one more question. Through the chair, I’m hoping the minister could provide some insight on the Calgary and Edmonton public safety and community response task forces. Both the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services sit on these task forces, and they single-handedly assigned people to sit around those tables. We haven’t had an update on their work since December 2022, Madam Chair, although the government website reports that they are still active. The mandate for these task forces, per the budget, is to deploy an investment of \$187 million, a commitment to address the issues of addiction, homelessness, and public safety. Through the chair to the minister, when can the public expect an update on the status of these two task forces, and how much funding have each of them been allocated to date?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I mean, work was – well, look, we were facing some very exigent circumstances at that time, as I’ve indicated in the past. We had people that were being stabbed in the streets. We had people that were unsafe using transit systems in both Calgary and Edmonton. There was the establishment of this committee, which was part of the intent to take immediate action. There was no intent to put out some sort of report, which is typical of governments just to put out reports, and then they may or may not be acted upon. You know, this is part of . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We’ll move to the government side. Please proceed, Member.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Madam Chair and, through you, to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services as well as our Deputy Premier. I would like to start with sharing the conversations I have with the First Nations, in my role of parliamentary secretary to Indigenous Relations, regarding our Public Safety and Emergency Services. We have First Nations reaching out, thanking our government and specifically your department, the minister himself and his team, for the amazing work they have done with cleaning up encampments in the city as well as a comprehensive action plan in regard to investment into Indigenous policing programs. I have overwhelming support and phone calls from the chiefs and members of the community. They’re very thankful that you’re taking, you know, a deep dive into Indigenous policing in our province.

They also were happy about our province, government, and your team exploring options, instead of self-supply sites, to build more rehab centres and mental health clinics in our province, which we need desperately here. So a big thank you to the team.

I have a question specifically on page 19 of the Public Safety and Emergency Services business plan. Objective 1.3 states that PSES, Public Safety and Emergency Services

will continue to improve the delivery of policing services in the province to ensure Albertans are safe and police are accountable to the communities that they are serving, including working with the Alberta sheriffs and further investment into the Indigenous policing programs.

With that, I have a question. What are the benefits to the government of Alberta related to the increases in the funding for the Indigenous police services in the budget of 2024? And, as well, why are governance bodies needed for the community tripartite – I apologize; my Ukrainian is coming through when I read this – agreement, the CTA for communities.

Mr. Ellis: Well, I think a lot to unpack there, Member. Thank you very much. Through the chair, of course, the additional \$2.6 million as part of Budget 2023 approval, which began in ’24-25 fiscal year, for a self-administered First Nation policing service to increase staffing levels through recruitment strategies in adding more officers. But I think it’s also important, because you brought this up. Look, the Indigenous and Inuit policing program – and I’ve been very public about this; I’ve said this at federal-provincial-territorial meetings – is a discriminatory program. It is a program that those police officers – Blood and Tsuut’ina and Lakeshore, as an example – get paid less. They get paid less. They don’t get the same pensions. That is not right. That is not fair. I have advocated. I have a verbal commitment from this Liberal-NDP government that we will not tolerate this discriminatory program. I am hopeful, I guess, that they will treat First Nations policing as an essential service, which is really what it should be. That being said, we’re continuing to work with my colleague in Ottawa, but none of this is easy.

But, that being said, I have made a commitment to Siksika Nation. I have made a commitment to other First Nations in this province. Because it is about lifting them up. It is about empowering them. It is about going to them and saying: “What do you want? How can I help you,” as opposed to, you know, again, the heavy hand of government or, we’ll say, some folks that just want to impose a certain type of policing on them. As I’ve stated before, what the overarching vision is: not an armored state but an extension, a reflection of the community that we serve.

When we have somebody from Siksika or Tsuut’ina Nation, as an example, who is born and raised in the community, wants to police in the community, wants to be a leader in the community – the member previously asked, you know, how do we stop this? Well, that’s part of the way that we stop this. We create leaders within the community. We empower people to be more than just – to be more, quite frankly.

What we are doing is, you know, rejecting the First Nations Indigenous and Inuit policing program and saying: “No. This needs to be an essential service, where they get full funding, fair pay, where they get pensions equivalent to that of any other police service in this province.” That is what I have been fighting for. When that person is born and raised in the community, policing in that community – and I’ll use Tsuut’ina as an example because that is the one that is closest to Calgary. I get it. When that person sits here and goes, “Hey, I can get \$20,000 more going to police in Calgary,” how does that help Tsuut’ina Nation? It doesn’t. It doesn’t help Tsuut’ina Nation. It won’t help Enoch. It won’t help Siksika. They lose people. Who are they losing? They’re losing leaders in their community. We have to stop that. We have to stop that as well.

So none of this is easy, but I can tell you right now that this is why I am absolutely committed to helping Siksika Nation, the first jurisdiction in 14 years to establish a police service. This is why I have the commitment to Enoch, I have a commitment to folks in Treaty 8, and, quite frankly, any other First Nations that want to establish their own, whether it be a police service or whatever is going to suit their community. We understand that some are really small, probably will not have a police service per se. However, something right now, I would say, is better than what they currently have. In some of these jurisdictions, they have none, and that's not right.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you very much, Minister. And again, as a parliamentary secretary for Indigenous Relations I do have a lot of conversation with the First Nations across the province, and the biggest and the most impressive feedback I've heard from the First Nations is that it's the first time in a long while that First Nations of Alberta felt that the government, and your specific ministry, is really listening, attending, and implementing new regulations to help our First Nations across the whole province.

With that, on page 117 of the Public Safety and Emergency Services business plan, key objective 1.1 states that PSES, "in partnership with police services, municipalities, and Indigenous communities, [will] implement strategies to address crime and social disorder, particularly in urban centres and transit systems," which is also a big plague in our province right now. Thank you for addressing that already.

11:50

The question is: what Public Safety and Emergency Services grants are available for municipalities and Indigenous communities to support them in the implementation of strategies to address crime and social disorder in our province? Can you expand on the municipal police transition grant and what the grant money can be used for? How will this grant support Indigenous communities who are interested in exploring local and regional police models for their own communities? And the last question would be: has there been much uptake in Indigenous self-administered policing since the grant was initially available for them?

Mr. Ellis: Well, obviously, a lot to unpack in the next 20 some-odd seconds. This is why this one grant is the Indigenous – you know, there's an Indigenous word in the police transition grant that we're talking about here because it really is about supporting Indigenous communities and helping them up to say: "What do you want? How can I help you?" We also have other grants that are available, the Alberta crime prevention grant, pretty much any grant that is available.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That's our time. We'll head back now over to the Official Opposition.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have four or five questions left, so I will try to get them in. The first one relates to the government fiscal plan '24-27 and talks about significant investment in disaster preparedness, wildfires, water management. It also relates to Alberta emergency management, line item 4, 4.5, 6.

It's more a general question because the union representing people, wildfire people: they are essentially saying that wages are low, benefits are less, and contracts are unpredictable. I guess that's what they're concerned about. That's the concern that many Albertans share, that Alberta will not be prepared once wildfire hits. So what do you have to say to those, Minister?

Mr. Ellis: Well, Member, through the chair, of course, that is a question for Forestry and Parks. However, let me just try to provide some context in regard to Alberta Emergency Management Agency itself. I want you to think about a municipality that, unfortunately, is facing the crisis, and we use the crisis of a wildfire as an example. You know, Alberta Emergency Management will then send out somebody to augment and support that municipality to ensure that they have all the resources. If that incident commander, who's typically your fire chief, as an example, requires further resources, then they come in and try to get them the resources that they need. But that specific question that you're asking: I'm sorry, sir; it's more of a question for . . .

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: I can move on to the next question. Through the chair, last year the day before the estimates you announced that you will mandate body cameras for all police officers in the province. I was looking at all these documents. I don't find reference to that work. Through the chair, I just want to know where that project is at.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I'll get these guys to expand on that, but I'll tell you what I can tell you so far. Obviously, Calgary itself was, like Toronto, a bit ahead of the game, ahead of the curve on this as they already had existing body-worn cameras. I can tell you that the Edmonton Police Service has not done full implementation, but I think that they are in the process of going through that. They do have some that are deployed right now. Maybe Curtis can speak to that a little bit more because of his recency with the RCMP. The RCMP, of course, have started to roll that out in certain communities throughout Alberta.

Curtis, could you maybe expand on that a bit?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister. I think it's in progress.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Sorry. It is in progress.

Mr. Sabir: Through the chair, I will move on to the next question. With respect to the victim of crime fund, what I need is just two numbers: how much directly will go to supporting victims of crime direct services, and how much will go towards other safety initiatives?

Mr. Ellis: I'll commit to getting back to you with the answer to that question. You're looking for a number. Is that correct, Member?

Mr. Sabir: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Also, victims of crime service organizations, the existing ones. They are opposed to the changes, the four-zone model. Minister, through the chair, you identified some gaps, that many communities didn't have those services available to them. But also the government of Alberta closed seven victim-based service programs, such programs, without disclosing the reason why the closure occurred, and they never offered support to those seven programs. So, Minister, will you agree that that was a mistake to close down those programs, those seven programs, and that created a gap in victims' services?

Mr. Ellis: Sorry. Are you suggesting we created a gap in victims' services, through the chair, Member?

Mr. Sabir: Yes, by closing down those seven programs.

Mr. Singh: Point of order. Madam Chair, the point of order is under Standing Order 23(b), the member speaks to matters other than the question under discussion. The matter as raised by the member is a matter of policy. That is not an item on the ministry's estimates, fiscal plan, or business plan.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Sabir: Nothing can be . . .

The Chair: So we'll have Member Eggen speak to that.

Mr. Sabir: It's not a point of order. The member is just wasting committee's time.

The Chair: I think the minister would like to say something, so please proceed.

Mr. Ellis: I want to answer his question, but you can finish your point of order.

The Chair: We'll go to you. I think you were done, right? You were finished speaking to the point of order?

Mr. Sabir: The point of order. I said that this is a waste of committee's time because victims' services is part of this budget, this ministry. The member just didn't read before coming here.

The Chair: The minister would like to make a comment, so let's go to the minister.

Mr. Ellis: Not about the point of order. Are we good, the point of order itself?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I just want to answer the member's question. Yeah. I'm sorry. I got a point of clarification from staff here. The boards failed. It had nothing to do with us closing anything down. The boards failed, and this is part of the redesign to ensure that boards don't fail in the future. Again, predictable, sustainable funding and consistency throughout the province: I would think that people would agree that that's a good thing.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

One last question through the chair. I think I asked that precharge assessment system question, but you didn't get a chance to respond to it. It has its pros and cons, but the question I

have for you as minister: how does it impact the independence of police work?

Mr. Ellis: As I indicated, the precharge is more Justice.

However, ADM Zablocki does say that there's a bit of a connection there. Go ahead.

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. Thank you. I'll just speak in the context of precharge and how it connects to policing agencies across the province. In particular my own experience, formerly with the RCMP, is that the precharge process really enhances the communication between Crown prosecutors and the police service. There have been gaps in the past, but what precharge does is it really puts some formality around that. So Crown reviews the cases; they get back to the police. If there are gaps or shortfalls, it results in creating efficiencies in the time of police, in the time for Crown prosecutors, and in court time as well. Again, from the provincial police service perspective I can say that it has been very well received.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you to the chair. I think I'm specifically talking about its impact on the independence of police.

Mr. Zablocki: If I might respond, Madam Chair. In my assessment it doesn't negatively impact that independence. That independence is very important. There always needs to be a strong working relationship between Crown prosecutors and police and police officers. Again, as I mentioned earlier, this enhances that communication. Again, there's no independence impact.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

And through the chair one last clarification: there's no money set aside in this budget for Bill 11.

Mr. Ellis: For Bill 11? No.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

I still have time remaining.

The Chair: That's it. We have a new clock, Member. The meeting is concluded. We're going to continue after lunch.

I will advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the main estimates has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we're scheduled to meet on Monday, March 18, at 7 p.m. to consider the estimates for the Ministry of Justice.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

