



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Families and Communities

Ministry of Children and Family Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Monday, March 16, 2026  
7 p.m.

Transcript No. 31-2-7

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

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC), Chair  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair  
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP),\*Acting Deputy Chair

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Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)  
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**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

**Participant**

Ministry of Children and Family Services  
Hon. Searle Turton, Minister



7 p.m.

Monday, March 16, 2026

**Ministry of Children and Family Services**  
**Consideration of Main Estimates**

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

**The Chair:** All right. I'd like to welcome everyone and call the meeting to order. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Children and Family Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027. I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, when we come to you, if you would kindly introduce your team at the table with you, that would be great. My name is Jackie Lovely. I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and chair of the committee. We will start to my right.

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

**Ms Schulz:** Good evening. Rebecca Schulz, MLA for Calgary-Shaw.

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

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Good evening. Tara Sawyer, MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

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

**Mr. Turton:** Good evening, everyone. I am Searle Turton, Minister of Children and Family Services. To my left are Joni Brodziak and David Wheeler. On my right are Lisa Sadownik and Lillian Yu.

**Ms Gray:** Good evening, everyone. My name is Christina Gray. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Member Batten:** Good evening. I'm Diana Batten, MLA for Calgary-Acadia.

**Ms Hayter:** Good evening. Julia Hayter, MLA for Calgary-Edgemont.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Brooks Arcand-Paul, MLA for Edmonton-West Henday.

**The Chair:** I see that we have no remote participation today. I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Member Arcand-Paul will be substituting as deputy chair for Ms Goehring, and hon. Ms Schulz will be substituting for Mr. Getson.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream of the meetings can be accessed via Legislative Assembly website. Please set your cellphones and other devices on silent; that includes myself.

Speaking rotation and time limits. Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Children and Family Services shall be considered for three hours. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates and legislative policy committees; 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the

meeting blocks of speaking time will be combined, but only if both the minister and the member agree. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the allotted time in the main estimate schedule and the committee will adjourn. Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

With concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint. Does anyone object to having a break today? All right, seeing none, we will have a break.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the direction of the minister, address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to the microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commencing. 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 arise, and individual speaking times will be paused. However, the block of speaking time and the overall three-hour meeting clock will continue to run. Any written materials 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, and debate flows through the chair at all times, please, members, including instances where speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

I would now invite the Minister of Children and Family Services to begin with your opening remarks. Sir, you have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Well, thank you very much, and good evening, everyone. Again, I'm Searle Turton, Minister of Children and Family Services. Joining me on my right are deputy minister, Lisa Sadownik, and assistant deputy minister of financial services and senior financial officer, Lillian Yu; and on my left is chief operating officer and assistant deputy minister for child intervention delivery, David Wheeler, and assistant deputy minister for youth and preventative family services, Joni Brodziak. In the gallery I have assistant deputy minister for Indigenous partnerships and strategic services, Cynthia Dunnigan and assistant deputy minister of regulatory compliance, quality assurance, and business supports, Brian Mackowecki.

Madam Chair, I'm pleased to present the Children and Family Services Budget 2026 estimates and 2026-28 business plan. We're investing nearly \$1.7 billion into services for Alberta's vulnerable children, youth, and families. This is an increase of 5.6 per cent from Budget 2025-2026. We are focused on what matters most, meeting our legislative responsibilities to keep children safe and keeping our promise to support Albertans fleeing violence. Alberta's fiscal reality is challenging, and my ministry is experiencing growing case complexity, inflation, and rising service delivery costs. We're making disciplined choices so that services are available where they're needed the most. We will continue to listen to and work with our partners, who are caregivers, agencies, women's shelters, and sexual assault centres, to make collaborative program improvements while investing in supports for lower income families and youth with complex needs.

Our core responsibility is the safety and well-being of about 9,000 children receiving child intervention services right across the province, and this includes investing in front-line staff and caregivers. This year we're increasing child intervention delivery

funding by nearly 5 per cent to more than \$1 billion. Family-based placements, such as kinship and foster care, provide children unable to safely remain at home with stability, access to essential supports, and connections with family and culture. This is why we're investing in over 8,000 compassionate, hard-working foster, kinship, and permanency caregivers right across the province. Budget 2026 increases their rates by 2 per cent, and this helps cover day-to-day necessities like food and clothing, skill fees for foster caregivers, babysitting, and relief costs.

Many Albertans become caregivers because someone they know has fostered. So we are expanding the refer-a-foster caregiver program to include kinship caregivers, supports for permanency recipients, those who were previously licensed foster caregivers, and nonprofit organizations. When a caregiver becomes fully licensed, they will receive \$1,500, as will the person who refers them, up from \$500. We clearly heard from caregivers that we needed to modernize our system, which is why we will be launching a new online portal. This new tool will enable them to access information and submit claims through a secure account. Recruiting and retaining caregivers is part of our long-term strategy to connect children and youth to the right placement for their diverse needs.

Budget 2026 also invests in our front-line child intervention workforce. Some of these supports include a new job classification with a pay increase of up to 9 per cent, enhanced mental health and OHS supports, and tuition so that eligible employees can advance their education. With Mental Health and Addiction, we are maintaining annual funding of \$3.7 million to the eight provincially funded child and youth advocacy centres that offer co-ordinated multidisciplinary services to children who experience abuse.

My ministry also helps families build resilience and avoid the need for intervention. We fund prevention and early intervention systems through 70 family resource networks right across the province, centres that offer free services, including parenting classes and targeted supports for families with complex needs. Budget 2026 invests \$66.7 million in FRNs. Through this funding, we're strengthening services and increasing access to supports for youth as well as Indigenous, ethnocultural, and rural communities. These actions also respond to the Auditor General's recommendations to help Indigenous families stay together through culturally appropriate supports. We're also adding \$4.3 million to the transition to adulthood program, which empowers young adults leaving government care to live independently, pursue education, build careers, and maintain lifelong connections.

Budget 2026 invests more than \$93 million into addressing family and sexual violence, strengthening our response to the government's strategy for ending gender-based violence. Fifteen sexual assault centres and their umbrella organizations will receive \$15.8 million in 2026 and 2027.

#### 7:10

Albertans fleeing violent relationships also need safe places, so Budget 2026 maintains funding to 32 women's emergency shelters and 19 second-stage shelters right across Alberta. Over the past year we have worked with shelters to renew the grant program to allow for innovation and flexibility based upon their local needs. This will also ensure the funding is data driven, equitable, and needs based. In addition, we are investing in a safe and welcoming environment. Over the next three years Budget 2026 will invest \$4 million in a first-of-its-kind capital grant program for women's shelters. This new program will address urgent facility renewal, repair, and maintenance. This way shelters can continue to provide reliable and welcoming environments so that women and children can focus on recovery and next steps. For youth the moment they choose to

access help can be pivotal, and that is why we will continue to fund six youth emergency shelters right across Alberta with \$4.4 million.

We're also reducing duplication to our focus on proactive, client-focused strategies that support victims of domestic violence. As a result, the Family Violence Death Review Committee has been dissolved. Many of their insights, such as early intervention, risk identification, and crossministry co-ordination, are now standard components of a broader government strategy and will continue to guide our government's response to family violence, and we are very grateful to this committee for their incredible work.

Across Alberta government-owned buildings support front-line services for vulnerable children, youth, and families. These are the places where children in my ministry's care live and where families meet with front-line workers. Over time these facilities need small-scale upgrades to safely meet the needs of the people who use them. Budget 2026 commits \$2.1 million per year to support improvements as well as \$6.3 million through Alberta Infrastructure to replace four community group-care facilities.

Additional capital funding from Alberta Infrastructure invests nearly \$60 million in provincial campus-based centres over four years, providing wraparound supports for children and youth with complex needs. This includes the development of a new centre in Grande Prairie, ensuring that support is close to home for northern Alberta youth, and the modernization of the Yellowhead Youth Centre, the largest of its kind in the province.

My ministry is also helping lower income families keep more of what they earn and provide more for their children through the Alberta child and family benefit. We're investing \$405 million, an increase of \$30 million from budget 2025-26 to support Alberta's growing population. This benefit funds basic necessities through a monthly tax-free payment to about 190,000 families right across the province and encourages workforce participation.

My ministry is also actively working with First Nations, the transition authority in line with the federal government's An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families. As of this March five First Nations in Alberta have fully enacted children and family services laws under the federal act. We understand how important it is for Indigenous children and youth to stay connected to their families, communities, and culture, and we support this incredible work. Budget 2026 continues to invest into Indigenous cultural understanding training for staff, enhancing connections, and working with communities.

Madam Chair, my ministry is dedicated to caring for people, and our budget clearly reflects this while meeting today's challenges. We're strengthening child intervention, supporting caregivers and youth transitioning to adulthood, and maintaining safe places for women and children fleeing violence. Through it all we are working with sector partners to make our programs more responsive to community needs. I'm incredibly proud to lead a ministry of talented and dedicated employees who work tirelessly to make a positive difference in the lives of Albertans.

Thank you very much for having me here today. I look forward to answering all the questions from the committee members. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will now begin the question and answer portion of the meeting. For the first 60 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams.

Do you prefer blocked or shared time this evening?

**Member Batten:** Through the chair to the minister, I would love to do shared time if he's up for it.

**The Chair:** Minister, your choice.

**Mr. Turton:** Block time is fine.

**The Chair:** We'll go with blocked. Please proceed, Member.

**Member Batten:** Thank you so much, and thank you to everyone who has prepared for these estimates. I know there's a lot of work that goes into it, so thank you to everyone.

Through the chair to the minister, page 22 of the 2026-29 government of Alberta strategic plan speaks to modernizing services and improving supports for vulnerable Albertans. At the same time page 75 of government estimates shows youth in transition operating expenses, budget line 3.2, increasing by approximately \$4.78 million, or about 5.8 per cent, over this year's forecast.

Of course, investment in youth who are transitioning into adulthood is critical for their long-term success. Can the minister, through the chair, outline what concrete outcomes the government expects this additional funding to achieve for youth transitioning out of care from government? Will this funding expand access to housing supports, increase financial assistance, improve access to education or employment programming, or strengthen mental health and mentorship supports?

Per the most recent publication 2,120 young adults currently access the program. How many additional youth does the ministry expect will benefit from this additional funding? What measures will the ministry use to track whether this investment is actually improving stability and long-term outcomes for youth leaving the child intervention system? Through the chair to the minister: when the funding increases by \$4.78 million, what will be the difference for a young person aging out of care in this coming year relative to one that is aging out today?

Of course, through the chair to the minister, youth who have aged out of care have been clear that the previous support and financial assistance agreements often provided greater stability than the current transition to adulthood program, particularly because supports under the SFAA could extend financial supports to the age of 24 and were often more responsive to individual needs. Many youth and advocates have since raised concerns that the transition to adulthood program, with its reduced length and flexibility of these supports, has created new gaps for young people who are trying to secure stable housing, pursue education, or enter the workforce while transitioning out of care of government. Through the chair to the minister: with the additional funding now being allocated to youth in transition supports, how will the ministry ensure that this investment actually addresses the gaps youth have identified in the current TAP program? How will the ministry measure whether these changes are improving stability and long-term outcomes for the young people who rely on these programs?

Through the chair to the minister, advancing futures is intended to support youth who have aged out of government care in pursuing postsecondary education. Given the rising cost of postsecondary education, including tuition, textbooks, housing, and basic living expenses, does the ministry believe the current level of support available through advancing futures is sufficient for youth transitioning out of care to realistically complete their studies?

Now, through the chair to the minister, 1,051 young adults accessed this program as of December 2025. Can the ministry outline how many youth leaving care each year are eligible for the advancing futures program? What is the level of financial assistance currently provided per student? What proportion of youth

transitioning out of care are actually able to benefit from the advancing futures supports, and how many youth who may wish to pursue postsecondary education are unable to access the program due to limitations in funding or eligibility criteria?

Through the chair to the minister: is any portion of the increase to youth in transition funding on budget line 3.2 intended to strengthen the advancing futures program either by increasing the financial support available per student or by expanding the number of youth who can access the program? Does the ministry measure long-term outcomes such as whether participants remain employed, continue their education, achieve financial independence, or achieve financial independence after leaving the program?

Given the public investment in advancing futures what performance indicators does the ministry use to determine whether the program is delivering a strong return on investment for both the youth and for the province? If participants are not securing stable employment after completing the program, what steps does the ministry take to adjust program design or supports to improve these outcomes? Through the chair to the minister: does the ministry publish or report employment or education outcomes for the advancing futures participants so Albertans can see whether the program is effectively helping youth transition out of care and build stable, independent futures?

Now, with the increase in youth in transition funding outlined in this year's estimates, will the ministry expand access to advancing futures so that more youth leaving care can pursue postsecondary education? How is the ministry ensuring that youth who are aging out of care are aware of and able to access these supports so that financial barriers do not prevent them from continuing their education?

**7:20**

Now, to the minister through the chair, page 22 of the 2026-29 government of Alberta strategic plan speaks to modernizing services and improving supports for vulnerable Albertans. However, page 75 of the government estimates, item 3.1, early intervention and early childhood development, shows an increase of \$859,000, which is just over 1 per cent over forecast. Now, experts across childhood development and social services consistently highlight that early intervention is one of the most effective ways to improve outcomes for children and families while reducing the need for more complex and costly interventions later in life, and of course many communities, service providers continue to report growing pressures on the programs that support children and families proactively, so before the challenges escalate.

Our family resource networks, or FRNs, are doing an incredible job and providing incredible work supporting families. As the minister had mentioned in his opening, they provide parenting supports, early childhood development programs, and community connections that help stabilize families and strengthen outcomes for children. Given that the government's own strategic plan emphasizes strengthening supports for vulnerable Albertans and given the proven value of early intervention programs delivered through FRNs, to the minister through the chair: why is the ministry failing to invest strategically in these preventative programs?

With the increase in budget line item 3.1 sitting just over 1 per cent, how will this funding meaningfully expand the early intervention services that help families before situations escalate? More specifically, what concrete improvements will families actually see as a result of this increase? Will it expand access to FRN programming, increase the availability of preventative supports for families, or strengthen community services designed to help families stay stable? And if early intervention programs like those delivered through FRNs are widely recognized as effective at

improving outcomes and reducing the long-term system costs, why is the ministry not prioritizing a larger investment in these preventative supports?

Now, page 75 shows budget line 3.1, again, increasing roughly about 1 per cent over forecast. Given inflation, population growth, and the rising demand for youth services, isn't this effectively a real reduction in spending capacity for programs intended to support Alberta's youth? The ministry's mandate commits to improving outcomes for Alberta's young. Through the chair to the minister: how does a 1 per cent increase in line item 3.1 meaningfully support that mandate when service demand and operating costs continue to rise? What analysis did the ministry conduct to determine that that 1 per cent increase was sufficient to deliver on those objectives? How can these outcomes realistically be achieved without proportional increases in program funding or staffing capacity? And if funding remains essentially flat, which programs or services connected are going to see reduced reach, delayed rollout, or limited availability for Alberta's youth?

What specific outcome targets for youth are expected this fiscal year, and how do those targets compare with last year's? If the ministry fails to meet the objectives outlined, what accountability measures are in place given this limited increase in funding in Budget 2026? If these objectives are not fully developed, what will be the impact on Alberta's youth? How does the government justify proceeding with funding levels that appear insufficient to meet its own commitments?

Further, page 41 of business plan 2026-2029, key objective 1.2, states, "support [FRNs] to deliver universal, targeted and intensive prevention and early intervention services that focus on child development and well-being, caregiver capacity building, and social connections" and then under initiatives supporting key objectives shows a \$67 million allocation to FRNs. Given the almost \$82 million allocated in budget line 3.1, where are the remaining \$15 million being allocated, and what outcomes are being monitored to ensure responsible and adequate investment in services that serve Alberta's youth?

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you so much, Member.

We will move over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and again thank you to the member for those heartfelt questions. I have appreciated her passion in the Chamber, and I appreciate her questions here tonight. You touched base on a number of different topics, and I will do my best to answer as many of them as I can. If not, I will make sure I answer them on the next one. That way each section is properly addressed.

The first question that you did talk about at great length at the start of your question block, Member, was about the youth in transition. This is obviously something that's very near and dear to my heart. For any of us that have teenagers or young adults, we realize how important that stage of your life is, and as the Minister of Children and Family Services I understand and have heard firsthand about the challenges that so many youth transitioning out of care are going through as they enter adulthood. I realize that's challenging for most young people, and those transitioning out of government care can face even more challenges. That's why we deliver a program that prepares youth and young adults with child intervention involvement to live independently, pursue education, build careers, and have every opportunity to find success. I think that's something that each and every one of us around this table wants for these amazing young adults.

The transition to adulthood program that the member talked about is helping young adults find mentors, develop employment

and life skills, attain postsecondary education, build careers, and maintain emotionally supportive and lifelong connections. By investing in the future of youth and young adults transitioning out of care, we are better supporting vulnerable young people with a more co-ordinated, specialized support program, which is an investment in our province's future. In addition to TAP, as the member talked about, youth in care and young adults transitioning out of care are able to access a wide number of programs and services to support successful transitions. Some of these programs include advancing futures, the registered education savings program, mentoring for youth and young adults from care, youth employment connections program, foster caregivers caring for young adults, the Youth Advisory Task Force, family resource networks, and, of course, youth hubs.

The budget, as the member has asked, for TAP in 2026-2027 is \$65 million. This is consisting of \$17.9 million for TAP delivery, which is soft supports, and \$47.1 million in financial supports. The member was asking about how many individuals are receiving these supports. As of December 2025 2,123 young adults are receiving supports through TAP. Of these, 1,878, or approximately 88 per cent, are receiving services through the ministry's provincial service delivery or off-reserve service arrangements. This is about a 1 per cent decrease from 2024-25 Q3 to '25-26 Q3. Of the 1,878 young adults receiving services from the province or off-reserve, 1,426 have TAP financial support agreements, 80 receive services through a TAP foster caregiver caring for a young adult agreement, and 372 have TAP soft supports.

TAP recipients can choose between one of four pathways based on their individual goals. One of the goals is stability, adult support services, education, and employment or career: 14 per cent are enrolled in the adult support services pathway, 37 per cent in the stability pathway, 21 per cent in the employment and career pathway, 19 per cent in the educational pathway, and 9 per cent are still in the process of selecting a pathway. And with the guidance of our amazing staff at CFS we're going to do our best to help ensure that they have a path that's viable for them. A TAP recipient's monthly core benefit is \$810, and TAP also provides supplemental funding for annual or as-needed expenses such as medical, cultural, damage deposits, and child care. So there's an extensive support network for many of these amazing youth that are transitioning into adulthood.

The youth employment connections program is funded in collaboration with the Assisted Living and Social Services ministry to support employment readiness. Since the program was launched in April 2024, 331 recipients have received services; 272 have completed career planning; 250, pre-employment supports; and 195 completed skills and development training. Again, another positive example about how the youth in this program are receiving the care and the attention that they require so that they can transition into adulthood.

The member asked in her questions about some of the support offered to young adults transitioning out of care into adulthood, and I just want to again highlight a couple aspects. TAP recipients are eligible for financial core monthly benefits up until the day before their 22nd birthday.

7:30

Also, there are a number of programs that they have access to for mentoring employment, which I had touched base on. Just one example: the mentoring for youth and young adults in and from care program provides tailored training and resources to build service providers and mentors capacity to meet the needs of youth and young adults from care, including ensuring that Indigenous youth and young adults are connected to Indigenous communities and

culture. Again, it's extremely important to increase those cultural and family connections for so many of our kids because, as we know and I'm sure we will talk about later on today, of the large number of Indigenous youth within the system.

I also want to talk a little bit about some of the financial benefits for those over the age of 22, as the member talked about. Support for TAP recipients does not stop when they turn 22. TAP recipients aged 22 to 24 have a choice to continue to access transitional and nonfinancial supports such as mentoring opportunities, life skills programming, employment readiness supports, and regular connection to a dedicated TAP practitioner. Some supports, it's also important for the committee to realize, do continue up to the age of 31. Young adults can apply to the advancing futures program up until the day before they turn 25 and can receive supports to pursue their educational goals for up to five years or until the day before they turn 31.

Now, the member also talked a little bit about advancing futures. Note that no changes are planned for '26-27, but we are committed to continuous improvement. I think that's really important both for the ministry as well as for myself, that we want to make sure that this program is constantly evolving and improving to ensure that the kids are looked after.

Regarding advancing futures, as the member talked about, is something very near and dear to my heart. The government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that young adults transitioning out of care into adulthood have access to postsecondary opportunities and support life skills development and long-term success. The member rightly talked about the success of advancing futures because we know that it does make a difference. This program is open to young adults aged between 18 and 31 who have been in care who wish to pursue postsecondary studies. Through this program recipients have access to financial, social, and emotional supports. Young adults can apply to advancing futures program up until the day before they turn 25 and can receive supports to pursue their educational goals for up to five years or until the day before they turn 31.

Our government provides 25 students a year with a \$2,000 Duke and Duchess of Cambridge scholarship award, and these scholarships are awarded to students from advancing futures program based upon their academic performance. Recipients of the Duke and Duchess scholarship have achieved exceptional grades while dealing with challenging circumstances and should be proud of their academic performance and hard work. Again, this is definitely one of those programs that I like to brag about as it's really providing a leg-up for so many children and youth that are advancing into adulthood.

The 2026 budget for advancing futures is at \$19.5 million, of which \$14.2 million is allocated to recipient bursaries or grants. Just some of the stats: in 2024-25, eighty-four point five per cent of the recipients completed their program of study. Again, this is showing success in this program. The target for 2024-25 was 89 per cent and continues to be the same in 2025 and 2026-27. And again I just want to thank all those amazing students for their incredible hard work fighting through all their challenges and advancing their education.

As of January 2026 one thousand one hundred and nine advancing futures recipients are enrolled in the program: 31 per cent are enrolled in a degree program, 33 per cent are enrolled in a diploma program, 13 per cent are enrolled in upgrading, and 23 per cent are enrolled in our certificate program. Again, for the people that are interested in the economic side, every \$1 spent on advancing futures creates approximately \$4 in economic and social benefits.

The member was talking real briefly about some of the breakdowns for the youth in transition budget, the youth in

transition budget being \$86 million for '26-27. That would include TAP delivery at \$17.9 million and TAP financial support at \$47.1 million for a total of \$65 million. So again, this is a sheer example of an amazing program that provides incredible supports for young adults.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We'll head back over to the Official Opposition for their next segment of questions.

**Member Batten:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you a thank you to the minister for those answers.

Page 75 of the government estimates 2026-27, business line 2.2 shows a \$3 million underspending for child intervention delivery while the budget now proposes a \$49.8 million dollar increase, or 5.2 per cent. Can the minister, through the chair, explain why the ministry was unable to spend the funds allocated last year? Does this underspend indicate vacant front-line positions, delayed services, or administrative barriers? What has been done to ensure these gaps do not continue this year?

There's approximately \$33 million in additional funding for budget line 2.2, child intervention delivery and, of course, front-line workers are consistently reporting staffing challenges, shortages, and high caseloads. Can the minister clarify whether the budget increase is primarily maintaining existing service levels or whether it will allow the ministry to expand services or reduce caseload pressures? How will this funding translate into measurable improvements in caseload ratios and workforce capacity? Can the minister provide the current vacancy rate for child intervention positions and explain how this budget possibly addresses those shortages? If the workforce shortages persist despite this funding increase, what contingency plan does the minister have to ensure vulnerable children are not left without adequate protection or services?

Key objective 2.3 focuses on improving outcomes for children, while key objective 2.4 focuses on supporting the workforce. Through the chair to the minister: what proportion of the \$33 million increase is directed towards improving outcomes for children versus supporting staff capacity? What specific performance targets will the ministry use to demonstrate that the additional \$33 million in child intervention delivery funding is improving outcomes for children and stabilizing the workforce?

Now, Minister through the chair, Bill 38, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, where the government changed reporting requirements so that serious incidents and deaths were no longer required to be reported once a young person in care of government turned 18: while this was framed as an administrative change, the practical effect is that some of the outcomes affecting youth who were in government care are no longer systematically being tracked or publicly reported. For many young people who grew up in the child intervention system, the transition out of care is one of the most vulnerable periods of their lives. These youth often face adulthood without family support, financial stability, or safe housing, and the risks they encounter – homelessness, mental health challenges, and exploitation – are well documented. When reporting requirements for serious incidents or deaths are reduced, it risks obscuring the very outcomes that should inform policy improvements and system accountability. To the minister: given the mandate of the ministry noted on page 39 of the business plan to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are protected, what concrete actions have been taken to address this lack of insight into government-directed programs?

This change sends a troubling message at a time when Albertans are facing both a mental health crisis and an affordability crisis,

conditions that disproportionately affect young people leaving care. By limiting the reporting of tragic outcomes after youth transition out of the system, the province also limits its own ability to learn from those outcomes, correct course, and ensure that future youth leaving care are better protected. Through the chair to the minister: how are you ensuring that you are informed and able to make evidence-based decisions in allocating Albertan tax dollars towards Albertan priorities, including keeping Albertan children and youth safe while supporting them to participate fully in the economy as adults?

When oversight and transparency are reduced, the system risks losing sight of the young people it was responsible for protecting precisely at a moment when understanding their outcomes is most critical to preventing future harm. Through the chair to the minister: reducing red tape is advertised as saving Albertans' time and money. What funds have been saved from this policy change, and where have those dollars been reinvested in support of Albertan children?

Page 74 of the 2026-2029 government estimates, budget line 4.2, under prevention of family and sexual violence, which focuses on the prevention of family violence, sexual violence, and abuse as well as promoting healthy relationships across Alberta: these programs play a critical role in protecting vulnerable individuals and strengthening families by addressing the root cause of violence before harm occurs. By supporting prevention initiatives, education, and community partnerships, this work helps build safer communities, breaks the cycle of abuse, and ensures that Albertans have access to the supports and resources needed to foster healthy, respectful relationships. However, budget line 4.2, prevention of family and sexual abuse, shows an increase of approximately \$540,000, less than 2 per cent over forecast. Through the chair to the minister: can you explain what new or expanded prevention initiatives Albertans will see as a result of this increase? How will this funding improve the province's ability to educate Albertans about healthy relationships and prevent family and sexual violence before it occurs?

7:40

Studies show that 1 in 3 Albertan children will be exposed to sexual abuse before reaching the age of 18 and nearly 1 in 2 adults in Alberta will be assaulted in their lifetime and that when children are exposed to or experience abuse in childhood, they are highly likely to repeat the pattern as adults. Through the chair to the minister: how will the funding indicated on budget line 4.2 support public awareness campaigns, school-based education, or community outreach programs aimed at preventing violence and abuse? Does the ministry anticipate that the almost 2 per cent increase will expand geographical reach of preventative programming, particularly in rural or underserved communities? What specific populations or communities does the minister expect to reach who were not previously being served? What outcomes is the ministry measuring to determine whether investment in violence prevention and healthy relationship promotion are actually reducing the incidence of abuse over time?

What role will community organizations and service providers play in delivering the prevention program supported through budget line 4.2? And given the importance of early education and preventing violence and that the highest risk for abuse is seen in women and girls, Albertans with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and sexually diverse peoples, how is the ministry working with schools and youth-focused organizations to ensure prevention efforts reach the young people across the province? How does the ministry ensure that prevention programming funded under budget line 4.2 is culturally appropriate and accessible to diverse

communities across Alberta? What long-term outcomes does the ministry expect from this investment in strengthening prevention efforts, particularly in terms of reducing the number of Albertans experiencing family or sexual violence?

The ministry's business plan on page 42, key initiatives supporting key objectives, bullet 3, highlights \$29 million to provide services to Albertans impacted by sexual and family violence, which appears to refer primarily to response and survivor supports. Can the minister through the chair provide a clear breakdown of how much total funding in this budget is dedicated to prevention programs versus services for people already impacted by violence? If the \$29 million referenced in the business plan is primarily directed towards supporting victims after the violence has occurred, can the minister explain what proportion of the minister's overall funding is actually being invested upstream in prevention initiatives?

As the minister had said in his opening, we know that investment up front saves everyone headaches and hardship and heartache when things escalate and aren't addressed initially. I would love the minister to explain how – given the earlier comment about investing a dollar into advancing futures and how we see \$4 back in social benefits, very similar math happens here where we invest in prevention, we provide those resources, we educate children so that they're aware of their resources, their options. Can the minister through the chair share with us what return on investment he is expecting to see given the – what was it? – less than 2 per cent investment into the prevention of family and sexual abuse?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** That's the wrap-up of your questions, Member? Okay. Very good. That gives us 30 more seconds.

We'll move back over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and again thank you to that member for those questions. To touch base a little bit on what the member was saying in the last block, I just want to answer quickly her questions pertaining to early intervention services for children and youth.

In 2026-27 Children and Family Services is administering approximately 50 community-based grants totalling \$6 million for the provision of mental health, youth suicide prevention, mentoring, and early intervention supports and services for children and youth right across Alberta, including 12 First Nations communities here in the province. The breakdown for that grant is \$1.5 million to support mentoring opportunities for children and youth with a focus on youth in care, \$1.2 million to support mental health supports for children and youth, \$1.3 million to support prevention and early intervention services on First Nations, and \$2 million to support youth suicide prevention initiatives, including front-line service delivery, training, education and awareness, research, and reduced access to means of suicide. In 2026-27 Children and Family Services is also administering grants totalling \$4.4 million for six youth emergency shelters right across the province located in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Fort Mac, Lethbridge, and Grande Prairie.

Also regarding early intervention services about the budget, there is an increase of \$4.1 million, or 2.5 per cent, from the 2025-2026 forecast. This increase from the forecast is primarily due to higher caseloads in the transition to adulthood program and public-sector compensation adjustments. Children and Family Services is and will remain committed to using taxpayer dollars in a targeted, effective way for prevention and early intervention services. Albertans should receive consistent, high-quality services regardless of where they live.

That really ties into one of the parts of the ministry that I'm always happy to talk about, and that's family resource networks. I know the member talked at great length about the preventative nature of family resource networks, and I really think that this is the best tool that we have to provide those preventative services so that we can pour into amazing families and young adults and kids and ensure that they lead healthy lives. This continues to be one of my highest priorities as Minister of Children and Family Services.

Our FRNs provide a wide range of high-quality prevention and early intervention supports for children, youth, and families right across our province so that so that they can access the supports that they need regardless of where they live. These services focus on the well-being of families and help build healthy, strong communities, which is something I know that the member has been talking about with her range of questions. Through family resource networks we have been able to connect thousands of children, youth, and families to supports and services that help them build their resilience and reach their fullest potential. In 2026-2027 we are maintaining the family resource budget at \$66.7 million, and we will continue to leverage current investments to reduce waitlists, enhance service delivery, and support impactful outcomes.

I will say that I have experienced first-hand the positive benefits of the family resource network in my area, APFA, which is located in Stony Plain. I remember just a couple of short years ago I decided to come out to their father and son night. It was *Finding Nemo* night, I think was the theme. So I was very pleased to go out with my two boys, a good father-son bonding moment. While I was there, I remember seeing a young father with his two young kids. As soon as he walked in, you could tell he was a little out of place. He didn't quite know the routine and what to do. His daughter brought him on over to the playdough area, and he was kind of working, you know, playing a little bit. While he was playing, I saw some of the staff at APFA come over to him and start chatting with him and provide him some information. At the end of that evening that young father, who I found out later was a single dad, received a food basket, a bunch of supports to access in the area, and was actually able to be a better father for his daughter. Those are the types of experiences I know that family resource networks have throughout the entire province.

When I was first appointed as Minister of Children and Family Services, it became very clear that while the family resource networks were very strong in some urban areas of the province, there were other areas of the province that needed a little bit more attention, and we needed to be able to look at a bit of a renewal of the program. That's why, since being appointed as minister, we have been really putting forth those resources to ensure that they are targeted and they are focused on those families that need help the most.

Since 2021 this program has been undergoing a phased evaluation with the participation of family resource networks right across the province. Again this is speaking to the continuous improvement for the programs that are located within CFS. The evaluation confirms that the program is having a positive impact on children, families, and communities right across Alberta, and this is resoundingly endorsed when I talk with municipal leaders or community leaders as I've been travelling around Alberta. Participants who have experienced the family resource networks have shown improved well-being, enhanced their parenting knowledge like that amazing young dad, strengthened relationships, and were better connected to the culture, language, and community. Again, we are continuing to meet the needs of children and families here in the province of Alberta.

7:50

The member was asking about how many individuals have been accessing these amazing supports. The overall number of participants accessing family resource networks here in the province in '24-25 was 128,900, and this was comparable to the year previous, in 2023-24, of 128,300. It demonstrates the ongoing need for this program. The need is great regardless if you're in a rural area or in an urban area, as I'm sure many of the members here at the table can attest to.

Family resource networks ensure that children are supported to build the best possible foundation in their early years, youth have the resources that they need to be successful, and parents and caregivers are supported in raising their families. These include programs focused on parenting skills, improved child and youth development, social supports, and increasing well-being and resilience. We do realize that mental health is playing such a large part when it comes to the health of so many of our young adults. With the program that is currently being evaluated, we are going through that phase evaluation, again speaking to that continuous improvement that I touched base with in my first phase.

To do a bit of a funding breakdown: the available funding within the family resource network budget has been invested to address some notable service gaps which had been clearly identified when I became minister almost two and a half years ago. This includes access to short-term mental health supports, \$1 million annually; expanding services in rural and remote communities, \$300,000 annually; enhancing service delivery in Métis settlements, \$500,000 annually; youth programming for pregnant and parenting teens, \$260,000 annually; building capacity to support ethnocultural families in rural communities, \$500,000 annually; capacity building to address the needs of the LGBTQ for their youth, \$500,000 over two years; addressing wait-list pressures for intensive services, \$1.5 million annually; and a one-time 3 per cent increase to address identified cost pressures.

Again, it was very clear when I became minister almost two and a half years ago. We want to make sure that all kids and families and groups here in the province continue to get the support that they require. The evaluation has shown that FRNs are positively impacting children, youth, and families. Participants experience improved well-being, which, again, is very similar to much of the feedback that we've been getting from recipients for this program.

The member talked a little bit as well in her question block here about the OCYA reporting. First of all, I just want to say that there is no greater tragedy than the death of a child or young adult in care. This is something that hits me very near and dear as a father and especially as Minister of Children and Family Services when I hear first-hand about these experiences about kids that could potentially be hurt. When a child does receive child intervention services and has died or is seriously injured, we conduct a rigorous internal examination of what happened. The safety of vulnerable children and youth is a top priority for our government, and we will not stop in our work to make a meaningful difference.

The office of the Child and Youth Advocate does incredible work. I'm very thankful for Ms Pelton and her work in investigating deaths of children, youth, and young adults in care. Alberta's government through the Ministry of Children and Family Services is aligned with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, making a positive difference in children and families. I'm very thankful that we have been able to meet well over 100 of the recommendations put forth by the OCYA, and again, I appreciate her work.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will move back over to the Official Opposition. Please proceed with your questions, Member.

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, would you like to do shared time, or would you like to do block time?

**The Chair:** Shared or block time, Minister?

**Mr. Turton:** Oh, sorry. Block time.

**Ms Hayter:** Okay. Thank you.

As we know, for women to leave and not return to abusive homes, having economic independence is crucial. On page 41 of the business plan objective 1.6 mentions addressing affordability concerns and providing financial supports to eligible Alberta families and children. I'm curious. If we're addressing affordability and wanting women to be economically independent and resilient, as a cost-saving measure and preventative work, what is your ministry doing to advocate for increasing the minimum wage and pay equity?

On page 22 of the '26-27 strategic plan, priority 2, objective 5, supporting vulnerable Albertans, it states that the government is "preventing gender-based violence through awareness, education and community engagement. Government is supporting the implementation of [a] 10-year Strategy to End Gender-based Violence and support survivors." Within the '26-27 business plan, outcome 3, key objective 3.1 is a co-ordinated implementation of Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence. Within that plan on page 6 the report states that "to [improve] the quality of life for all Albertans," it is a shared, reflected "commitment across government to end gender-based violence." I truly, actually do appreciate the co-ordinated approach and the implementation of this crossministry strategy to end gender-based violence.

Referring to page 28 of the '26-27 business plan, how much of the \$15.7 million is allocated to the implementation of the 10-year GBV plan? How much money went into the creation of the Alberta 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence? Where in the budget documents does it show the total cost implemented and paid for this plan? Can the minister confirm that the \$19 million allocated to the gender-based prevention is allocated from his ministry to other ministries for implementation? Can the minister list which of the other ministries have been allocated this funding and how much was allocated to them? Can the minister confirm if there are any performance metrics for the use of this funding? If so, what are they, and if not, why? Will the minister provide this information to me in writing if it's not available today?

With the implementation of this crossministry strategy, what formal co-ordination is in place between Children and Family Services and other ministries for Albertans whose needs go beyond the narrow family-violence funding stream? Has the ministry created any clear referral or funding pathways for shelters serving clients whose needs overlap with housing, addiction, mental health, immigration, or other issues? If the shelters are being told to seek other funding streams, which ministries are expected to pick up those unmet needs?

In the '24-25 annual report it showed shelter pressures increasing, with longer stays linked to increased client complexities, safety considerations, housing costs, or the lack of affordable housing options to transition into. In the business plan key objective 1.4 on page 41 the ministry refers to reviewing and updating the investments in the women's shelter programming. Can the minister explain what has changed in this budget to ensure shelter funding is better aligned with the actual pressures shelters are facing? The annual report showed that women are staying longer in emergency

shelters in part because of housing pressures. Where in the budget documents can I find the specific funding or program changes that are intended to reduce those longer shelter stays? With increasing complexity, what additional support is being provided for staffing, programming, and wraparound services beyond just shelter beds?

In the business plan, page 42, key objective 2.5 refers to renewed shelter programming and funded community-based supports. Can the minister explain what measures the ministry will use in '26-27 to show whether those investments are actually reducing pressures on the shelter system? How much is coming as stable operating funding to front-line GBV organizations versus short-term project grants? What is the plan to move them to multiyear funding?

Stakeholders have consistently raised concerns about short-term and one-time funding. One-year grants do not allow for meaningful long-term programming or evaluation. They are causing a lot of instability. Has the minister heard from shelter directors that short grant timelines make budgeting and planning unmanageable? If so, what changes are going to be made in response to this? In the current business plan what portion of women's shelters and sexual violence funding is stable, operational-based funding, and what portion remains one time, short term, and project based?

Can the minister explain how the '26-27 budget gives shelters and community agencies the stability to plan for staffing and services over multiple years when they're relying on short-term grants? Will the renewed women's shelter program provide multiyear operational funding, or are shelters still expected to work under short-term grant agreements? What metrics is the ministry using to judge success for the programs that are funded for only one year and may not continue? How will the ministry make sure that the smaller shelters without large advocacy teams are not disadvantaged in seeking additional funding or capacity? Where is the planning to give shelters enough stability to plan staffing, programming, and capacity long term? Does the ministry see these one-year gender-based violence grants as pilot projects, and if so, what process exists to continue or scale successful ones?

8:00

In the government estimates page 74, 4.3, it states that women's shelters "[provide] safe accommodation for women and children in crisis due to family violence, and helps connect them with resources they need to rebuild their lives." Are shelters now being told that provincial funding will apply only to beds or services for clients who meet a narrower family violence definition? If so, what is the definition? How is the ministry expecting shelters to support clients who do not fit that definition but still need shelter and safety? Is the ministry's position that domestic violence funded beds should never be used for women facing other urgent safety and housing crises? Are shelters now to find separate grants or other funding streams to cover those clients? If the ministry is funding only part of the shelter's actual demand, what plan is in place to make sure those women and children are not simply left without support?

Stakeholders are hearing that there will be implementation of a new shelter funding approach. Can the ministry confirm whether the implementation of the new shelter funding approach was delayed from April 1 to July 1, or do the '25-26 grants extend to July 1, with the rest of the year still uncertain? How are the shelters supposed to budget for a full year when they don't have confirmed funding? Did the ministry assess the risk that these short-term extensions could lead to staffing instability, service reductions, and delayed planning? Why was the ministry not in a position to provide full-year clarity before the start of the fiscal year?

Last year's budget promised shelters a \$19 million additional funding that they are still waiting on. Many stakeholders are wondering where the money went. I don't see it referred to at all in

the ministry's '26-27 budget or business plan. When they asked this ministry, they were referred to Status of Women, and they still don't have an allocation breakdown. Has the entire \$19 million allocated over the three years been spent? If so, what did the funding go to, and what were the tangible outcomes? Was the \$19 million used to create the Alberta 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence?

With Alberta's agreement with the federal government we have received \$7 million in transfers in '25-26 and '26-27 for gender-based violence prevention and related social policy funding. The federal gender-based violence prevention funding peaked in '23-24, and the federal funding is now declining as the federal agreement expires. Page 30 of the business plan is related to federal cost-shared agreements for the gender-based violence prevention and related social policy funding. What provincial dollars are being spent to end gender-based violence? Can the ministry outline what actions it has taken to identify additional funding or other funding sources to ensure the continuing of funding for prevention of gender-based violence after the federal funding ends? What contingencies has the minister accounted for should the federal funding be lost for either the separatism question or other reasons? Can the ministry outline what actions are being taken to identify alternative or additional sources of funding to ensure the continuity of prevention of gender-based violence should federal funding cease to exist?

The government ended the Family Violence Death Review Committee, a body that reviewed deaths related to family violence, identified patterns of risk factors, and made recommendations to help prevent future deaths. The government said that that work was to become redundant because of the other review bodies and newer initiatives. I want to ask very clearly: what in this year's budget replaces that work? Which branch, unit, or funded initiative is now responsible for reviewing deaths linked to family violence? Which body is specifically there to identify patterns of systematic failures and family violence related deaths? Why did the government think that it was acceptable to remove one of the few mechanisms specifically focused on family violence death while also claiming that prevention is a top priority?

The government has said that this change allows for resources to be directed to front-line work. Was any of that money transferred into prevention of family and sexual violence, into the gender-based violence strategy, women's shelter renewal, or community-based violence supports? What metrics in this year's business plan tell Albertans that this ministry is still learning from family violence related deaths and using that information to prevent future ones?

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member.

We'll move back over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you again, Member Hayter, for your questions as well as your passion, which you have clearly exhibited in the Chamber as well, which I appreciate.

Just real briefly, I do want to touch base on the previous block's question regarding the OCYA reporting, and then I'll be referring to a number of the questions regarding women's shelters and sexual assault centres. Again, briefly, to the last segment, amendments to the Child and Youth Advocate Act were proclaimed in June of 2025. The reason for this is it really improved alignment between the office of the Child and Youth Advocate's mandatory reviews and government reporting. Reviews are mandatory when a child under the age of 18 receiving intervention services dies, and reviews are discretionary when a child dies within two years of receiving intervention services up to the day before the age of 20.

The changes made to the Child and Youth Advocate Act are helping to streamline reporting.

The advocate's work is now only focused on children and youth who have recently or are currently receiving child intervention services, leading to a timelier recommendation process in support of improved outcomes for children and youth. Aligning the advocate's mandatory reviews with government reporting has reduced the intrusion on the privacy of families and young adults over the age of 20. Reviews are still mandatory for deaths of children under 18 receiving services and are now discretionary when a child dies within two years of receiving services up to the day before they turn 20. The death of any person in Alberta can still be investigated by a fatality inquiry pursuant to the Fatality Inquiries Act, as recommended by the Fatality Review Board.

Alberta is committed to ongoing systemic improvement and is a leader in public reporting, including posting online when a child or youth has passed away in care or receiving services. Again, I just want to express my grief for any of the families that have experienced a loved one who has passed away within Children and Family Services.

The member also, and a little bit alluding to Member Hayter's questions, talked a lot about family violence and the important role of women's shelters and sexual assault centres and the key role that they have to keep women safe here in the province of Alberta. Experiencing any form of family violence is devastating, and that is why our government wants to ensure that anyone who experiences it has a safe place to turn for help. Again, my heart grieves when I have heard so many stories as I've been travelling around the province. You don't have to go very far to come across someone that has been through the scourge of sexual or domestic violence and to hear about the impact that it has on their families and their kids and perpetuates generational trauma.

Children and Family Services is committed to ensuring that individuals or families experiencing family violence get the supports and services that they need. Alberta's government has numerous programs and supports in place for those experiencing domestic, family, or intimate partner violence. We also invest in programs that help those perpetrating abusive behaviours to get healthier, including investment in men's and boys' programs. Again, this is something that has come out loud and clear when talking with stakeholders in the sector, that additional funding has to go to help support men and boys throughout the province of Alberta.

Budget 2026 commits almost \$10 million to family violence programming here in Alberta. We will continue to invest in strategies to promote healthy relationships and support individuals who have experienced violence. In total CFS will spend almost \$7.3 million in 2025-26 and '26-27 to support Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence. The member talked about many of the different ministries that are collaborating together, and I do appreciate the leadership of Minister Fir in Arts, Culture and Status of Women. For the member's question, the total cost of the GBV plan should be asked to that ministry, but we are trying to get you the individual breakdowns within this ministry.

In 2025-26 and '26-27 the ministry is investing almost \$7.3 million to implement prevention initiatives that target root causes of violence before it occurs and increase protective factors for Albertans, especially in marginalized and underserved communities. We also conduct public opinion studies to understand the prevalence of family violence and Alberta's perceptions. This work will inform investments in prevention and intervention, again, getting that public feedback about how we can improve the system.

As well, we fund Indigenous-led organizations aimed at providing culturally appropriate family violence prevention initiatives and support women's shelter programming to offer safe and inclusive supports and services. To distribute the \$3 million of the \$7.3 million available in '25-26 for family violence prevention grants, in mid-January of 2026 CFS launched two grant calls, an open grant call and an invitational grant call specific to Indigenous-led programs and services. Children and Family Services will continue our work to promote healthy relationships, invest in family violence programming, women's shelters, and sexual assault centres to support and empower Albertans fleeing gender-based violence.

**8:10**

The member talked at great length about women's shelters, and this is one of the aspects of my ministry that I've appreciated travelling around the province. I think at this point I've travelled to most of the women's shelters here in the province. There are still a couple that I haven't had a chance to be able to go to, but I've appreciated the experiences and the stories that many of the executive directors have shared with me and conversations with survivors of domestic and sexual violence as they've been seeking refuge and looking for a safe place to find supports in these various women's shelters around the province.

In Budget 2026 we invest nearly \$62.2 million for women's shelters to help individuals and families to get the support that they need. This includes \$2 million for CFS's mandate to increase funding for women's shelters by \$10 million. I'm very pleased to say that we are on track to meet our mandate commitments. The 2026-2027 budget also includes a \$500,000 capital grant funding to support the women's shelter facility pilot program, which aims to address critical facility renewal and maintenance needs, enhance safety, and maintain adequate capacity to serve vulnerable women, children, and youth fleeing violence or crisis while maintaining a safe and functional facility. This is something that I have been advocating for since becoming minister almost two and a half years ago.

To mention about two specific examples of how the safety and well-being of women and families has been affected in the past, there was one shelter that became very apparent had a black mould issue, and that was causing an unsafe spot for safety and refuge for women and children in a rural women's shelter, and there's another one that had very much of an emergent situation regarding some safety and sprinkler issues. We were able to meet those needs to make sure that those women's shelters were repaired and they continued to be a safe place. But this capital grant funding is really going to allow women's shelters throughout the entire province to on an ongoing basis meet the maintenance needs of their various shelters and ensure that these facilities are safe for women and children in their darkest days. By maintaining these safe places, the government will ensure that the shelters are safe, secure, and meet the increasing demands for emergency accommodations for women or children in crisis.

Over the past year CFS has met with shelters, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, and crossministry partners to develop guidelines that balance provincial consistency with flexibility for shelters to provide services and ways that work for their respective communities. The renewed funding approach is based on need and ensures that a wide range of services are available for Albertans to access in each region while helping maintain stable funding for shelters.

I understand quite clearly the differences between the needs and challenges of shelters that are located in rural areas versus the ones in urban. They are both complex environments to be able to act in.

I know in rural areas, as I've been travelling around the province, it's challenging when women are fleeing in the middle of the night with their kids. They might have to travel for hours at a time to be able to access a shelter. We want to make sure that those shelters are there when they need them, but in large urban areas there are also issues. There are issues about cultural understanding and making sure that we can enhance family relationships with Indigenous communities.

The member talked quite at great length about shelter capacity, and I just want to again assure Albertans and many of the people that are watching that there are always supports there when you need them. Ideally, I would wish that all of our women's shelters should not need to exist, but unfortunately there are individuals that definitely need these services, and that is why I'm very thankful to continue to help support these throughout the entire province. We are remaining committed to reducing family violence and ensuring access to some of the most critical services that women and children need to keep safe. That's one of the aspects of the capital renewal program I was very thankful to help support in this budget.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister.

We will move over to the government side. Will you be using shared or blocked time?

**Mrs. Johnson:** I would love shared if the minister is willing.

**The Chair:** Minister, what's your preference?

**Mr. Turton:** Block time, please.

**The Chair:** All right.

Please proceed, Member.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Well, thank you. Thank you through you, Madam Chair, to the minister for being with us here today. Thank you for the work you do and to all of your staff as well for the very difficult job that you have in this ministry. Appreciate this time this evening.

I'd like to talk first on child intervention delivery. It's an essential, legislated program that provides a safety net to the most vulnerable children in our province. Looking at the statement of operations on page 44 of the business plan, the child intervention program is anticipated to grow by approximately 3.1 per cent from the 2025-26 forecast to the 2026-27 estimate, where it sits at just over \$1 billion. That's followed by a decrease of about .3 per cent in 2027-28 and no change in 2028-29.

First, would the minister outline what child intervention delivery does and how it works, and then can the minister please explain what factors are driving the increased investment into child intervention delivery and how this funding will be used? And then: which 2026-27 initiatives will most directly strengthen placement stability and reduce risk for children and youth with complex needs?

Continuing on with the child intervention system programming, I'd like to look at the initiative related to that child intervention system, to the improvements located under outcome 2 on page 42 of the business plan. This initiative has allocated \$652 million in 2026-27 to improve the child intervention system through the implementation of preventative, safety-oriented, evidence-based programming and the operation of government-supported facility-based care which targets the complex care needs of children and youth in care. First, would the minister explain how the \$652 million investment in budget 2026-27 will be used to strengthen prevention, safety-oriented programming, and care for children and youth with complex needs within this child intervention system?

There's mention of implementing preventative, safety-oriented, evidence-based programming. How will this programming improve the child intervention system, and is the ministry tracking progress on this initiative? Then: how will the implementation of preventative, safety-oriented, evidence-based programming improve outcomes for children and youth, and what measures is the ministry using to track progress and effectiveness?

Then under caregiver supports if we look at the initiative on page 42 of the business plan, there's \$340 million allocated to support foster, kinship care, and permanency placements, increase caregiver rates, and attract new caregivers. These caregivers play a critical role in providing stable and supportive environments for children and youth who require care outside of their family homes. First, can the minister please explain how foster, kinship, and permanency caregivers are contracted by the ministry? And then: what government-led recruitment strategies are under way to expand foster and kinship capacity, particularly in high-demand regions, and which KPIs will be tracked and publicly reported? Finally, would the minister outline how the investments through Budget 2026 will address concerns with caregiver recruitment and retention?

Staying with child intervention staffing under key objective 2.4 on page 42 of the business plan, this involves supporting the child intervention workforce through developing and implementing workforce strategies. I understand that there have been challenges in Alberta and across Canada around recruiting and retaining child intervention staff. This makes key objective 2.4 that much more critical to the success of this ministry. First, would the minister provide greater insights to this committee on the progress made that supports recruiting and retaining child intervention staff? Would the minister please highlight what types of strategies will be used to accomplish key objective 2.4?

8:20

Staying with the child intervention system under complex needs, as noted in Budget 2026 documents and through the discussion today, there are concerns about the sustainability of the workforce. It is a priority, and I noted with concern that there is increasing case complexity. The fiscal plan on page 82 indicates that more children and youth are experiencing mental health, addiction, emotional, aggressive, and behavioural difficulties, and I think we heard that from you a little bit. It is a disturbing trend, and I'd like to focus this question on how your ministry is addressing it. How is the ministry helping these children through Budget 2026, and could the minister please outline the top deliverables in 2026-27 for safety-oriented, evidence-based programming and complex needs capacity, including milestone timelines? Also, how is the ministry building on recommendations from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to further strengthen assessment quality and front-line practice, and when will progress updates be published?

Going on to foster care and kinship supports, line item 2.4 on page 75 of the main estimates details foster care and kinship supports, and it stands at almost \$269 million in 2026-27. I understand that this item involves providing culturally appropriate and diverse supports to children temporarily unable to live in their family home. Would the minister please outline what this investment through Budget 2026 will go to support, and what is this ministry doing through Budget 2026 to address foster caregiver shortages so that children can find stability during challenging and difficult times?

Then one of my favourite topics, also one of my colleague's, is family resource networks. On page 41 of the business plan, key objective 1.2, it is referenced that the family resource networks

strengthen caregiving capacity. They support healthy families, child development and well-being, and increased social connections. We heard there are about 128,000 kids that are accessing this every year. It's amazing. I also read that these family resource networks deliver a continuum of targeted prevention and early intervention services, so I'd like to ask a little more about these networks and the services they provide. Would the minister please provide further information about family resource networks and how they offer preventative programming that benefits our communities? How will Budget 2026 impact the operations and reach of the family resource networks?

Finally, we've talked a little bit in these previous moments of women's shelters – I'm just going to touch on that briefly in these final couple of minutes – and the programming review. This goes to key objective 1.4, and this involves the review and update for women's shelters. More specifically, it changes the ministry to review and update government's investment and long-term vision for women's shelters' programming for individuals, women, children, and families experiencing family violence and abuse. Will the minister please explain how Budget 2026 will work to implement key objective 1.4 as it relates to the review and long-term vision? Through Budget 2026 how many shelter programs will be supported in 2026-27, and is the ministry providing for any other supports to this sector? Finally, my last question in this final minute: how is the ministry ensuring the best use of these funds to support the women's shelter sector?

Again, I just want to thank the minister and his staff for this amazing work. I've been to some of these shelters. I've been to the family resource network in Lacombe. They are doing absolutely amazing, phenomenal work. It is preventative, it is helping in so many ways, and I'm just so grateful to my colleague for her work in it and to the minister and your staff for all that you've done in this.

I will pass the time over to you. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you so much. I appreciate the member wrapping up those questions. [interjections] There's a lively discussion happening between the two sides here. We'll just get focused back and turn this over to the minister for his response to those thoughtful questions.

Please proceed, Minister.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to the member for her questions as well. In the time that I've known her over the last couple of years, your passion for kids is pretty awesome. I do respect that, and I appreciate that.

You know, as Minister of Children and Family Services, as you can imagine, there are a number of stories that children and families go through that I receive. I'm very thankful to so many Albertans that have shared with me their experiences as they go through some of their darkest days. Every now and then there's a question that just kind of sinks a little bit deeper.

You know, I think of one individual story from someone that I have known for a very long time. They were involved in the children intervention system in another province. They told me about their experiences, and I think this pertains a little bit to what Member Johnson was talking about. This individual as a grown individual – he's older than me – was talking about how even to this day as a grown adult, as a leader in his respective community even simple things like garbage day get him triggered about his experiences that he had in the intervention system in another province where as a young boy, he confided in me, he went through the intervention system. He knew when he was growing up that

when he saw the garbage bag out front, that was almost a sign that he'd be moving on. As a 50-year-old individual, this still haunts him to this day. He made the point of telling me this experience and how it goes and affects his daily life as he lives here in Alberta.

Stories like this – even though that individual's experience was in another province, it ties in with what the member was talking about, the importance of the intervention system and that how for so many of these amazing kids they may not know where they can actually sleep, or they may not have someone that they can go to for comfort. That's an experience that maybe many Albertans are not aware of. When the member – in her first question she asked about the child intervention delivery and how it works and its impact. I mean, I think about my friend that confided that story. That is, again, a burden that I do take very seriously as the Minister of Children and Family Services and making sure that these kids are looked after.

Some of the services that are offered within my ministry include in-home services and supports; out-of-home placements, including kinship care and foster care and community group care and campus-based care; and, of course, permanency services such as adoption, private guardianship, and postpermanency services. I know I've been at this committee for many years talking about my experiences with adoption as I have experienced and gone through that process with my youngest son. I'm very thankful for my good friend MLA Schulz, who was at the brunt of many of my questions in her prior role pertaining to adoption.

When necessary, unfortunately, the department does have to step in, and we do have to make a difference and intervene sometimes on some of the darkest days of these families, but I'm pleased to say that we do collaborate with parents and extended family members to identify a safe and stable temporary caregiver, maintain important family and cultural connections, and support reunification of children with their parents. Again, this is the ultimate goal. We want to make sure that our families are safe and healthy and our kids are looked after. When a child must come into care, all efforts are made to place a child or youth in a family-based placement like kinship when it is safe to do so. However, the goal is to place children and youth in optimal placement that matches their needs. For children or youth who require more intensive placements, there are options, including community care, campus-based care, and personalized community care.

The member did talk a little bit about some of the factors that are driving the increased investment in the child intervention delivery system and how it will be used. One of the main drivers behind the investment in child intervention is increasing case complexity for youth receiving child intervention services. This includes severe mental health issues, substance abuse, developmental disorders, and youth justice system interaction. This complexity has resulted in an increase of out-of-home placements, which are more expensive than family-based placements. Budget 2026 invests over \$1 billion into child intervention, and this is an increase of almost \$31 million from 2025-26 to forecast and address case complexity, public-sector compensation, including implementation of the new child intervention practitioner classification, and to support caregivers and agencies with increasing pressure. This investment is critical to keep children safe and is legislated under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, which has taken up a great deal of time over the last year as we have been reviewing that important piece of legislation. Again, I'd like to thank two of the members here that have helped participate on that committee.

**8:30**

We are taking action to address rising case complexity to make sure that children and youth have placements that meet their needs

and to plan so that our system is sustainable. Our investments support children and youth in government care to have the right placement for their needs and support the potential to increase family-based placements, such as kinship and foster care, which support better outcomes. Again, I have appreciated my conversations and round-tables that I've had over the last couple of years with foster and kinship caregivers around the province as they've been telling me about their experiences and sharing with me ways that we can improve the system.

The member also asked about some of the initiatives that will most directly strengthen placement stability and reduce the risk for children and youth with complex needs. Again, some of the programs that we have to address the rising cases of complexity: we are working right across government with community partners to provide more appropriate supports and services to children and youth who are living with multiple health diagnoses or disabilities or addictions and behavioural challenges resulting from trauma.

I very much appreciate the collaboration that is currently existing within government amongst different ministries to be able to address these vital concerns. Some of these government partners include Mental Health and Addiction, to support programming and access to care for children and youth experiencing mental health and addiction challenges; Primary and Preventative Health Services, to facilitate access to medical care; Alberta Health Services and Recovery Alberta, to collaborate on complex medical decisions; Assisted Living and Social Services, to support transition to adult services and other programs that support children and youth with disabilities; and Education and Childcare, to support success in school, just to name a few.

Alberta's government recognizes that children and youth entering the child intervention system have increasingly complex needs requiring specialized care, stability, and access to therapeutic supports. Our goal is to make sure that the best, most appropriate placements are available to meet this need. As well, I'm very thankful for many of the stakeholders that we deal with, especially with our community-based care that provides such exemplary service for so many of our complex youth.

The member did talk briefly about the investment in the child intervention system programming. I'd like to thank the member for her question not just for tonight but for many of the sidebar conversations that we've had over the last little bit. For Children and Family Services Budget 2026 is focused on prioritizing core programs, keeping children safe, supporting early intervention for children, youth, and families, and assisting Albertans who experience family violence and sexual violence. Highlights for my ministry include an increase of almost 4 per cent from the 2025-2026 third-quarter forecast and investment of nearly \$1.7 billion in Budget 2026 for Children and Family Services to strengthen the programs for vulnerable children and families, especially the ones that they rely on.

The ministry and its partners are working to prevent family and sexual violence, which I know I will be touching on in my next block with the opposition. This is helping families stay together or reunite when safe to do so and finding placements in kinship, foster, and legal permanency homes when children and youth must come into care. This will include continuing to review policy and practice by implementing safety-oriented, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate approaches and methods; developing and implementing improvements to kinship and foster care to continue to provide children and youth in temporary care with a healthy, nurturing, and family environment; providing targeted support and optimal placements for children and youth with complex care along the continuum of available out-of-home placements and support, again, the reunification with their families and communities; and of

course, developing and implementing workforce strategies to support the child intervention workforce.

Again, I just want to take these last couple of seconds to let the workforce of Children and Family Services know how much I appreciate the incredible work that they're doing to help so many families and kids throughout the province. I appreciate them a great deal.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you so much, members.

As you all know, there is another group meeting in the other room across the hallway here. We have been in touch with them to figure out how we can collaboratively work together so that we're not all coffeing at the same time, so we will take our five-minute break now and get fresh coffee.

[The committee adjourned from 8:35 p.m. to 8:41 p.m.]

**The Chair:** All right. That's our break, everyone.

Minister, you're ready to go, I see. We'll move over to the Official Opposition. Please proceed, Member. Blocked or shared time?

**Member Arcand-Paul:** I would go back and forth if the minister is comfortable.

**Mr. Turton:** Blocked time is fine.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the minister. On page 79 of the estimates this government has a projected revenue of \$51 million for "Services on First Nations Reserves," with zero accountability for this transfer. I'm curious about this number and any other social transfer that this government receives from Canada, particularly under the administrative reform agreement. With these funds, does the government keep a distinct account for funds received from Canada on behalf of Canada's responsibility to First Nations children while ensuring the funds are actually used for First Nations children? What is the metric to confirm this?

Through you, Madam Chair, can the minister please explain where this revenue for services to First Nations reserves comes from, where it goes, and whether there is a performance metric to satisfy Indigenous peoples that the money that the provincial government is receiving is actually going to support First Nations children and youth? If not, why not?

I look at the budget estimate and see the provincial government receiving \$51 million for services to First Nations reserves and then subsequently see only a modest increase of \$980,000 to Indigenous partnerships, or line item 5, which includes a real cut to policy and partnerships and an increase of \$1 million in Indigenous connections. These modest increases are unlikely to meet key objective 2.7 of the business plan, especially given there are zero metrics to confirm the efficacy of this province with the administrative reform agreement, particularly in extraordinary situations including medical, foster, or kinship care and complex needs.

I'm curious how much this government applied for with the Make-A-Wish Foundation for children that are PGO in care of this government.

This government has also shown zero willingness to accomplish the very first call to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which, let me remind us all, is to reduce the amount of Indigenous kids in care to none. I'm appalled at this budget because we're seeing zero results, especially looking at an increase of 78 per cent of all children in care being Indigenous as of

December 2025. Madam Chair, this is unconscionable. Looking at the metric of DFNA involvement in child intervention under performance metric 2(b), the per cent of First Nation children and youth served by a DFNA is 34 per cent. This still does not deal with the fact that apprehensions are still largely carried out by the province, with 72 per cent of child interventions being with Indigenous children and families.

I do not see any line items relating to the band designate, either. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: can you please clarify how the government determines the amounts available for the band designate? As we all know, costs greatly exceed with CYFEA mandates. What is allocated for band designates?

This government is also hanging its hat on the TAP program, with \$65 million in '25-26 according to page 22 of the strat plan, which leaves \$25 million to the advancing futures program, if I'm calculating correctly, but no metrics to assess success for the TAP program.

The caveat under performance metric 1(b) does not give me much confidence in this government or this program given that it's been in place for quite some time now under this government. While a self-survey of youth participants to assess this government's program efficacy is, with great respect, Madam Chair, lazy. What the program does not accomplish is an understanding of the ongoing colonization that this government commits against Indigenous youth that go through the system. If you're forcing traumatized youth to self-report while holding the purse strings for support, it's another level of cruel that this government continues moving toward. When we see a mere provincial increase of 5 per cent in this program year over year with 2,123 young adults participating in this program – meanwhile, this and previous UCP governments have had between 7,000 and 8,000 youth in care year over year – Madam Chair, quick math: that's less than 26 per cent of all those that have aged out of care accessing this Alberta Works for former youth in care, if they have not yet passed away, like the several family members that I and countless Indigenous families in this province have lost in years.

To sum, Madam Chair, through you to the minister, I'm asking for accountability on the administrative reform agreement and how much this government receives for First Nation youth on- and off-reserve, how this budget addresses reducing the amount of Indigenous children in care with TRC call to action 1, and how this government can believe that the TAP program is accomplishing what it sought out to do, given the figures that we're seeing from this budget and the actual amount of youth that have aged out that are accessing this program.

Madam Chair, those are all my questions to the minister. Please, if you can't answer today, I'll accept them in writing as well.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, hon. member.

We'll move back over now to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and, again, thank you to the member for his passionate questions. The member talked a great deal about Indigenous children in care. This is something I know I've touched base on with my ministry team a great deal. We understand the impact that it has on Indigenous kids, which predominantly make up the system. Child intervention practitioners are guided by the child intervention practice framework. It does include six core principles, which help out our Indigenous kids. They are Indigenous experience, preserve family, strength-based connection, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

The Indigenous experience that we know is that Indigenous peoples have always had their own ways of ensuring that vulnerable members, including children, are safe, protected, and nurtured. We honour this by recognizing their expertise in matters concerning their children, youth, and families. With connection we understand that children and youth are supported to maintain relationships that are important to them, be connected to their own culture, practise their religions or spiritual beliefs, and for those with involvement have a plan for their care where they are included in the decision-making process. We remain committed, as always, to working in partnership with Indigenous communities and walking the path towards reconciliation. Our goal is to help Indigenous families stay together whenever possible by providing those culturally appropriate prevention and early intervention services through programs such as family resource networks.

Alberta's government is strengthening cultural supports and connections with communities for Indigenous children and youth who need child intervention services by ensuring that a cultural plan is in place for children and youth in care to maintain and build connections with extended family and community. This is something that has come up to me personally from Indigenous leadership as I've been travelling around the province as well as at protocol meetings. It also includes recruiting and training and supporting caregivers who can foster positive cultural and community connections for Indigenous children in their care and ensuring that Children and Family Services staff have the skills and understanding that they need to serve Indigenous families.

Children and Family Services works with First Nations to transfer authority as they exercise jurisdiction over child and family services under Canada's An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families. This is something that has taken up a great deal of time for myself as I've been travelling around the province meeting first-hand with nations on their respective lands, talking with their DFNA heads and other stakeholders on the respective nations that are involved with children's services to look for ways that we can help out these amazing kids.

When children and youth are unable to live with their families, we do prioritize placement with trained and supported kinship caregivers who can keep them connected to their community and culture. Again, this has come out loud and clear as I've been travelling around the province. We want to make sure that these kids know where they came from. We want to do everything we can to ensure that they have those family and cultural connections. We know that this has a lasting impact on these kids, leads to better outcomes, and we can end the cycle of generational trauma. This is something I'm very aware of. This is something that has been clearly communicated to me from First Nations leaders, and we're doing everything we can to ensure that those connections remain intact.

8:50

To the member's question on line 5.2, there is a \$1 million increase for Indigenous connections primarily related to public-sector compensation adjustments.

To tie in real briefly with some of the questions that were with the prior member about the TAP program evaluation, the question that the member asked previously was about how CFS will know that TAP is helping young adults prepare for a successful transition into adulthood. Obviously, this is something that we want to be able to measure and keep track of. TAP has been fully operational less than 3 years and continues to evolve based on feedback from stakeholders, participants, and practitioners. In 2025-2026 TAP implemented an evaluation framework to confirm programming is

meeting the participants' needs. This includes a survey that practitioners will complete with TAP recipients annually. Data collected from the survey will be used to inform continuous improvement of TAP, including opportunities to develop, pivot, and strengthen the program based upon the recipient's self-reported progress.

The ministry will continue to gather feedback through the Youth Advisory Task Force and the new performance measurement survey tool, and this data will help the ministry understand the effectiveness of the program and inform continuous improvement.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Over to the government side. Please proceed, Member.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. We'll continue on the block time, Minister, if that's okay with you?

**Mr. Turton:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Singh:** Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, thank you to the minister for coming here today. I just want to express my gratitude to the minister and the entire team for improving outcomes for vulnerable children and women in Alberta.

Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, my questions are on the capital investment. I see here on page 44 of the business plan and page 75 of the government main estimates that there have been new and significant capital investments into child intervention and women's shelters that increases over the next four years.

In child intervention I see \$2 million, quite a lot for new annual program. What kind of projects will this new capital program go into? I see that women's shelters will only be seeing \$500,000 of the \$4 million in the first year but close to \$1.5 million in the third year. Are there any limits to what a women's shelter can request for funding, or can one shelter get the whole amount budgeted for the year?

My next set of questions are on prevention of family violence, very important to the Calgary-East constituency. Through you, Madam Chair, on page 42 of the business plan, \$29 million is allocated to provide services for programs that support Albertans impacted by sexual violence, family violence, and abuse. These programs play an important role in ensuring survivors and their families have access to the supports they need during very difficult circumstances.

I don't see a lot of information about what is offered within the \$29 million. Could you please, Minister, expound on the different kinds of grants or programs offered through this funding and the outcomes that come with the funding? How much of this funding is allocated to sexual assault centres, child and youth advocacy centres, and how much of the remaining funds are allocated to other preventative supports and programs here?

Through you, Madam Chair, my next set of questions are on healthy development of Indigenous children and youth. It has been touched on by the previous member, and I know probably the minister wants to expand a little bit more on this subject here. In the ministry business plan it identifies a commitment to working with Indigenous communities and governing bodies. Key objective 2.6 on page 42 shows the ministry's commitment to work closely with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous communities to support the healthy development of Indigenous children and youth in care. It goes on to indicate this will be done by providing opportunities to maintain and enhance connections with family, community, and culture.

Additionally, key objective 2.7 outlines the commitment to work with the First Nations and the government of Canada to implement An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth,

and Families, which would enable transfer of authority of a child in family service delivery. Could the minister please explain what this commitment means in relation to Budget 2026? And could the minister please provide this committee some specifics on what the ministry is doing about this in 2026 and 2027?

My next set of questions are on family, community, and culture. Through you, Madam Chair, while reading over the ministry fact sheet on page 39 of the business plan, I saw the ministry has a special focus when it comes to service design. I read that the ministry works with partners to design services that are culturally appropriate.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member. We'll head to the minister for his answers.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you again very much for the member's passion. As minister I've appreciated getting his questions over the last couple of years. To go through it real quickly. I know the member did talk specifically about the \$2 million that is allocated towards the new capital plan. In communities right across Alberta government-owned buildings provide front-line service to vulnerable children, youth, and families, and these facilities include group homes for children in government care and offices where families meet with caseworkers. To keep families and staff who support them safe, small-scale upgrades are needed to address the health, safety, and security needs such as keeping reception areas and doors secure and offering culturally appropriate client spaces.

The previous approach for small tenant improvement projects, implemented in co-operation with Alberta Infrastructure, frequently resulted in project delays due to administrative inefficiencies, including late assignment on project managers as a result of financial procedural delays. Even low-cost, low-complexity projects were subjected to extended timelines leading to missed schedules, cost pressures, and disruptions to program delivery. In several cases straightforward video doorbell installations or minor renovations did miss timelines. Part of the reason for this was because dollars were not clearly identified for this important work and required annual processes to identify the funds for the purpose that is a known annual requirement.

The member mentioned briefly and asked some questions specifically about the women's shelters and about the capital renewal program there. Again, as I stated to some of the other members earlier, this has been one of the programs that I'm most proud about that has been included in Budget 2026. In this year's budget it will invest \$4 million over three years into new funding to maintain and repair critical shelter infrastructure. This investment ensures that shelters are safe, secure, and ready to support women and children in crisis: \$4 million in capital grant funding over three years in 2026-27 to 2028-29 is allocated for the new women's shelter facility pilot program, a conditional capital grant program designed to address critical renewal and maintenance needs and enhance safety at more than 50 women's emergency and second-stage shelters right across Alberta.

You were asking questions about how the funding will be prioritized. That will be based upon the immediate safety risks, risk of facility failure, and professional assessment of infrastructure needs. By maintaining these safe spaces, the government ensures shelters are safe, secure, and meet the increasing demands for emergency accommodations for women and children in crisis. I will say that since the budget has been tabled, this one point has been the most talked about issue that has been referenced to me from women's shelter providers throughout the entire province. There's

a great deal of excitement about this new program, and they're already talking to me about how they can apply.

**9:00**

You're asking some specific questions about the \$29 million in terms of the different grants or programs that are currently being offered. The \$29 million is being invested in community-based organizations supporting Albertans impacted by sexual violence, family violence, and abuse. In addition, we're also investing in prevention programs that address abusive behaviours at their source. This specifically includes \$15.8 million to support 15 sexual assault centres right across the province, and the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. Again, I also want to just speak to the leadership and guidance that Corinne and Haley have had over at the Alberta sexual assault services. Actually, I just met with them a couple of days ago and they've been providing exceptional guidance to us in terms of how we can invest in these programs.

This includes an additional \$2 million to SACs right across Alberta to help support and sustain existing programming – we continue to strengthen provincial co-ordination to better support survivors – and \$3 million under the 10-year made-in-Alberta strategy to end the gender-based violence. This plan builds on the extensive work done and already under way to address gaps in the system and streamline supports and funding to where it's needed most and includes prevention initiatives that target root causes of violence before it occurs and increase the protective factors for Albertans, especially in marginalized and underserved communities and, of course, to fund Indigenous-led organizations aimed at providing culturally appropriate family violence prevention initiatives.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Over to the Official Opposition.

**Member Batten:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair. To the minister. The ministry launched the caregiver round-table action plan, as noted on page 42 of the business plan 2026-29, to better understand the experiences of kinship and foster caregivers and to develop recommendations to strengthen supports for them and ultimately for Alberta's children and youth. Given, of course, that these round-tables are ongoing, through the chair to the minister: what measurable outcomes has the ministry seen so far? Per the January 2026 government of Alberta release, child intervention placement numbers show year over year a decrease in the number of children and youth being placed in an at-home placement, where this last year there were 123 fewer kinship placements, 85 fewer foster care placements, 9 fewer permanent placements for children and youth in Alberta, for a total of 893 foster homes, 2,126 kinship placements, and 583 agency foster homes, where the agency foster homes have increased by 38 placements.

Since these round-tables have begun, through the chair to the minister, how many additional kinship or foster caregivers have been recruited and retained in Alberta? What is the minister's target number of caregivers needed to ensure that children can be placed in a stable family environment rather than having more disruptive placements? Given that the only at-home seeing increases are the agency foster homes, to the minister: is this the ministry's solution to the need for more placements? If so, how many agencies are selected and where can the public access this information? Now, many caregivers have identified practical supports such as increased respite as critical to sustaining placements. Where in this year's budget are we seeing investments that reflect those recommendations, including the increased respite funding or other direct supports?

Now, the supports for permanency program is provided to provide financial supports to families who adopt or obtain permanent guardianship of children under care of the government. Per the January 2026 government of Alberta release there has been a 2 per cent decrease in families accessing this support, and budget line 2.3, page 75 of government estimates, shows about a 3 per cent over forecast increase.

To the minister through the chair. At a time when needs are high, seeing a decrease in families accessing supports is a bit of a head-scratcher. However, the minister will recall that this government placed income testing on the support, breaking their good-faith agreement with families who had opened their homes and their lives to children and youth who had been in care of the government. Through the chair to the minister: how does the minister account for these supports not being accessed at a time when caregivers are asking loudly for additional supports, and given the strong pushback from families, is the minister considering removing the income testing from the support and making it easier for families to permanently bring children and youth into their families?

Per the government of Alberta release in January 2026, group-care placements have increased by 15 per cent and overall facility placements by 13 per cent. Given that the minister and I have previously agreed and hopefully still do agree that group-care placements are not as foundationally positive for children and youth when compared to at-home placements, and the minister had already mentioned that placing children out of home actually costs more, through the chair to the minister: can you explain how key objective 2.2, page 42 of the business plan, speaking to providing children in care with healthy nurturing family environments, is being met?

Now, caregivers are also frequently speaking about their need for trust and flexibility to make everyday decisions in the best interest of the children in their care. As these round-tables continue, to the minister: what steps is the ministry taking to ensure policies better reflect the lived experience of caregivers and the children they support, and how will the ministry evaluate whether the round-tables are actually improving recruitment, retention, and caregiver stability, and when can Albertans expect to see these improvements reflected in both outcomes and future budgets?

Now, page 75 of government estimates: capital investment shows a \$5.5 million overspend for children intervention delivery capital. To the minister through the chair: what was the \$5.5 million invested in? Who received this funding? How was the contract awarded, and what outcomes of this \$5.5 million investment demonstrate positive outcomes for Albertan children and youth, and how is that being measured?

Now, given the overspend and that the estimate reflects less than a third of this year's forecast for the coming year's estimate and a huge need for youth shelter spaces in Alberta, to the minister: do these capital investments captured in these estimates address the needs of Albertan youth?

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member.

We'll move over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes, thank you so much, Madam Chair. To answer a couple of questions that were asked in the previous block as well, there was a question related to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. We do not have a funding allocation for that amount. There was also a question about the First Nations designates. CFS has budgeted \$1.5 million annually to support these designates so that the funding is within the child intervention budget and split evenly between treaties 6, 7, and 8. Each treaty determines how they're split between First Nations. For the question that came a couple of blocks

ago about women's shelters, specifically about the grants, this is obviously something that has come out loud and clear with many of our stakeholders about the multiyear grants versus the single-year grants. The grants have been extended until July of 2026, and then when we implement the women's shelter renewal program we will look at longer grant periods at that point.

The member also did talk a little bit and ask questions about the engagement that we've had with women's shelters. There was a building on the women's shelter round-table, which was held in February of 2024. The women's shelter renewal program, or whisper initiative, launched in summer of 2024 to create a more culturally relevant, integrated, and responsive system of care and reimagine how family violence services are supported and delivered right across Alberta. Over the past year the government has met with shelters, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, and crossministry partners to develop guidelines that balance provincial consistency with flexibility for shelters to provide services in ways that work for their respective communities.

The renewal program, as I mentioned, will be implemented on July 1, and it aims to provide a provincially consistent framework that allows for flexibility based upon community context. It also will allow flexible, transparent, and needs-based family violence interventions in areas of the highest need and strengthen alignment, co-ordination, and integration within the broader family and gender-based violence system of care. It will also embed culturally-safe, trauma-informed, and survivor-centred approaches and improve performance measurement, accountability, and sector sustainability and create space for innovation and service delivery, including the development and scaling of alternate models.

The ministry is continuing to reduce red tape and administrative burden by making grant agreements more flexible, which will allow shelters to allocate funding to best meet their local needs. In addition to providing operational funding to more than 50 women's shelters in the province on an annual basis, CFS also provides annual funding to the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, who provide co-ordination and support for members. Capital grant funding of \$500,000, which we have talked about earlier, has been provided to support the women's shelter facility pilot program.

**9:10**

In terms of the budget and some of the questions that the member talked about, there's no reduction to the operational funding for women's shelters. The difference between the 2025-2026 forecast and the '26-27 budget reflects one-time funding commitments, not reductions, to ongoing shelter operations. In fiscal year '25-26 we provided time-limited funding to modernize data systems, support regional collaboration, and pilot innovative service delivery approaches.

There were some questions as well regarding the Family Violence Death Review Committee. Again, I just want to thank all the members for their work on that committee. By shifting focus to more integrated and forward-looking prevention efforts, the government is better positioned to continue prioritizing the safety and well-being of Albertans affected by family violence. For example, we are advancing several high-impact strategies to prevent family violence, including Building on our Strengths: Alberta's 10-year Strategy to End Gender-based Violence and 113 Pathways to Justice: Recommendations of the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. These initiatives focus on proactive, community-based, and integrated approaches to violence prevention. We will continue to advance recommendations from the upcoming special case report.

The member also talked about sexual assault centres. I'll probably have to finish some of the information that the member

has been requesting in the next block. But I just again want to stress that no Albertan should ever have to experience sexual violence or abuse. Again, I'd just like to thank all the survivors of domestic and sexual violence that have come up to me and told me their stories and the impact that the sexual assault centres have had pertaining to their healing here in the province by providing the services and programs that they need to lead a healthier life. I'll talk more about them in the next block.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister.

We will move now over to the government side. Please proceed, Member.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair and through you to the minister. I just want to echo what some of my colleagues have said. I do think that appreciation for the work that your ministry does is really important to express to you because you do have to deal with some very difficult stories, and you guys are all working really hard. For me, especially because you have touched on it, your visiting as a new MLA: I think you were the second minister to reach out to me, to want to come and meet with me and the Mountain View Emergency Shelter. You know, we had a rather unfortunate story that happened that resulted in them having to begin a build of a domestic violence women's shelter. It took tragedy in the community, and with some funding from our government I'm happy to say that, since you came to visit, it is now open and operating. I got to tour the facility. But you taking the time to sit with them, they really, really appreciate it. You getting around in the province means a lot. So I did want to just take a minute to thank you for that. My questions don't actually have to do with women's shelters. I think you've been covering that. But I did want to take a minute to express my gratitude.

Actually, I wanted to talk about the child and family benefit program. It was touched on lightly. Affordability is an issue for many Albertans and, you know, around our country, everyone. In the fiscal plan on page 82 there are added supports to the Alberta child and family benefit program. The Children and Family Services expense, I note, is increasing \$30 million, or 8 per cent, from the 2025-26 third-quarter forecast. The most operating increases are for child intervention and the Alberta child and family benefit payment. My questions are around the payments. First, what is the purpose of the Alberta child and family benefit, and how will it support the needs of Albertan families in 2026-27? How is Budget '26 impacting the Alberta child and family benefit, and how does Budget 2026 use the Alberta child and family benefit to help address affordability pressures for families with children?

My next set would be around operating expenses. We all know that the youth are our most precious in this province, and when they're in government care or transitioning out of care, whether it's to their families or they are now independent, children require our support as they process into adulthood. Under operating expense increases provided for in Budget 2026 on page 83 of the fiscal plan the total expense is forecast at a little under \$1.7 billion in '26-27, which is an increase of \$63 million, 3.9 per cent, from the '25-26 third-quarter forecast. My questions would be: through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, could you please break down the expense increase? How does this increase through Budget 2026 compare to previous years? What are the ministry's top priorities with the increased funding through Budget 2026? I think what would be of value as well is if you could tell how the ministry uses performance measures and public reporting to demonstrate the progress and support continuous improvement over the fiscal year.

We've talked a fair bit about TAP and advancing futures. If I could take the last few seconds here, I'll talk about advancing

futures. In performance metric 1(a) on page 41 this program addresses the needs of youth transitioning from government care to postsecondary education. Could you explain, through the chair, the program and the number of young people it will serve through Budget '26? The metric looks at the percentage of youth who complete their planned education. Could you speak, Minister, on how that performance is evaluated and how Budget '26 will support achieving the 2026 to 2027 outcomes? That would be great, Minister, if you could do that.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member.

We will move over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much to the member for her questions. I have appreciated meeting her constituents in her area. To address her first question, which is about the Alberta child and family benefit, we do realize as a government and as a ministry the cost of living challenges that many families face, and this benefit is an important way that we have been supporting them. The Alberta child and family benefit, or ACFB, is a tax-free benefit paid to lower- and middle-income families with children under the age of 18. This amount varies based upon family income and number of children under the age of 18. It is estimated that between 185,000 and 190,000 families right across Alberta access this credit every year. Many Albertans continue to struggle with the high cost of living as a result of inflation, and this benefit helps put more money into their pocket.

As part of Budget 2026 the government will invest \$405 million into the ACFB, which is a \$30 million, or 8 per cent, increase from forecasted 2025-26 expenses. This budget increases to support the scheduled 2 per cent increase to benefits with anticipated population growth. Effective July of 2026 the ACFB will be increasing by 2 per cent, based upon the Alberta escalator as defined in section 44.2 of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. Working families can expect to receive up to an additional \$45 per year if they have one child and up to an additional \$115 per year if they have four or more children. The ACFB includes a base component and a working component. From July of 2026 to June of 2027 the maximum yearly benefit will be \$5,882, up from \$5,767, for a family with four or more children.

The other question you did ask specifically was about the expense increase based upon page 83. In Budget '26 we are focused on what matters most, which is of course meeting the legislated requirements and keeping our kids safe. The \$63 million increase in funding is primarily from a \$31 million increase in child intervention programming. The increase in funding is public-sector compensation adjustments, including the new child intervention practitioner classification, additional support for rising costs associated with case complexity, and a 2 per cent increase in foster care, kinship care, and permanency caregiver rates. Again, this was the number one ask that caregivers have been asking me for the last couple of years. Very thankful we were able to put forth these increases for them.

9:20

As well, we have a \$30 million increase for the Alberta child and family benefit to support and increase benefits and phase out thresholds by 2 per cent for families who access these supports and to support population growth and a \$4 million increase in early intervention services to support the increasing caseloads in the transition to adulthood program.

Your question as well was pertaining to the increase through Budget 2026 compared to previous years. This budget continues to

support those families by building upon the investments from 2025-26. There's an increased focus on funding to support building capacity in child intervention and help address agency pressures and support case complexity. Further, this budget continues the commitment to foster care, kinship, and permanency caregivers by increasing those caregiver rates by, again, 2 per cent, which I'm very thankful that we're able to do.

You asked specifically about my top priorities with the increased funding through Budget 2026. The safety and well-being of children and youth, including those in child intervention, has always been and will always be my highest priority. We have to make sure that these vulnerable kids are safe and protected. In our budget we will focus on what matters most, meeting our legislated requirements to keep our children safe and keeping the promise to support Albertans fleeing violence.

You asked a question specifically about the performance measures and the public reporting and how it demonstrates progress to support our continuous improvement. At the start of each fiscal year the ministry publishes a business plan outlining key objectives, performance indicators, and annual targets related to child safety, permanency, well-being, and youth transitions. These measures establish clear expectations and provide a baseline for tracking progress. During the year we continue to monitor results and take input from our stakeholders about ways that we can continuously improve the system.

Thank you very much for your questions.

**The Chair:** Over to the Official Opposition.

**Member Batten:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the minister through the chair, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act was recently reviewed through a committee process with recommendations provided to the ministry in late November 2025 and subsequently tabled in the Legislature in February 2026. Highlighted on page 42 is key objective 2.1, which is to continue to review policy and practice by implementing safety-oriented, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate approaches and methods.

Now, given the time and resources invested into the review, through the chair to the minister, what specific legislative amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act will the ministry introduce in response to the recommendations made by the CYFEA review committee, and when can Albertans expect those amendments to be brought forward? How many of the review committee's recommendations has the ministry accepted, partially accepted, or rejected? Will the government publish a formal response outlining its decision? How will the ministry publicly track and report progress on implementation of these recommendations so that stakeholders and families can see a measurable outcome?

Given that the January 2026 government of Alberta statistics report shows an increase in the number of intakes of children and youth and that advocates and the youth themselves are both concerned at the ever-increasing complexity of their needs, given the high risks of homelessness, mental health challenges, and exploitation and given that as of December 2025 78 per cent of children receiving services and care from Children and Family Services are Indigenous, through the chair to the minister: what actions are being taken to address this continued overrepresentation of Indigenous children in Alberta's child intervention system?

How will the ministry ensure that CYFEA amendments align with the federal Indigenous child welfare legislation and support Indigenous jurisdiction over child welfare services? What specific measures will the government introduce to strengthen cultural

continuity and community connections for Indigenous children placed in care? Does budget line 2.4, kinship and foster care support, which is seeing a 5.4 per cent increase over forecast, provide the additional financial, social, and training supports to kinship caregivers who are now caring for a significant proportion of children receiving intervention services?

The January 2026 report shares that 86 per cent of children and youth who suffered a serious incident or died in care of the government were Indigenous. What concrete actions is the ministry taking to address this devastating overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth who are dying in care of the government? In fact, looking at data as far back as 2026, Alberta now has the highest percentage of Indigenous overrepresentation for serious injury and death while in care of the government.

To the minister: will the government expand reporting requirements or oversight rules related to the Child and Youth Advocate to strengthen independent review of serious incidents involving children and youth receiving services? Will the minister reconsider adjusting the age of reporting back to 24 years of age to better understand outcomes facing youths who are in care of the government? Where in this year's budget are the resources allocated to support the implementation of the recommendations? How will the ministry ensure that the review results in tangible improvements for Alberta's most vulnerable rather than simply remaining a report to the government?

Now, Minister, I'd asked in the previous block and I have not yet heard the answer to the \$5.5 million overspend that we're seeing in child intervention delivery capital. Again, what was the \$5.5 million invested in? Who received this funding? How was the contract awarded? What outcomes for the \$5.5 million investment are demonstrating positive outcomes for Albertan children and youth, and how is this being measured?

Further, at 18 young people may legally be considered adults, but emotionally, their development, life experience, and stability do not suddenly change on their 18th birthday. Many youth, especially those navigating complex family situations, mental health challenges, and transition out of government care are still building the skills, confidence, and support networks they need to live independently. Several provinces have already recognized that young people do not suddenly become fully adult at 18, and they have extended robust supports, including financial ones, well into their 20s. For example, British Columbia provides financial, housing, education, and mental health supports up to the age of 26. Quebec supports youth through programs extended to the age of 25. Nova Scotia, up to the age of 24. Given that other provinces are clearly recognizing the developmental reality that youth often require support well into their . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member. That's your time.

Now over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. To answer a couple of those questions regarding the CYFEA review, which I have mentioned briefly has taken up a large part of the year, I'd like to thank again all the committee members for participating in that committee, including yourself, Madam Chair, and Member Batten. This committee has had a wide range of perspectives, with representation from Indigenous communities, guardians and caregivers, service providers, and a member from both caucuses. The committee has met from November 2024 to November 2025 and dedicated a significant amount of time to review the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. The committee's report included 37 recommendations focused within four themes: administrative fairness, permanency for children, Indigenous

continuity, and cultural considerations. We are currently reviewing the actual reports, and my department and I will take time to consider the recommendations that are put forth. It is my expectation, however, that we will be bringing forth changes in the 2026-2027 fiscal year.

The member also talked in an earlier block about supports for permanency income testing. To deliver core services the government made difficult decisions such as reintroducing income testing of the basic maintenance benefit and the supports for permanency program for guardians with a combined income of \$180,000 or more. Families already receiving supports for permanency funding will continue to get the basic maintenance rate until the children age out of the program at 18. This change only applies to the basic maintenance benefit, meaning guardians with a combined gross annual income of \$180,000 or more would still have access to all the other supports in the program. Alberta's disciplined fiscal approach protects the vital services that Albertans count on, enables debt repayment, and supports savings for future generations.

9:30

The member mentioned a couple of times about the \$5.5 million in capital overspend; \$3 million of that is IT project, and that includes a caregiver portal delivered by T and I, and \$2.5 million for carry-over for capital investment from the prior year delivered by Infrastructure for group homes. Hopefully that addresses that member's question.

In a prior block the members were talking, asking questions specifically about trends that we have within the foster care system. Compared to December of 2024, there were 18 fewer approved and licensed foster care homes or 15 fewer homes managed through the regions, which means fewer foster care placement options to meet the needs of children or youth who come into care. This loss is on top of the historic shortage of foster caregivers right across the province. For regional and/or off-reserve foster homes, there has been a 1 per cent decrease from December of 2024.

The foster care recruitment process is being streamlined to be more responsive to potential foster caregivers. Children and Family Services is committed to increasing the number of foster care beds to better serve vulnerable children, youth, and families in need. Through strategic initiatives and partnerships, efforts are focused on expanding the availability of safe and supportive placements, ensuring that every child and youth receives the care and stability that they deserve.

Through a province-wide foster care procurement Children and Family Services significantly strengthens system capacity and caregiver support. Before this procurement the province contracted approximately 1,420 foster care beds. The ministry aimed to expand capacity to 1,700 beds, representing a 20 per cent increase, and ultimately awarded 1,659 beds. This procurement increased financial support for caregivers.

The daily foster care program rate did increase by 35 per cent, rising from \$34 to \$46 per day to better reflect the responsibilities of caregivers within Alberta. In addition, a tiered, incentive-based funding model was introduced to support recruitment and retention. Again, these are two aspects that came out loud and clear at the foster care round-tables that we have been having.

In addition to the enhancements made in 2023-24, we have also been increasing financial supports to caregivers annually to address inflation in line with the Alberta escalator. This includes the basic maintenance, babysitting, relief, and for skill fee per diems, and the next increase is planned for April 1, 2026. In 2024 I hosted a series of provincial round-table discussions with kinship and foster

caregivers to gain insights into their experiences, and I do continue those conversations with foster care families in the province.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister. Over to the government side.

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and of course thank you to the minister, through you, and his staff. Minister, I really appreciate hearing some of the stories about you interacting, and it's been well mentioned by my colleagues your commitment to travelling throughout Alberta, including, of course, in my riding as well. Just getting to hear from you about the impact, I would certainly add that in my constituency office I want to say thank you to your department and your office. You know, I would say that in my time since being elected, hearing from constituents who are dealing with issues in your ministry is certainly one of the most moving parts of my job, and I will say that when I get a chance to pass their stories along and talk to your office, they've been helpful and compassionate as is required.

Of course, through the chair, I do have some questions, a lot of questions maybe, on some of the transition pieces that you've talked about, but I did want to say to anyone who's watching who's ever come to my office to talk about this: I appreciate all that they do for this service to Alberta as well. Minister, through Madam Chair, we talked about transitions. I believe the TAP program has come up, and I just wanted to give you a chance, Minister, to maybe speak a little bit more broadly about this program.

You know, I'm just kind of looking at performance indicator 1(b). This is on page 42 of course. It's important because it talks about young adult outcomes, and TAP helps prepare young adults to live independently, pursue education, and build their careers. I see the indicator will measure the self-assessed progress of participants and support the continuous improvement of the program, so through the chair: would the minister explain who is eligible for this program? Also, could the minister tell us more about this program and how it supports youth?

Finally, through the chair, from reading the document, I understand performance indicators are still in progress. How is the ministry developing these indicators, and when is it expected to have them ready?

If I might transition my transition questions; definitely no pun intended there. Through the chair, this is about youth in transition, and specifically I'd like to ask a question about the youth in transition portion of the early intervention services program. Per the fiscal plan, this offers services to assist young adults transition from supported care programs to more independent adulthood. It does go on to indicate that this includes social and emotional support, financial assistance, and coverage for tuition and living expenses for youth pursuing postsecondary education.

I did note that this funding is increasing by \$4.8 million in '26-27. If it pleases you, Madam Chair, through you, I would like to ask the minister if he could please tell this committee more about this program and the demographic it serves. Is this program distinct from the others we've already discussed? I think this transition topic is obviously very important, so I would be interested to hear perhaps some of the distinctions between these programs and discuss what role those play. Then, finally, on this topic, through the chair: what role does this play in the early intervention services program?

I see I have about a minute left, so I would appreciate the opportunity to put one final question here on the table to you, Minister, through the chair. This is related to the family-based care metric. This is performance measure 2(a) on page 43 of the business plan, and it measures the percentage of children in care placed in

family-based care. I read that “This demonstrates the ministry’s commitment to prioritizing the best interests of children by placing them . . . in kinship care, in foster care or through permanent placements.” I do have a couple of questions, through the chair, to you, Minister. For the benefit of this committee, would the minister further outline the distinctions between the different types of care and the ways family-based care benefits the child? One last question here in our last 16 seconds. Through the chair, I see the target for ’26-27 is 85 per cent in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. How will Budget 2026 work to help the ministry achieve this target?

Thank you very much, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member.

Over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Always happy to receive members from the sister riding for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, which is Leduc-Beaumont, a very similar writing to the one that I represent, and I always appreciate the member’s advocacy.

To touch base on some of the questions. One of the first questions that the member talked about was TAP and who is eligible for that program. TAP is available for young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who at the age of 18 were subject to a permanent guardianship order, a permanent guardianship agreement, a temporary guardianship order, a custody agreement with youth, or an enhanced agreement with youth. TAP recipients are eligible for financial core monthly benefits and nonfinancial supports up until the day before their 22nd birthday. TAP recipients aged 22 to 24 have access to transitional and nonfinancial supports, and they also continue to be connected to a TAP practitioner. These supports can be essential for helping a young adult build their future, so that they can lead a healthy and productive life.

It’s also important, as I mentioned earlier, that some supports can continue up to the age of 31, and young adults can apply to the advancing futures program up until the day before they turn 25 and can receive supports to pursue their educational goals for up to five years or until the day before they turn 31.

One of the questions that the member also asked about is, again, how these programs help out our youth. I just want to stress about some of the other programs that are available. In addition to TAP, youth in care and young adults transitioning out of care are able to access a number of programs and services to support successful transitions, which include advancing futures, which we’ve talked quite a bit about, registered education savings programs, mentoring for youth and young adults from care program, youth employment connections program, foster caregivers caring for young adults, Youth Advisory Task Force, family resource networks, and youth hubs. So there’s a wide and broad range of supports that the member has asked about in terms of that can help out youth.

**9:40**

The member also talked a little bit about the early intervention services program, so more about that specific program and the demographic that it serves. Youth in transition is the overarching program, like I mentioned below. But all youth in transition programs except for advancing futures do serve young adults from government care from the ages of 18 to 24. You also asked if this program is distinct from others that have been discussed at great length throughout the evening. It is not a distinct program. It is the overarching program that encompasses all the supports that the ministry provides to young adults ages 18 and up.

The member did talk a little bit about family-based care and some of the metrics that we have to measure the success for that program,

some of the distinctions that we have between the family-based care systems that we have within the ministry. We would have kinship and foster care. They provide that one-on-one relationship. Kinship care is the first placement explored for children and youth coming into care. That’s very important because we want to make sure that the family connection remains intact. We know clearly from evidence that if we can maintain those family connections, the child will be looked after well into the future. When that is not available, foster care placement options are explored at that point. We also know, again, that the main preference is kinship care as a first priority.

When family-based placement cannot meet the needs of a child or youth in care, additional options on the placement continuum are explored. I think that is important for all members of the committee to understand, that there is a continuum of care within Children and Family Services. It moves over from therapeutic foster care to community group care, campus-based care, or personalized community care placement. That may be necessary to best match the placements for the specific needs of children and youth.

There was a question about the accountability for child intervention delivery. To ensure transparency and objectivity when monitoring compliance, we did develop two new service delivery accountability frameworks, which were launched in early 2026. These frameworks are a quality assurance tool to ensure oversight on the performance of regions and delegated First Nations agencies, with the goal of continuous improvement. Again, this is something that we strive to do at every step of the process within Children and Family Services, working with our stakeholders, working with our caregivers to ensure that our kids receive the best care possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will now move over to the Official Opposition for their next set of questions.

**Member Batten:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Alberta is facing a \$9.4 billion deficit, without a plan to balance this budget in the coming years. Page 4 of the strategic plan 2026-29 vision statement indicates that investment in the Alberta advantage and supporting the things that matter most to Alberta are part of it. The Ministry of Children and Family Services’ mandate includes improving outcomes for vulnerable children, youth, and families in Alberta. As we discussed, the ministry is responsible for early intervention services, where the preventative portion, budget line 3.1, is receiving roughly 1 per cent increase over forecast. The ministry has allocated a 5.8 per cent increase, budget line 3.2, to help support the gap in supports provided to vulnerable young Albertans as they transition away from being under the guardianship of the government, which, I guess, is both interventional as well as preventative as it could set up these youths for a successful adult life.

The ministry has allocated 5.2 per cent increase to the child intervention services. Even with a year-over-year increase in the number of children and youth requiring intervention the ministry has cut funding overall to the prevention of family and sexual violence by almost 3 per cent. This funding is meant to not only prevent family and sexual violence through the delivery of preventative services, but also the same funding is meant to provide safe spaces and resources for Albertans experiencing family or sexual violence to help rebuild their lives. This cut is especially concerning considering that roughly 95 per cent of sexual assaults are not even reported to police, and there is a growing devastating trend where survivors are unable to find shelter space for themselves and their children.

The ministry, however, has allocated about 9 per cent, less than a million dollars over forecast, for Indigenous partnerships, when Alberta continues to see an overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in care of government at 76 per cent and overrepresentation of Indigenous young lives who die while under care of this government. From April 2025 till January 31 of this year 86 per cent of children and youth who died in care of this government were Indigenous. However, Madam Chair, the ministry has allocated a 13 per cent increase over forecast to their own operation budget, which is responsible for the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, and corporate services, all in service to the minister.

Now, Minister, through the chair, the budget does allocate funding to support public service agreements, and it's important to acknowledge the essential role these agreements play in delivering services across Alberta. The workers supported through these agreements are present throughout nearly every area of Children and Family Services' portfolio, from child intervention delivery and prevention programs to family supports, youth services, and community-based initiatives. These front-line professionals and organizations are often the ones working directly with children, youth, and families in communities across the province, providing critical supports, prevention programming, and crisis response. Their work forms the backbone of service delivery in this ministry and the effectiveness of many of the programs through the Children and Family Services budget. It ultimately depends on their capacity and the stability of the workforce operating through these public service agreements.

Many of the workers supporting vulnerable children, youth, and families are not government employees but staff of community agencies funded through the public service agreements. To the minister, through the chair: why has the government not prioritized strengthening these front-line workforces to the same degree as ministerial staffing? Has the ministry conducted any analysis on whether underfunding front-line service providers while increasing internal spending could undermine the effectiveness of the programs the ministry is responsible for delivering? Through the chair, how does the minister justify a 13 per cent increase when vulnerable Albertans are seeing cuts to preventative services, flat investment to interventional services, and a budget that clearly does not support the vision statement nor the ministry's mandate?

Given that research clearly shows that the best return on investment per dollar is spent in prevention, does the minister not understand, is there a lack of will, or is it an inability to responsibly invest taxpayer dollars for the largest return on investment focused on Albertans' priorities? Does the minister recognize that the inability to prioritize Albertans over government is not only a misuse of tax dollars but also a very, very good reason to call the next provincial election?

Further, the minister has noted many times a few things he has shared that I want to emphasize as we're discussing this last piece. The minister has said that he wants folks who are experiencing violence to always have the supports there when they need them. So do we, which is why I'm asking: why did the ministry prioritize a 13 per cent increase to their own pocket and not to providers?

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member. That's your time.

Over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I first of all just want to address the member's question pertaining to cuts to women's shelters. I guess to quote my good friend: nothing could

be further from the truth. There's no reduction to the operational funding for women's shelters. I just again want to stress that.

The difference between the 2025-2026 forecast and the '26-27 budget reflects a one-time funding commitment, not reductions to ongoing shelter operations. In fiscal year '25-26 we did provide time-limited funding to modernize data systems, support regional collaboration, and pilot innovative service delivery approaches. Those are strategic one-time investments to strengthen the system. They help to improve accountability through better data, reduce duplication through regional co-ordination, and test new ways to meet client needs more effectively. Because these initiatives are not ongoing operating pressures, they do not require continuing funding at the same level. I'm just pleased to help clear up some misinformation that was there.

Regarding the member's questions earlier about Bill C-92 – we didn't really have a chance to touch base about that too much – Alberta's government understands the importance of ensuring that Indigenous children and youth stay connected to their families, communities, and culture, and Children and Family Services works with First Nations to transfer authority as they exercise jurisdiction over child and family services under the federal act.

**9:50**

It's also important for members of this committee as well as many of the individuals watching online to know that Alberta is a leader when it comes to transferring children's services over to First Nations compared to other provinces. Community-led processes aim to ensure that children and youth benefit from a stronger connection with their community and culture, and Alberta will continue to engage the federal government to provide our perspective and the lessons learned. As of January 2026 five First Nations in Alberta have fully enacted children and family services laws under the federal act to which Children and Family Services has transferred over 248 case files. We are working in partnership with Indigenous communities and walking the path towards reconciliation.

As well, there were some questions about the contracted agencies. We do have a strong relationship with a broad network of contracted agencies and select grant-funded stakeholders. Their commitment to delivering essential services and providing crucial support for children, youth, and families throughout the province is pivotal to our success, and we're grateful for the support and services that they provide to children, youth and families.

We are committed to fostering and promoting a collaborative and supportive partnership with the child intervention contracted agency sector. I'm very thankful for the countless conversations I've had with stakeholders from all over the province, and I've always had an open door with meeting with these incredible stakeholders that are looking after our most vulnerable kids. Through our partnerships with contracted agencies we are ensuring that Alberta's children and youth in care have access to the high-quality services that make a meaningful impact to the lives of children.

We do allocate funding to contract agencies through open, transparent, and competitive tendering processes. This approach ensures value for money and aligns system capacity to support children and youth in care and their increasing complex needs. Agencies inform this process by identifying what they need to deliver services effectively and efficiently. Children and Family Services directs funding where it makes the most meaningful difference for vulnerable children, youth, and families. In 2025-26 an additional \$13.6 million was dedicated to community group-care services to support children and youth who are unable to live in

family-based placement due to behaviours that may result from unresolved trauma and may be more complex and outside of the ability of family-based caregivers.

Again, as I mentioned before, there is a vast spectrum of care that is available for some of our most vulnerable kids. As well, I just want to again stress that we're committed to fostering and promoting that collaborative relationship – I just want to highlight a line – and the association of other stakeholders throughout the entire province and the open-door policy that they have shown me, and vice versa, as they've been able to provide input on how we can improve the system.

I want to specifically talk about one partnership that we have. We have \$172,000 in partnership with the University of Calgary to deliver the leadership development program, providing no-cost, high-quality leadership training to approximately 112 supervisors and managers across the child intervention contracted agency sector. Again, I believe, as the Minister of Children and Family Services – most ministers are obviously biased towards their respective ministries, but I do think that the staff within CFS truly wear their hearts on their sleeve. I'm very thankful we've been able to provide the additional support so they can do the work that they have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Over to the government side.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much. I want to thank the minister for his great work and his passion for this ministry. I also want to thank the team at Children and Family Services. I would agree with the minister. I've often felt that this is probably the most challenging and the most rewarding work in government, and I'm sure grateful for all that you do for vulnerable children and their families across the province.

I know we're running a little low on time here at the end of the night, but for all of those watching I do have two questions to finish up this evening. Minister, on page 41 of the business plan, outcome 1 emphasizes strengthening families and communities through early intervention and prevention supports. This is something I'm very passionate about and I think obviously has the biggest opportunity to change the trajectory for these children and their families. Can the minister explain how this budget – and you've already done this somewhat – is enhancing these services? Specifically I would like to know what specific programs or service expansions are being prioritized in '26-27 under this outcome.

I know we've talked about many of the programs' investment numbers and performance measures tonight. I'm grateful for all the minister has shared thus far in the evening. Given that we're nearing the end of our time together, the last question I'd like to ask the minister is if the minister would highlight the key focus areas for the ministry in '26-27 as it delivers on the priorities set out in Budget 2026. Then, through the lens of Budget 2026, would the minister highlight what he is most looking forward to addressing in 2026-27?

With that, Madam Chair, I will conclude my questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Minister, over to you.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to thank the member, MLA Schulz, for her incredible leadership when she was the minister for children's services for so many years. It's not lost on me that for three Committee of Supply sessions I sat almost in that exact chair asking you many questions about how we

were helping out vulnerable and complex kids, so I appreciate your support in that.

Anyways, thank you very much to the member for those questions. She did ask a couple of questions about highlights that I have appreciated with Budget 2026. As I mentioned before, at CFS we serve nearly 9,000 children receiving child interventions each and every year, so the \$1 billion investment into child intervention, which shows an increase of approximately \$31 million from the forecast, I know is going to be going to the right places. It's going to be earmarked towards helping some of the most vulnerable, complex, but absolutely amazing kids that need that additional support.

I'm very appreciative that we're able to help support our amazing caregivers and foster and kinship caregivers throughout the entire province with rate increases as well as trying to streamline the process to make their lives easier as they open up their hearts and their homes. The last thing I ever want to hear from a foster care or kinship care provider is that they want to be able to help look after an amazing child, but for whatever reason they can't. Knowing that in this budget we are knocking down those barriers so that these foster and kinship caregivers can continue to pour into these amazing kids brings great satisfaction to my heart.

Other aspects that I appreciate about this budget would be the capital renewal program that I mentioned repeatedly, which will be supporting women's shelters throughout the entire province. As I stated, this has been one of the number one priorities that women's shelters have talked to me since I've been appointed as minister almost two and a half years ago. It really shows their dedication to helping out some amazing women and kids who are going through their darkest days, who might not know where they can put their heads down for some rest, for some stabilization, to receive the support and care that they require. Knowing that our women's shelters continue to be supported with increased funding, knowing that the red tape continues to be reduced so that they can continue to pour into these amazing survivors of domestic and sexual violence also brings great joy to my heart.

I know the member talked at great length and I know her passion is about the intervention and prevention services and how it supports families. Since 2021 this program has been changing regarding family resource networks because for myself as Minister of Children and Family Services, it's really important to ensure that the services are targeted towards those families that need help the most. I understand that there is a role for universal services, and I'm very thankful that our family resource networks will continue to have universal services which will help out so many families here in the province, but I also realize that there are families that are in crisis. There are families that need a lot of extra help and attention, and the fact that we are going to be able to work with our family resource networks to be more targeted, more precise in helping out and providing those services for those families so that we can prevent them from entering more onerous aspects of the child intervention system, as well, I think will pay dividends here in Alberta for generations to come.

I would also say that knowing that our family resource networks continue to evolve, continue to cater to a wider range of ethnocultural and Indigenous families that they might not have had access to before, I know is going to make a huge difference. We realize that Alberta is changing, that there are new Albertans calling this place home. As much as some people would like to think that every family is perfect, I know that Children and Family Services is always going to be there to make sure that these families, these kids receive the support that they need.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow, March 17, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Primary and Preventative Health Services.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10 p.m.]









