



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Legislative Offices

Friday, December 15, 2023
11:01 a.m.

Transcript No. 31-1-4

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The 31st Legislature
First Session**

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC), Chair
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC), Acting Deputy Chair

Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)*
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)**
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)

* substitution for Scott Sinclair

** substitution for Glenn van Dijken

*

Legislative Officers

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Kevin Brezinski | Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner |
| Diane McLeod | Information and Privacy Commissioner |
| Terri Pelton | Child and Youth Advocate |
| Glen Resler | Chief Electoral Officer |
| Marguerite Trussler, KC | Ethics Commissioner |
| W. Doug Wylie | Auditor General |

Support Staff

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Shannon Dean, KC | Clerk |
| Teri Cherkewich | Law Clerk |
| Trafton Koenig | Senior Parliamentary Counsel |
| Philip Massolin | Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services |
| Nancy Robert | Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees |
| Abdul Bhurgri | Research Officer |
| Christina Williamson | Research Officer |
| Warren Huffman | Committee Clerk |
| Jody Rempel | Committee Clerk |
| Aaron Roth | Committee Clerk |
| Rhonda Sorensen | Manager of Corporate Communications |
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| Shannon Parke | Communications Consultant |
| Tracey Sales | Communications Consultant |
| Janet Schwegel | Director of Parliamentary Programs |
| Amanda LeBlanc | Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i> |

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Participants

Ministry of Children and Family Services

Leann Wagner, Assistant Deputy Minister, Child Intervention

11:01 a.m.

Friday, December 15, 2023

[Mr. Getson in the chair]

The Chair: Hello, folks. I'd like to call the meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome members and staff and guests to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. My name is Shane Getson. I'm the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland and chair of the committee. I'd like that all members joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record – and then we'll hear from the folks on the videoconference, our other members – starting to my right.

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

Mr. Dyck: MLA Nolan Dyck from the fine riding of Grande Prairie.

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, Taber-Warner.

Mr. Sinclair: Scott Sinclair, Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Mr. Bhurgri: Abdul Aziz Bhurgri, research officer.

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

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

The Chair: We'll go to the video line, in no particular order but ladies first.

Member Eremenko: Thank you. Janet Eremenko, Calgary-Currie.

The Chair: I see the gentleman to her right on my screen. I'm not sure it's working in yours. MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. David Shepherd, MLA, Edmonton-City Centre.

The Chair: I also see on the screen MLA Long.

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

The Chair: I do also see an external phone number. I'm not sure who that is.

Ms Chapman: That is me, MLA Amanda Chapman, Calgary-Beddington.

The Chair: Oh, perfect. Welcome back.

Also, for the record I'd like to note a substitution. Mr. Rowswell will be substituting for Mr. van Dijken, and Mr. Long will be stepping up into the deputy chair role. Later on this morning, late morning, we anticipate that Mr. Lundy will be substituting for Mr. Sinclair when we make that change.

A few housekeeping addresses to note before we return to the business at hand. Please note the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, so, members, you don't need to be putting your hands on the buttons. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Assembly TV online. Members participating remotely should ensure that they are prepared to speak or vote when called upon, and videoconference participants are encouraged to have their cameras on, if possible, when speaking. Please set all your cellphones and other devices to silent mode.

We're ready to go. I'd like to draw everyone's attention to the draft meeting agenda. Would anyone like to propose any amendments? I see MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Hunter: I ask the chair and the committee clerk to add an agenda item before the review of the OCYA report to discuss the motions passed at the last meeting regarding the budgets of the Ombudsman, the Public Interest Commissioner, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Hunter. We'll just give the clerk a moment to get that up on the screen.

Does that work, MLA Hunter?

Mr. Hunter: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go to discussion.

Mr. Hunter: We have to pass this motion first, the motion that I just gave. That's the second motion, I believe.

The Chair: Okay. What was the first motion that you gave, MLA Hunter?

Mr. Hunter: I'll read it again, sir. That the chair and the committee clerk add an agenda item before the review of the OCYA report to discuss the motions passed at the last meeting regarding the budgets of the Ombudsman, the Public Interest Commissioner, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Oh, sorry. This is the first, then.

The Chair: Okay. Are you okay with this, or did you want to . . .

Mr. Hunter: Yes. Sorry. It was just written differently.

The Chair: Okay. No problem. Let's have you, if you wouldn't mind, sir, just read the one that is on the screen into the record.

Mr. Hunter: That

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices amend the proposed agenda for its December 15, 2023, meeting by adding decisions on the officers' 2024-25 budget submissions immediately following the approval of the agenda.

The Chair: I appreciate it, MLA Hunter.

We'll move to discussion on the amendment to the agenda. Any discussion?

Okay. I'll call the question. All those in favour? Opposed? Perfect. Thank you.

Motion carried.

Ms Chapman: Sorry. MLA Chapman in favour. I thought I was unmuted, and I wasn't.

The Chair: No problem. We'll just take our time on these ones this morning and make sure we've got the tech working. No worries at all. Thank you, MLA.

Now we'll need to approve the agenda as amended. I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour? Against? In the technical world, whether you're on phone or videoconference, voice vote, all those in favour? Perfect. Thank you.

Moved that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices amend the proposed agenda: we have that. Now we're on to the discussion portion. It looks like the first item we'll be considering today is the

decisions on the officers' 2024 budget submissions. At our meeting yesterday we passed motions regarding the budgets of three of the officers of the Legislature. Concerns about the process were raised referencing Standing Order 52.041(3), which reads, "A Member may not, without the approval of the committee, move a substantial motion or an amendment that was not filed in accordance with suborder (1)."

To ensure that we follow the procedure properly, I'd like to suggest that we rescind and revisit the decisions made yesterday regarding the budgets of the Ombudsman, the Public Interest Commissioner, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We do not have any motions on notice for this matter, but I believe that the LAO staff can help us out with the wording on these and the necessary motions. I'll ask the committee clerk to put up some potential wording on the screen for your consideration, as it were.

MLA Shepherd, I see your hand up.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, Mr. Chair. I would like to step forward and put forward that motion.

The Chair: I appreciate it. Thank you, MLA Shepherd. Would you like to read it in, MLA Shepherd?

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly, if I may.

The Chair: Can you see it on your screen there?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, I can, Mr. Chair. That the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motion to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices rescind the motion passed at its December 14, 2023, meeting approving the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Ombudsman in the amount of \$4,574,080.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shepherd. Any discussion on the motion?

Mr. Shepherd: If I may, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yeah. Please proceed.

11:10

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. I do appreciate the opportunity to revisit this motion and the question at hand. As you noted, Mr. Chair, proper procedure was not followed. I think Albertans do expect us to be consistent in our procedures and certainly to follow the procedures that are laid out in the standing orders. I think that is an incredibly important part of our work as representatives and indeed in making sure that we uphold democracy, particularly on issues of such serious import, when we are talking about the budgets, the ability to function for officers of the Legislature, who do extremely important work on behalf of the people of Alberta. I thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing and giving this opportunity for correction so that we can have equitable debate and scrutiny for all members.

I've mentioned before that I've had the honour of serving on this committee for every year that I have been here as an MLA. I had the honour for a few years of serving as chair. I understand, you know, that as we're moving through these, there can be a bit of a learning curve, so I hope this is something that we can all as members just take to heart, look at this as a learning opportunity, and that we can move forward from here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Perfect. I appreciate the comments on that, MLA Shepherd, and I am in violent agreement that when we're going

through these items, we want to make sure of everything: the i's dotted, the t's crossed, et cetera, et cetera. I really appreciate everyone's consideration for doing this this morning and making sure that we have it correct in the record for everyone.

MLA Hunter, I saw your hand.

Mr. Hunter: Yes, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments that Member Shepherd just made. However, I will say that it is true that there were procedurally things that should have happened yesterday that didn't happen. The member just finished saying that he had been on this committee for eight years now. Interesting that he voted in favour of these things. There were three motions that I brought forward yesterday stating "amended." Obviously, if he had been aware of it, he should have made those statements yesterday rather than bringing it up. I would say that I appreciate him being here and present today, and I hope that we don't have this happen again so that we don't have to waste the time of Albertans in the future. Thank you very much for the work that we're going to be doing today, but we could have done this yesterday had the member actually been aware at 8 a.m., when we actually started the meeting.

The Chair: I'm going to take the opportunity – MLA Shepherd, I see your hand, but I'm hoping to head this off at the pass. There was a clerical error, members, on the standing committee here. We're all involved in the same process. I'm going to make sure that we're not mentioning who may be here or may not be here or the condition or any of that. Let's just keep our sticks on the ice this morning if we can.

To me, this is an administrative function on the front end to correct what was a procedural/clerical error, so as the chair I will accept responsibility for that. I would hope that the members, if you have any comments or concerns about the items, point them at me and not at each other this morning so we can get through this next step.

Right now what we have is the discussion on the floor to accept the motion so we can get through the business. If we're accepting these, there will be ample opportunity for lots of conversations on each one of the items. I hope that members would consider that and then speak to the items of debate once we have them on the floor.

MLA Shepherd, I still see your hand up, but I'm hoping that addressed some of it.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I do appreciate those comments.

I will just briefly respond to Mr. Hunter. I will note that, again, this was a significant deviation from any previous practice of the committee. No member would have come in expecting that someone would disregard part (3) of Standing Order 52.041. It took us a moment, absolutely, to catch up to the fact that that portion of the standing order was in fact being breached. We were moving very rapidly, very quickly. I think it is reasonable that we are addressing this here today, and as you say, Mr. Chair, I don't think we need to make accusations to each other. Certainly, to do so might be a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j).

So the fact is that, yes, I missed it the first few times, but clearly Mr. Hunter also missed – well, pardon me. I will not go there, Mr. Chair. Clearly, members also missed the proper procedure, as did all. We have the opportunity to correct that today. Let's do so without further accusation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

And, with that, I'll use a little western colloquialism: keep your pistols in your pockets, boys, and your gunpowder dry. We've got a lot to get through here today, so let's get through these things. I'd appreciate it.

We do have the motion on the floor.

I am prepared to call the question. All those in favour of the motion? Any opposed? To the videoconference/phones, all those in favour, please say aye. Thank you. Any opposed?

Motion carried.

We're going to have our clerks helping us out quite a bit through these next proceedings, folks. There is a proposed motion that would help us get through the first amount. Would someone like to move this motion or would someone like to consider reading it and then move and read it into the record for us? MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: I think this one has already been done, hasn't it, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No. This would be coming to the first one of the legislative offices for the Ombudsman.

Mr. Hunter: Okay.

The Chair: So kind of the procedure, how it's going to work here: we'll have to rescind the initial three motions. We'll have to give permission every time to do that. It has to be by consent of the committee. We'll pull those off the table, and then we can get on to the next phase.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices rescind the motion passed at its December 14, 2023, meeting approving the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Ombudsman in the amount of \$4,574,080.

The Chair: Perfect. Any discussion?

Prepared to call the question. Those in favour? Opposed? On the videoconference. Any opposed? Looks like all in favour. Thank you.

That motion carried.

We also have another motion that might be coming up for members' careful consideration regarding the legislative offices for the office of public interest.

Go ahead, MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motion to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices rescind the motion passed at its December 14, 2023, meeting approving the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner in the amount of \$1,439,610.

The Chair: Okay. Sorry, it should be "commissioner" is what we're seeing on this end. Just to make sure that we don't have to do this again. Okay. So the Public Interest Commissioner. Yeah. We're good now. Any discussion?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour? Any opposed? Hearing none. We'll go to the phones. All those in favour? Any opposed? Hearing none.

Motion carried.

We have another one similar to the first one. We'll repeat this three times. So we have another potential motion for you, to rescind the approved budget amount.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices rescind the motion passed at its December 14, 2023, meeting approving the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner in the amount of \$1,439,610.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Hunter.

Discussion?

I'll call the question. All in favour? Any opposed? To the phone lines, videoconference, all those in favour? Any opposed?

Motion carried.

We have another one for members' careful consideration. That would be for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, I believe. It should be coming up.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motion to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices rescind the motion passed at its December 14, 2023, meeting approving the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in the amount of \$8,713,638.

11:20

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, MLA Hunter.

Discussion?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour? Any opposed? Back to the phones, video, all those in favour? None opposed.

Motion carried.

Last one. We have an additional motion. There we go. That should be coming up on the screen here as well. Do we have any movers for this one?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices rescind the motion passed at its December 14, 2023, meeting approving the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in the amount of \$8,713,638.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you, MLA Hunter.

Any discussion?

I'll call the question. Those in favour? Any opposed? On the video lines, telephone, all in favour please say aye.

Motion carried.

Now we're on to potentially new motions, and we're open for discussion to allow for motions to come from the floor. We need the consent of all the committee to do that, so I'll ask that question first. Is everyone in favour of allowing motions to come from the floor that may not have been registered prior? It has to be unanimous, folks. Okay. On the phones, video, are we all good with allowing this procedure so we're all in oil? Okay. Good.

MLA Long, I'll have to hear from you as well. It has to be unanimous.

Mr. Long: Aye.

The Chair: Thank you. All right. So now we have a motion.

I believe we're open for discussion. MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Ombudsman in the amount of \$4,657,800 as submitted.

The Chair: Just give us a moment to get it up on the screen, MLA Shepherd. If we wish to start with the discussion while our clerks are putting it up, that might help us expedite some of the process. Are you willing to do that, sir?

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly, Mr. Chair. We had the opportunity to hear in full from the office of the Ombudsman, who gave us, I think,

a clear and thorough presentation on their budget. They were quite clear that there are some financial pressures that have come from some expansion of some of their work as well as some of the necessary increases in salaries that were mandated under increases for all members of the public service. I see no reason to deviate from what they have asked. I think they've justified their expenses. They have shown good work, so I believe we should approve the budget as submitted.

The Chair: Okay. We'll just see what's coming up on the screen here for us.

I can still keep it – MLA Hunter for discussion.

Mr. Hunter: I'd like to move an amendment to this motion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. If we can pause for a second till we get the first one up. We'll make sure that MLA Shepherd is comfortable with the context of the original motion, and then we'll look at proceeding with the proposed amendment to the motion.

MLA Shepherd, can you see that on your screen?

Mr. Shepherd: Yeah, I can. Approved budget estimates for \$4,657,800. Yes, Mr. Chair, that captures my intent.

The Chair: Okay.

Clerks, do we need to have MLA Shepherd read it in directly, or does his approval or thumbs-up work for us at this point?

Ms Robert: No notice is required for this.

The Chair: Okay. Now the amendment.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that
the motion to approve the budget of the office of the Ombudsman
be amended by striking out \$4,657,800 and substituting
\$4,574,080.

The Chair: Okay. We'll give the clerks a chance just to put that down.

Mr. Shepherd: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yeah. In just a sec, MLA Shepherd. We're just conversing with the clerks here on this end. You might not be able to see that. Just give me a sec.

If the committee will allow me to indulge – we'll come back to the point of order, MLA Shepherd, but I think we're already going to work out the mechanics here, so if you can just hold that back for a sec. What we'll need to make sure that we're in compliance with procedure so we don't misstep again today is a motion to allow motions to come from the floor. We'll need unanimous consent on that.

Ms Rempel: Just the majority.

The Chair: I'm sorry; majority on that. Then what that will do is allow us to proceed with the amendment to the motion that MLA Shepherd has.

Mr. Hunter: Sorry. Point of clarity, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yeah. Absolutely, MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: I need to understand this. So we need to bring forward a motion to be able to provide an amendment?

The Chair: Yeah. Here's where we're stuck. The original motion when we first looked at the estimates: that was standing. So that provided prior notice. MLA Shepherd, in essence, is reading back in a motion into the record that had prior notice. The amendment motion that we have now wasn't registered or filed in the prescribed time in advance. So then we would need a motion to accept motions by majority into the record so you can have the amendment.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Then I will make that motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I move that we allow motions to come from the floor. Is that the right wording?

The Chair: I'll confirm with the clerk. Just to confirm with the clerk that we get the right wording on that because I have a – not to presuppose what the committee might be doing for work for the next little bit, but if we get the correct wording for that the first time, then it might be something the committee may consider for other items going forward.

Mr. Hunter: Perhaps, Mr. Chair, would it be possible for the staff to put it up on the screen so we know the right wording?

The Chair: Yeah. That's correct. We're just working at the table here for a bit, and that was the request I just made.

At this point, MLA Shepherd, I'm not sure if that may have been your point of order. If not, I'm prepared to hear what it was. You're rescinding it?

Mr. Shepherd: That covers my point of order. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I had a sneaking suspicion, sir, so thank you for that.

Just again, we appreciate everyone's patience, folks.

MLA Hunter, can you confirm that your amendment to the motion would be as worded? And then we'll go back to the wording to allow for amendments to come from the floor so we have that context and that script so we don't step outside here.

11:30

Mr. Hunter: That is correct, but I don't think we can entertain this until we actually do the other motion.

Ms Rempel: Correct.

Ms Robert: Correct. We just want to make sure that's your intent.

The Chair: Correct.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. But this is correct.

The Chair: Yeah. Does anyone have a good screen saver we can use while we're doing this? I know there was a certain Grande Prairie drug-sniffing dog, but I don't know if I'd want to throw him up on the screen.

Mr. Dyck: I'm willing to pass on that one.

The Chair: Just, again, I really appreciate your patience, everybody. All right. Ready to go again.

MLA Hunter, can I get you to read the amendment in its entirety from 52.041? That's what we're looking for here, just to confirm with the clerk?

Mr. Hunter: So this is going to cover both . . .

The Chair: This will cover both at once.

Mr. Hunter: Okay.

The Chair: Well, it won't, apparently, but we have to get agreement that you're okay to take it, and then we'll vote on the amendment. This is democracy at its finest, guys.

Ms Robert: We're seeking permission to move the motion.

The Chair: Yeah. So we're seeking permission to move the motion.

Mr. Hunter: Is that all I have to say? Do you want me to read this, Mr. Chair? Do you want me to read this, or do you want me . . .

The Chair: Let's just read it in.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. That

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motions to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: strike out the amount of \$4,657,800 as submitted, and substitute in the proposed amount of \$4,657,800 as amended to \$4,574,080.

The Chair: Perfect. I'll open that up for discussion. We're good? All right. We'll get this yet. So now I can move for discussion, or do I need a vote to allow it?

Let's do it this way. All in favour of allowing this to hit the floor for consent, and then what we'll do is move to discussion on the dollar amounts. So let's do that. Everybody in favour of allowing this to come to the floor, please say aye. Those opposed? To the phones?

Motion carried.

Now we'll move to discussion on this item. Please feel free, Mr. Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, this amount represents a 2.1 per cent increase from the 2023-24 approved budget. This increase is in line with Alberta's current inflation rate and the government operational spending projections for the 2024-25 cycle. This is the rationale for why I think that we need to be able to keep this comparable to what we're seeing across the board with other public servants. This is the reason why I'm bringing forward this motion.

The Chair: And one other order of business: let's just make sure that you're moving the amendment.

Mr. Hunter: I moved the amendment.

The Chair: Once we get through this really awkward one first, folks, I swear it's going to just go by fast like molasses after this.

MLA Shepherd, over to you, sir.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the amendment. I will say this now. It is an incredibly thin justification for, frankly, what strikes me as a bit of an arbitrary cut. We are talking about \$83,720 which the member is proposing to cut from the budget of the Ombudsman. The member cannot point to, or has not, at least, pointed to any specific element of the budget that he feels is out of line. He has not pointed to any particular spending that he feels is egregious. He has not pointed to any particular reason for doing this other than a rather blunt tool, an extremely broad proposition that, simply, all offices should be held to the same increase regardless.

I would note this is the logic that was brought forward by this government in terms of the health care system over the last four years, and we have certainly seen the implication of that on a

number of fronts, the deep damage it did because the government did not actually stop and consider the nuances and the complexities of the systems that they were affecting with, again, an extremely blunt-force tool. It is simply a blanket cut, adding things at a specific amount year over year regardless of what the nuances might be.

Now, when we are talking about budget increases, often you also talk about – you not only look at inflation. You also – well, you look at inflation but you also look at other rises in costs. Indeed, there is broader inflation and then there is, of course, that which is imposed on the office which was not its choice, which is the increase of staffing costs.

So, again, I do not agree with the reasoning that's being put forward here by Mr. Hunter, and I'm going to be very disappointed if this is indeed going to be the position of the government on all things, particularly given that these members have not, to the best of my knowledge, paid the same level of scrutiny on other areas of spending which did not have, I think, the same level of public value and certainly did not achieve the same level of scrutiny.

Again, we are talking here about \$83,000. There was not a word said about \$142,500 in sole-source contracts given to the Premier's leadership campaign manager, Mr. Matthew Altheim; or \$130,000 in sole-source contracts given to the former president of the Premier's previous party, the Wildrose Party, Mr. David Yager; or \$175,000 in sole-source contracts that were awarded to Alberta Counsel, a legal lobbying group run by the Premier's former colleague and former Wildrose MLA Mr. Shayne Saskiw.

But when it comes to the officers of the Legislature, which no member here, I think, disputes are doing important and valuable work on behalf of the people of Alberta, indeed, and also in doing the incredibly important work in holding government to account, suddenly these members are very concerned about every nickel and dime.

I find it tiresome, Mr. Chair, so I will not be voting in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Shepherd.

I see MLA Long.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Chair, for recognizing me. You know, I will be supporting this amendment. I appreciate Mr. Shepherd's comments, especially given the circumstance that from 2014 until 2019 our province went from \$14 billion in debt to \$85 billion in debt largely because a government that was in place from 2015 to 2019 didn't scrutinize budgets, didn't make any effort to save money, and plummeted our province into debt that will take decades to recover from. I appreciate that our government actually looks at tax dollars as though they don't belong to government but, instead, are coming from taxpayers and citizens and actually apply scrutiny to budgeted amounts.

That said, I do support this amendment and look forward to, hopefully, the committee supporting it as well.

11:40

Mr. Hunter: Just one final comment, Mr. Chair. I was going to actually call a point of order on Member Shepherd. He used the word that we "cut." This is actually – there's no cut. I just said that it was a 2.1 per cent increase from year-over-year budget. I just want to make sure that those people, if they're watching or listening, recognize that we are actually going to move a 2.1 per cent increase.

Now, I will say, Mr. Chair, that when Mr. Shepherd speaks, I think he needs to remember that there are many people, many private-sector individuals in this province that have taken many, many cuts over many years, and they have really suffered, and for

us to be able to actually address this issue here and now about being able to just see a modest increase in there, I think it's prudent, and I think that it actually speaks to Albertans who have actually had to share some of the real burden over a struggling four years.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Hunter.

MLA Shepherd, I see your hand is up again. Is there more to add, or is that a residual? You're still there, MLA Shepherd?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, I am.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Apologies. Technology.

The Chair: Yeah. No worries.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, I did just want to briefly respond to some of the comments that have been made by Mr. Long and Mr. Hunter. Mr. Long spoke about, I guess, our government's record. He spoke about the need for fiscal prudence. He said that his government recognizes that tax dollars don't come from government; they come from the taxpayer. They did not seem to recognize that, Mr. Chair, when they spent over \$70 million on low-grade children's medication, of which we will not receive more than 70 per cent. Only 9,000 bottles of that medication actually were distributed of the 250,000 that were first received. That was a massive waste of taxpayer dollars. Again, these members are quibbling over \$83,000 that is driven by a significant increase in individual salaries within the department.

So this is not an arbitrary thing. This was not a choice of this officer. Mr. Hunter is adamant that they are not imposing a cut. Well, let's be clear. They are cutting the amount. They are reducing the amount that has been requested by the Ombudsman to cover the costs of the office. That office has had significant increases in costs. Mr. Hunter can quibble about the semantics, but the fact is that what they are telling the Ombudsman is to make do with less. Yes, there is an increase, but the costs have increased more; therefore, they are imposing a cut. We went many rounds on this when it came to health care spending. But I do want to make that clear.

Again, I do not agree with what these members are putting forward with this amendment. I understand that Albertans have faced significant costs, indeed, as a result of this government. We had a quadrupling of the cost of electricity under this government. We had a massive increase in auto insurance under this government because of its decisions. So when this government claims it is standing up for taxpayers, when they claim . . .

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, Mr. Shepherd; we've got a point of order here.

Mr. Shepherd: Pardon me. I will take back my comments about this government because we are not talking about the government. We're talking about members, private members from the government side. I take that back, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Maybe what I can do, before we get me into deciding points of order here, which will be kind of unique given my background in the House as well – what I was allowing here so far was a fulsome debate. Understanding the comment, I asked you fellows to put your pistols in your pockets until the appropriate time. I think we've got a lot of shots fired back and forth. What I would like to do and, hopefully, to keep decorum and things moving forward here, folks, is if we can keep to speaking to the matters at

hand. We've both got a lot of water under the bridge, so to speak, in the last number of calendar years with administrations.

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly.

The Chair: So if we can keep it to these specific items, it might help with decorum and help us get through this. Just a word of caution to everybody. If we can do that going forward.

MLA Hunter, I'm not sure if you still want your point of order.

Mr. Hunter: No. You've actually stated it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Hunter: I was going to talk about the fact that we need to talk about what's in scope here.

But I will say to all members here that we at some point want to be able to bring in the ministry of children's services, and we need to get that done. So we can quibble over all of these things back and forth, or we can actually talk about . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Is this still a point of order, Mr. Chair . . .

The Chair: Hold on, guys.

Mr. Shepherd: . . . or it's just furthering debate?

The Chair: Yeah. Just give me a second here, MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Hunter: I'm just saying that we can continue to quibble over these things, or we can get on with the business at hand.

The Chair: Okay. So is the point of . . .

Mr. Hunter: I will withdraw the point of order.

The Chair: You're withdrawing the point of order. Okay.

I appreciate it, folks. Let's try to keep our sticks on the ice, and we'll get through this. There is another group. Obviously, we want to make sure that we have time for them as well. But, again, back to this: we want to make sure that we have debate on this because, again, at everyone's behest, we are responsible for taxpayer dollars, and I'm more than happy to have those debates. Let's just keep it as tight as possible to the matters at hand, and we can move that forward.

With that, I don't see any other hands on the debate side.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Chair, I had not concluded my remarks.

The Chair: Oh, I apologize, MLA Shepherd. Please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be succinct in my final comments. Again, that is just to note that these increases in these offices are largely driven by salary increases that were approved by government and by government members – right? – who voted in favour of this, that being a 3 per cent merit increase for management, 4 per cent for nonmanagement and those who are eligible, a 5 per cent CPI assumption. Those amounts, in total, are above 2.1 per cent in many cases for these officers. This limitation basically means, then, that these officers are not being given enough to keep up with the salary increases that have been mandated to them by a vote of government members. That is my concern and why I will not be voting in support of this amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for that.

I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour of the amendment to the motion, please say aye. Any opposed? And on

the phones and video, all those in favour? Opposed? In the famous words of Mr. Speaker Cooper, I believe the ayes have it.

Motion carried.

Now we're to the motion as amended. The amendment to the motion has now carried. Now we're on the entire motion as amended, and it's on the screen there now.

I'm prepared to call the question on this one as well, feeling that we've had ample debate on the subamendment item unless any member takes exception to that. In the interest of moving two more of these, in all likelihood, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour, please see aye. Any opposed? On the phones, those in favour, please say aye. And opposed? I believe the ayes have it. Thank you.

Motion as amended carried.

I'm going to get this right yet, you guys.

All right. We're on to the next one. Does anyone have any motions from the floor? MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I'm wondering whether or not we can put up the same wording as before and I can change the names and all this.

The Chair: Yeah. I believe that you've got your hand in, and I believe the clerks were perhaps anticipating what you might be thinking, based on our last conversations getting through the first one. Let's see how good we are at mind reading here.

Mr. Hunter: This is for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner.

The Chair: Just give us a sec here for the tech, guys.

Mr. Hunter: Did you want me to give you the numbers?

Ms Robert: It's the same as yesterday.

The Chair: Any changes from yesterday, MLA? Just make sure you're good with what we're anticipating.

Mr. Hunter: This is good.

11:50

The Chair: Okay. If I could, then, I'll just get you to read it into the record, sir.

Mr. Hunter: I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motion to be moved without prior notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner in the proposed amount of \$1,478,000 as amended to \$1,439,610.

The Chair: Okay. We'll open that up for discussion. That would be on allowing the motion.

I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour? Opposed? To the phones, all those in favour? Opposed? I believe the ayes have it.

The motion is carried.

Now we can move the motion, and we open it up for discussion on the motion.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner in the proposed amount of \$1,478,000 as amended to \$1,439,610.

Just the same rationale as the passed motion, that this represents a 2.1 per cent increase year over year and that it is in line with what

government operational spending is. This is the same rationale that I have.

The Chair: I see MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Not to belabour the point, but I will also be voting against this particular motion for the same reasons. Again, these officers are facing increases in their costs that were voted for and supported by government members and members of the committee previously.

If I may take a moment just to read, in fact, the motion that was moved, I believe by Mr. Hunter himself, that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve a compensation adjustment for the officers of the Legislature that parallels the current salary ranges, including the February 2024 cost-of-living adjustment and the April 2024 salary modifier available to senior officials in the Alberta public service.

Again, to note, that's a 3 per cent merit increase for management, 4 per cent for nonmanagement for those who are eligible, a 5 per cent CPI assumption.

What that comes down to, then: by capping it at 2.1 per cent, Mr. Chair, the members are essentially imposing a de facto cut on the officers. They are insisting that they increase the amount they pay their employees but not allowing enough of an increase to cover those costs. That will impact their ability to deliver services on the part of Albertans. Again, I have not seen similar scrutiny on government spending, which has been far more egregious and unjustifiable, so I'll be voting against this motion.

Mr. Sinclair: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called. MLA Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair: The point of order is on using the word "cut" when we've already discussed that it's an increase. He can preface it by saying "de facto," and you mentioned keeping your stick on the ice. Whether the elbows are intentional or not, the elbows are happening. These are not cuts; whether or not the increases are what was proposed, they are still increases. This is a point of order under 23(h), Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I appreciate it, Member. I don't find that this is a point of order under those items. You're allowed to have debate; you're allowed to have matters of debate; you're allowed to use different language. That's part of the process of going back and forth. I do appreciate you taking the reference to heart that we were asking for, you know, keeping our sticks on the ice and making sure it's clean, but I wouldn't have blown a whistle on that play, on this one, on the ice. I appreciate it, but . . .

Mr. Sinclair: If I may, is it okay to ask that we stop using the word "cut" since the people watching might be tuning in or not tuning in?

The Chair: I hate to intervene on that, but, no, using the word "cut" won't be called a point of order going forward either. You're allowed to use that. Really, the intent is to make sure of not causing a point of disorder if you're using language that's unbecoming or otherwise. From what I've seen here, folks, it's okay. So, no, the point of order is overruled, but thank you for interjecting.

With that, is there any other debate on this item?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour? All those opposed? On the phones, all those in favour? Any opposed?

Motion carried.

I'm suspecting there might be another motion coming. MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: If we could follow the same approach as the last, Mr. Chair, that would be very helpful to me. This is for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The Chair: Any changes in values? The clerks at table would just like to know. We'll put it up on the screen there.

Mr. Hunter: No, but I will read it into the record.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit the following motion to be moved without notice having been given pursuant to Standing Order 52.041: that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in the proposed amount of \$8,992,295 as amended to \$8,713,638.

The Chair: Okay. Discussion?

Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? On the phones, all those in favour? Opposed? Okay.

The motion is carried.

Now it's on the floor for discussion, and it's been moved by Mr. Hunter for discussion. Please confirm.

Mr. Hunter: Yes. Well, it has to come up, and then I have to read it. I'm just waiting for that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll wait for that.

I am taking a speaking list, too.

Mr. Hunter: I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in the proposed amount of \$8,992,295 as amended to \$8,713,638.

The Chair: Okay. Having heard that – that's in – now I see MLA Shepherd's hand up for discussion.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To reiterate, what we are imposing here is effectively forcing, in this case, the Information and Privacy Commissioner to make some form of cut because we are giving them less than what was requested to cover, specifically, increases in staffing salaries. We should recognize that in many of these cases for these officers the majority of the spending is on the staff that provides the services. We are not seeing, with any of these officers, any significant increases in infrastructure spending or other pieces. At times there have been some small amounts that have been put in for improving technology, for expanding some areas. In this case, we are largely looking at salary increases, and again largely the cost for these offices are individuals.

That may put the Information and Privacy Commissioner in a position, then, where they are forced to cut staff. This would be deeply concerning because we already have significant issues, significant backlog on this in this office within the freedom of information system. Indeed, we know that this office is currently conducting multiple investigations as part of a systemic review of behaviour by the current government, looking into issues of information being prevented from being released to members of the public.

Again, if we are reducing the resources that are available to this office by imposing – and I will say it again – a de facto cut, by saying that those increases which are imposed on them by members of the Legislature, including members of the government, are not going to be funded by the Legislature and that members of the government believe they should not be funded to the full cost, then

that is forcing the Information and Privacy Commissioner to make cuts. In this particular case, I am very concerned for the message that that sends, how that may be interpreted by some who view this decision should the government members, of course, proceed to vote in a similar pattern as to how we've seen them vote so far.

Certainly, I'm concerned about the message that this could be seen to send to the officers of the Legislature themselves. In particular, the Information and Privacy Commissioner also talked about important work they are doing in terms of education and engagement around growing technology in the province of Alberta, around AI and other technologies being used in crucial areas like health care, crucial areas like education, and the protection of individual privacy but also in terms of economic opportunity in the province of Alberta, Mr. Chair. If you take a look at the report, it talks at length about how important it is that these things be done. Indeed, we are moving into potentially a review of privacy information legislation in the province of Alberta with that to mind as well. Again, they are cutting the resources that will be available to the Information and Privacy Commissioner to do that work simply on an arbitrary basis, a number that they have chosen without consideration of the nuances and the different complexities that are involved in the operations of this office and the current work they are doing.

12:00

To clarify my comment again, Mr. Chair, having had a chance to look at some of the facts, you can see in the budget that 81 per cent of the costs of the office are personnel; 81 per cent. So these members – if they choose to vote for this amendment – are taking those additional costs, that have been imposed by government, by mandatory salary increases on 80 per cent of the cost – therefore, it's increasing for this office – and they're saying: sorry; find that somewhere else. For that reason, Mr. Chair, I cannot support this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Shepherd.

As far as a speaking list I have Sinclair, Dyck, Eremenko, and Hunter.

Proceed, MLA Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the member for the comments. I just want to make it clear again on record that these are not cuts. This is a 2.1 per cent increase to their budget year over year, and although Member Shepherd, with his eight years of experience – I think he's mentioned that more than once, so I think I got that right – on this committee: it seems to be a small amount he keeps discussing, \$83,000, but cover that over a number of different offices and you start to talk about millions. It's pretty easy to see how that can add up to billions of debt, which was, I believe, a hallmark of this previous government under maybe the first four years of his eight years of experience.

I believe this is responsible government, and it still is an increase, and we're asking them to make the same difficult decisions that I think a lot of Albertans are faced with right now because of the largely NDP-propped-up federal carbon tax and inflationary practices. For that, I am in support of this.

I'd also like to note for the record that it is our mandate to vote on the total amount, and for this reason, you know, I'd like to move to a vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. There were others on the speaking list.

Are you still going to speak, MLA Dyck?

Mr. Dyck: No. I removed myself from the list.

The Chair: Okay. Then we're over to MLA Eremenko. Let's do that right, finally; once, I hope.

Member Eremenko: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Boy, insert whatever hockey analogy you like. I sure hope that we can continue forward in the next, you know, 57 minutes without some of these quite personal attacks. I think we have some things of real substance to be debating here, and I'm concerned that we continue to go down a path that is not going to prove beneficial for any of our constituents or the officers who are patiently waiting to meet with us here.

I think that we have heard the rationale from the members opposite in terms of why they do not support the budgets as submitted by the officers despite having significant conversations several weeks ago already, where I don't recall anybody asking this particular officer if they were interested or capable of doing the same work with less. That had never come up, so I do take issue and concern that when the officer did have an opportunity to speak to the very important work that they did, none of these concerns were raised at that time.

Look, I think it's no surprise to anybody that Albertans and, frankly, citizens across this country are facing a real tsunami of concerns when it comes to technology, when it comes to privacy, when it comes to the data that belongs to us, the very private and sensitive information that is used for decision-making and that we, you know, share every day as a result of going through the world. The role of this office is more important than ever, so I would like to put forward that using this incredibly blunt tool, taking a 2.1 per cent blanket application across the board to these budgets, is like taking a sledgehammer to a budget where, really, perhaps a scalpel would be more appropriate.

Frankly, there are some increases to this budget that I would expect to see given the incredible demands and concerns that are being put forward to us when it comes to AI, when it comes to where information is stored, how it is stored, who it is provided to, and how it is shared. This is critical information. If we only ever expect for these very moderate increases, then, frankly, I think we're going to be behind the eight ball, and Albertans would expect for us that, above anything else, we are protecting their data, we are protecting their privacy, because it is about safety, and it is about security.

I cannot speak enough against this motion. Unlike the member had mentioned, this is, in fact, a suggested decrease in the budget of \$278,657 – it is not \$83,720 – and that is going to represent a significant impediment to the ability of this office to do the job, the job that they are in fact expected to deliver and to provide on behalf of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Well, good. Lots of stuff to unpack there. What I will say is that there are a couple of arguments that were made there, most by Mr. Shepherd, but the one argument he made there is that there's no way that they can do their work based upon, you know, the salary increases that are supposed to be coming. If that's true, then the government, who also has those salary increases, would not be able to do it on a 2.1 per cent increase. They are, Mr. Chair, doing it on a 2.1 per cent increase. So if the government, which is a very large organization – and each of those ministries has many people working for them – can do it on a 2.1 per cent increase, I'm pretty sure that these commissions can do it on a 2.1 per cent increase as well. That's the first thing I wanted to say.

The other thing that I wanted to say is that, if you remember, Mr. Chair – you've also been an MLA for many years. You'll remember that in the last go-around we had NDP MLA Thomas Dang, that actually had probably the most egregious hack in Alberta history that cost the information and privacy . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Chair, I call a point of order based on 23(b), "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." The behaviour or the actions of a previous member of the Legislature, who is not a member of this committee, has nothing to do with the budget or the business plan of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, has nothing to do with this debate. If members of the government want to call points of order on something as simple as use of the word "cut," I would certainly say that a point of order applies here. Mr. Hunter can speak to the budget, he can speak to his motion, but the activities of Mr. Dang have nothing to do with either.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: I would like to respond to that. Mr. Chair, you have already ruled that they can use the word "cut" in that, so I don't know how that is an argument. Let's just be clear. I think that the members opposite and the NDP side have used lots of speech in terms that do not actually have anything to do with the scope of what we're talking about here, so I would say that this is actually just a point of debate rather than a point of order.

The Chair: Yeah. You guys are making it really easy for me today here, and I'm saying that in the most facetious way at this point. There's going to be some vim and vigour in our debates. Absolutely.

MLA Hunter, I don't know if you were going to bring it back in line with some of the comments that you had regarding hacking or otherwise, but I would like to raise a big caution flag of using other members' names, former or present, in making that point, and it potentially could cause disorder. The other exception I take is that I haven't been around that long. So thank you for giving me that compliment, but, you know, on the point of order side at this point I'm not going to call it a point of order.

But I want all members here – to MLA Eremenko's very salient point, we have other folks in the hopper. We've had ample time to debate and throw things at each other in the House. Let's try to get through this in the next bit. It's not a point of order, but a strong caution flag has been thrown in the play. So let's, please, keep our sticks on the ice.

MLA Hunter, you were, I believe, going to continue on in your debate.

Mr. Hunter: I was just trying to be able to address the concerns that the members opposite had brought up. Mr. Chair, I will just finish that thought in that I had never once heard one NDP MLA complain about the cost to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner when that previous member – I won't say the name; God forbid – did what he did, which was a cost to all taxpayers and to that organization to be able to have to work through that.

I never heard once this argument that these guys – because what he had done was costing taxpayers money, was not allowing them to do the work that they should be doing. So I would say that those arguments are, you know, falling hollow as we kind of work through these numbers.

12:10

Again, I will go back to the first point that I made, which is that if the government, which is a very large organization – it runs the whole province – can do it on a 2.1 per cent increase, I believe that these commissions can also do the same.

The Chair: MLA Renaud, you caught my attention there for speaking as well.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. I just want to make a couple of quick comments and just preface that we're having this discussion immediately following, you know, discussions in the Legislature about the fact that MLAs needed to have a higher gift limit before disclosure or removing caps for salaries for people that are appointed to ABCs.

In any event, I expect that teachers and nurses and educational assistants will be interested to hear that as they move into bargaining with members of the government. They'll see that the government is putting a hard line in the sand, ensuring that workers, if they want to keep up with inflation: the only way that'll happen is if jobs are lost.

I wanted to underline also, in addition to that, the point that Member Eremenko made; that is, not one member on this committee asked any question of the officials that were here talking and presenting about their budget, any question whatsoever about reductions or cuts or: would they be able to keep their level of work and productivity with a cut? Not once. They waited until they were gone. So that's incredibly disappointing.

Thank you.

The Chair: With that, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour, please say aye. Opposed? On the phones, those in favour, please say aye. Opposed? In the famous words of Mr. Speaker Cooper, I believe the ayes have it.

Motion carried.

With that, we have a next agenda item. I would maybe take a chance for everyone to have a quick bio break. Five minutes. Be back here, and we'll carry on with the Ministry of Children and Family Services. I appreciate those folks waiting so patiently for us in the lobby.

[The committee adjourned from 12:12 p.m. to 12:16 p.m.]

The Chair: Well, thank you very much for your patience.

What we'll do here is we'll just introduce ourselves around the table – I'm MLA Shane Getson, chair of the committee – to my right.

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

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

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, MLA for Taber-Warner. Good morning.

Mr. Lundy: Hi. Brandon Lundy, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Mr. Bhurgri: Abdul Aziz Bhurgri, research officer.

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

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

The Chair: And just to make a quick note for the record as well, we did a shift change. We have MLA Lundy signing in for MLA Sinclair, who's out, and we'll just go quickly to the teleprompter, as it were, or the videoconference line. We'll just go around that. I see MLA Shepherd. Please introduce yourself, and go on to the right.

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

Member Eremenko: Good afternoon. Janet Eremenko, Calgary-Currie.

Ms Chapman: MLA Chapman, Calgary-Beddington.

The Chair: And I see MLA Long. We'll take his word for it. He's there. He's a silent type of speaker.

We really appreciate this. The Child and Youth Advocate is back in here again. We're going to be going through your report and your presentations. And is it Ms Wagner? Ms Wagner, if you could please introduce yourself and your team, and we'll let you carry on from there.

Ms Wagner: Well, good morning. I'm Leann Wagner. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the child intervention division with Children and Family Services. Joining me is David Wheeler, assistant deputy minister for regulatory compliance, quality assurance, and business supports within the ministry.

The Chair: Perfect. Well, I'll cede the floor to you. Please, carry on.

Ms Wagner: Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a briefing on the Ministry of Children and Family Services' response to the recommendations from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate's 2022-2023 annual report. I will be using a PowerPoint as part of my presentation to highlight some key points in our response.

First, I'd like to begin by providing context with respect to legislative authority. The Minister of Children and Family Services is responsible for administering legislation, including the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, CYFEA, and the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, PSECA. Whereas the advocate's duties, roles, and functions are set out in the Child and Youth Advocate Act, the ministry is legislatively required to report all deaths of children involved with child intervention to the minister and the advocate. The minister is required to publish on our website the ministry's response, two recommendations made by the Child and Youth Advocate, and statistical data about incidents giving rise to serious injuries and deaths of children receiving intervention services. The Child and Youth Advocate Act states that the ministry must publicly respond to the advocate's recommendation within 75 days of receipt of the recommendations.

All deaths of children, youth, and young adults receiving child intervention services as well as those who previously received services within two years go through an internal review. This review looks at what was happening at the time of the incident to understand the factors that contributed to the service provided and decisions made during involvement with the child and family. We examine records and talk to staff about the services and supports provided, determine any immediate changes to be made in policy or practice that could help prevent a similar occurrence, and take specific actions to support the immediate safety and well-being of the child or other children, youth, or young adults.

This process allows us to understand what improvements we can make to policy and program delivery. Through the office of the Child and Youth Advocate legal representation for children and youth provides lawyers for children and youth and child intervention matters and offers legal representation to children and youth receiving services from child intervention. The advocate also provides advocacy services on behalf of children and youth involved in our system. These advocates are an important part of case planning and management for services for children and youth.

We also have a memorandum of understanding between the advocate and the ministry. The signed MOU outlines our mutual

commitments to support advocacy for children and youth; exchange information while also respecting the privacy of children, youth, and families served by the ministry; work in collaboration to ensure that the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children and youth are considered; provide necessary information for the advocate to complete their review; and ensure continual improvement of services to children and youth.

At this point I'd like to turn to the advocate's recommendations in their 2022-2023 annual report. The first recommendation is with respect to young people with complex needs. The recommendation is that the ministries of Health, Education, children's services, community and social services, and Justice and Solicitor General develop and publicly report on a co-ordinated action plan to address service gaps for young people with complex needs while longer term initiatives are under development. This plan should include targeted activities and milestones that meet the immediate needs of these young people. Children and Family Services accepted the intent of this recommendation and considers it complete.

We released a review of children, youth, and young adults who died between April 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021. This report publicly committed to an action plan that would keep children safe. The plan supports those with complex needs and supports continuous improvement of child intervention practices in Alberta. We have made significant progress on the recommendations in that report.

Children and Family Services also offers a range of services and interventions that are immediately available to all children and youth involved in our system. These include additional out-of-home placements, that offer both therapeutic and clinical services; referrals to appropriate community and government supports such as those offered by Alberta Health Services for formal mental health and addictions assessment, diagnoses, and treatment; personalized community care, which provides an out-of-home placement augmented with additional Alberta Health Services clinical supports. This program is delivered by Children and Family Services, Mental Health and Addiction, Alberta Health Services, and two community partners.

Examples of crossministry collaboration include the joint protocol for complex medical decision-making between Children and Family Services and Alberta Health Services. It was developed to help guide complex pediatric medical decision-making when both organizations are involved. The protocol supports effective co-ordination of services in order to provide care that is in the best interests of the child or youth, many of whom have complex needs. The crossministry protocol between Children and Family Services and Seniors, Community and Social Services supports assessment, planning, and intervention methods to assist children, youth, and parents with disabilities, including cognitive challenges, across both ministries.

In addition, eight campus-based treatment centres provide intensive and therapeutic out-of-home residential support for Children and Family Services involved youth aged 12 to 17 years with complex emotional and behavioural needs. The campus-based care environment provides treatment, education, socialization, support, and protection for youth with trauma-based needs and behaviours.

The second recommendation is that the ministry should examine the connections for each Indigenous child in the care of the director and identify tailored actions that build and strengthen connections with their family, community, and culture. Children and Family Services accepted the intent of this recommendation and considers it to be in progress.

12:25

All children in care are required to have a culturally appropriate service plan. As of March 2023, 93 per cent of all children had a service plan that was recorded as culturally appropriate on file. To help staff understand what culture means across the many Indigenous communities in Alberta, we offer training through our Indigenous cultural understanding framework. All staff, including all levels of management in Children and Family Services, are required to take this training. As the advocate acknowledges, Children and Family Services has robust policy and practice procedures around cultural planning. Our policy states that cultural planning needs to reflect four areas of connection: relational, legal, physical, and culture. We agree with the advocate's comments yesterday that cultural plans should include more than attendance at community events.

In response to the recommendations we have established a working group that meets biweekly to review existing policy and practice guidance, focused on family, community, cultural planning, and connections, to ensure clarity for practitioners while identifying any impediments to adherence to the policy. We are conducting targeted file reviews to better understand how policy and practice guidance is translated into front-line practice. This will help identify barriers and successes and determine what actions are required to strengthen cultural plans for all children in care. The results of the file review will inform potential next steps by the end of the fiscal year.

The final recommendation we will speak to is that the ministry should publicly report on summary findings from their examination of all Indigenous children and their unique connections to their families, communities, and cultures within 12 months and provide ongoing annual updates. We accepted the intent of this recommendation and consider it in progress.

Children and Family Services agrees on the importance of transparency and already makes child intervention data specific to Indigenous children publicly available through a variety of reporting products, including online reports, an interactive tool, and our annual report. On a quarterly basis Children and Family Services publicly provides child intervention information and statistics on the number of Indigenous children receiving services as well as the number of Indigenous children in care. On an annual basis we update a public child intervention data tool, which provides 10-year trend analysis on child intervention services by legal type, placement type, and permanency outcome by Indigenous status.

The ministry's business plan and past annual reports include a performance measure on percentage of children in care placed in family-based care by Indigenous status and a performance indicator on the number of First Nation children and youth served by a delegated First Nation agency as well as the total number of First Nation children that have transferred to an Indigenous governing body. Based on findings from the targeted review outlined in our previous response, we will continue to explore reporting options.

Children involved in intervention services are often our most vulnerable. Seeing them succeed and reach their own goals is tremendously rewarding for all of us who work in Children and Family Services. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the advocate's 2022-2023 annual report, and we are happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Appreciate it. Thank you, Ms Wagner, on that.

Just for the committee's information as well we also have folks from the Child and Youth Advocate here today to act as technical advisers to the ministry.

With that, I'll open it up to the floor for any questions. Go ahead, MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the ministry for being here today and for the important work that you do. I see on page 37 that two recommendations were closed. You mentioned that CFS, upon receiving recommendations from the OCYA, determines how to respond to the recommendations as well as what actions are to be taken by the ministry. So can you just walk us through the process for deciding whether to accept, accept with intent, or not to accept the advocate's recommendation as well as determining whether a recommendation has either been met or not met?

Ms Wagner: Thank you. Receiving and responding to recommendations is a collaborative process between ourselves, if we've been named with another ministry, and with the advocate. In order to understand both the opportunities and the consequences of moving forward to implement a recommendation, the ministry considers: is the recommendation aligned to our current policy and practice as we update our manual on a regular basis? Is implementing the recommendation within our current legal mandate? Do we have data confirming that the recommendation is connected to a systemic issue? What is currently under way to address the recommendation? Can we leverage work already under way to meet the recommendation? Where are we going strategically, and did we plan for something similar in other strategic initiatives? What do our stakeholders say, including front-line caseworkers, Indigenous communities, contracted agencies? Are there any budget implications of implementing, for example, a recommendation? How is the recommendation linked to the broader government of Alberta commitment and mandate of government? And can we develop a plan that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely?

After the analysis the ministry will either accept the recommendation in full, meaning we agree with the concerns of the advocate, and if the recommendation is clear on how to address the recommendation, we agree on how it should be addressed; accept the intent of the recommendation, meaning we agree with the concerns of the advocate, but we will or have already acted in an alternative way that the ministry determines will better meet the intended outcome of the advocate; or not accept, meaning we have determined the recommendation is not actionable and will not meet the intended outcomes of the advocate.

Children and Family Services assesses our own progress based on actions the ministry committed to in our original public response and defines its progress by the following status: complete, the recommendations or the intent of the recommendation has been met by actions taken; in progress, steps or actions are under way to achieve the recommendation; ongoing, long-term action required as there are systemic or standing issues; response pending, the public response has been drafted or is in the process of being drafted and has not yet been approved; complete or alternate solution, the ministry has developed an alternate solution which addresses the concern, an implementation plan has been formulated to fully respond to the underlying issue identified in the recommendation, and the ministry has demonstrated that all necessary steps were taken to respond to the recommendation.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Hunter: I do, Mr. Chair. In the occasion that there is a disagreement on a recommendation or the department encounters

some barriers to implement a recommendation, what's the process for resolution?

Ms Wagner: The ministry assesses its own response, its own progress based on the actions we publicly committed to. These are often recommendations where the ministry accepts intent versus accepts. Of course, the OCYA may not always agree that our actions satisfy the intent of the original recommendation, which often can lead to this discrepancy.

Ideally, we make every effort to avoid this situation by discussing in advance with the advocate our plans to respond to their recommendation. If we do not agree on the status of a recommendation, the first step is for the respective program areas within the ministry and the OCYA to discuss, resulting in the sharing of additional information or a redraft of the update to provide clarity. If these discussions do not resolve the discrepancy, the advocate may choose to elevate their concerns directly to the deputy minister or minister.

The Chair: Okay. I do have a speakers list going; I have Dyck, Lundy, and Renaud. Go ahead, MLA Dyck.

Mr. Dyck: Perfect. Well, thank you so very much for coming and presenting here today. I learned a lot. As a young father – I asked a similar question yesterday to our presenters – it's always challenging to me to hear about children's deaths. Yeah. We have seen a few children and young people pass away from various medical conditions, including some infection complications, respiratory issues, and – always unfortunate, but cancer is a reality.

Here's my question. I realize many of these deaths are due to medical conditions of children, and they're not preventable. But I do believe our government cares deeply about these children and youth, so I do believe as well that we should support these children and their families during this extremely challenging time. I'm very curious on what services and supports the ministry or government offers to the children and young people who have various conditions and their families. Honestly, some of these children might be terminal, so what are we offering as a ministry and then also as a government?

Ms Wagner: When a child is ill and they cannot live with their family, we will provide them with a specialized placement either with a foster family or in a residential facility such as Rosewood. They will be cared for by highly trained individuals, and we will continue to maintain their connections with their family. So we encourage their parents to come and visit them, their grandmothers, their extended family, their siblings to visit with them.

12:35

Because we are their guardian, we always intend to offer the highest quality of care to them and to ensure that they get the best quality of care they can. We have two specialized pediatric clinics that are dedicated towards children in care, one here in Edmonton and one in Calgary. Children who have medical conditions are linked with that clinic and receive medical care from a pediatrician.

We then begin planning. If we think they're going to transition to adulthood with a condition, we make every effort – we have a terrific relationship with seniors and community supports – to transition them seamlessly to adult supports, including out-of-home placements. Whether that's, you know, in a small home or whether – sometimes they stay with their foster parents or their kinship family or go to a long-term care facility.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Dyck: I don't. That was my question. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Now, I did have on the list here MLA Lundy and then MLA Renaud, but I'm wondering, in the spirit of balance and co-operation – MLA Renaud might have been a little bit slower on the draw – if MLA Lundy would be so kind as to consider her going ahead of you.

Mr. Lundy: Sure. Yeah.

The Chair: Very kind of you, sir.
MLA Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of questions. I know the ministry reduced 3,410 regulatory requirements in an effort to reduce red tape, I suppose. This is actually one of the three outcomes that were identified in the annual report. I'm wondering – I don't expect that you would have them here – if you could table for this committee the list of those regulatory requirements that were eliminated or changed and how that impacts, I guess, the work of this ministry and, obviously, the recommendations of the OCYA.

Ms Wagner: Technically I believe that is outside the scope of the motion that was passed by the committee in terms of us speaking directly to the recommendations of the advocate, so I respectfully decline to answer the question.

Ms Renaud: Can I ask a follow-up on that?

The Chair: You certainly can.

Ms Renaud: There are three outcomes identified by an entire ministry, and I'm assuming that it supports the work of the OCYA. That seems like a lot of space and effort. I would assume that these changes are positive for the work and positively impact the work of the OCYA. I don't understand why that would not be something the ministry would be proud of.

Ms Wagner: I would just respectfully suggest that that question would be best directed toward the advocate, how those regulatory changes may have positively or in some manner impacted the advocate's work.

The Chair: Okay. Over to MLA Lundy.

Mr. Lundy: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the department officials for joining us today and for all the important work that you do. On page 33 of the report it showed there were 67 children and young adults who died or were seriously injured, representing that 76 per cent of the cases were Indigenous. It is heartbreaking to see this overrepresentation. I'm aware that the Alberta government often works in collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations to improve the outcomes of Indigenous populations in the province. Could you please provide further detail on what our government is doing to protect and improve the welfare of Indigenous children in Alberta?

Ms Wagner: Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care is a high priority for our ministry. We are focused on providing culturally appropriate prevention and early intervention services to support families and provide targeted help early, reducing the need for greater interventions down the road. We have a few tools and approaches that we use. The first is that we support First Nations in delivering child intervention services. We have 19 DFNAs who provide child intervention services to Indigenous children on-

reserve and some off-reserve. Thirty per cent of our caseload is managed by these delegated First Nations agencies.

We support the transfer of authority to Indigenous law from provincial law. To date we've transferred over 130 cases and plan to transfer additional cases over the next 12 months to First Nations. First Nations can identify a band designate, who works with us to ensure that children are connected to their culture, and their community can provide input into case planning and family-finding.

We require all child intervention staff who wish to be promoted to complete training under the Indigenous cultural understanding framework. Approximately 10 per cent of our staff are Indigenous. I would note that there are 7 per cent of Albertans who identify as Indigenous.

In our recent request for proposals for group care we are requiring more robust approaches by our vendors to support Indigenous culture. In our own government-operated, campus-based treatment centres we have hired Indigenous practice specialists and are implementing a program that includes ceremony, relationships, access to cultural and community events, and nutrition that is more oriented towards Indigenous culture.

We continue to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child intervention through policies and practice that prioritize children being connected to their families, their communities, their culture as well as providing a defined path to achieving legal permanency, whether that is family reunification or private guardianship.

Finally, we have an elders wisdom circle that provides Indigenous cultural wisdom and advice on various department initiatives to help inform our work to better serve Indigenous children, families, and communities, acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous world views and traditions.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Lundy: No. That's great. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. On the list here, with balance, I have Shepherd, Chapman, Renaud, and Rowswell. I'm wondering if we can put that same balance in. MLA Shepherd, you're up next.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much for joining us today to provide your perspectives from children's services. I did have a question. We know we have seen an increase, a significant increase, in the number of deaths. Indeed, in the year 2022-23 we saw about 50 deaths recorded, but the ministry did not undertake an internal review on that. Now, I do know that that was the first time in five years. In the five years previous, whenever we set a new record for a number of deaths, there was an internal review that was conducted. So I'm just wondering if there was a particular reason why in this case there was not an internal review and what the process might be to determine when an internal review should take place.

Ms Wagner: As I indicated in my presentation, we do an internal review of every death of a child. So for every child who passes away, there is an internal review conducted. The review I mentioned in the presentation was done in 2021 in response – Minister Schulz had made that request of the department to take a look at the number of deaths that occurred with children during that time frame. So we, of course, undertook a review, and a number of recommendations were made. The action from the report and its recommendations were made public.

Mr. Shepherd: A follow-up, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yeah. Please proceed, MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. I appreciate that clarity. So if I understand you correctly, you do an internal review of each death individually, but you will only do a systemic review if it is specifically requested by the minister. Is that correct?

Ms Wagner: Well, generally we would rely on the systemic reviews conducted by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for that level of review. Minister Schulz indicated that she wanted a review done, so of course we responded with a review.

The Chair: What I'll do here just to try to balance it out, folks – we're down to about three, four minutes here, from what I can see, if we're going to get through the rest of the agenda.

MLA Rowswell, would you like to ask your question?

Mr. Rowswell: Sure. It's my understanding that the OCYA and the government have different definitions of youth, which can cause discrepancy in the data. Could you please explain how the Children and Family Services ministry defines youth?

Ms Wagner: Yes. Just one moment, please.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay.

Ms Wagner: The ministry – the definition of youth is defined in the act, in our various pieces of legislation. We provide services to a child under child intervention up to their 18th birthday. I can't speak to the definition in the advocate's report; I don't have that information. But that's how we define it.

Mr. Rowswell: So how do the different definitions affect the reporting of deaths or serious injuries, and how does that impact your ministry's response to the recommendations?

12:45

Ms Wagner: You know, we do not quibble with the advocate if a recommendation is made on a child who might have passed away, unfortunately, on day 18 plus one, for example, or on day 17 minus two. We're not going to quibble that that recommendation does not apply to us, of course, because the advocate, in our view, is addressing systemic issues in their reviews of deaths. So we generally just, you know, accept that as being applicable to our program and respond as needed to the recommendation.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you.

The Chair: Maybe what I can do here – we'll just be cognizant of time. MLA Renaud, I'll bump you behind MLA Chapman. Because we're getting tight on time, if you have a question, maybe a written response back from the ministry would be required.

We'll let MLA Chapman have the last question, and then we'll thank the individuals who came forward today and then move on to the last part of our item, which would be a ton of deliberation and more motions, which seem to chew up the shot clock a little bit.

MLA Chapman, all you.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Chair. Hopefully, just a quick question about how your department collaborates with Health. I believe that the majority on this committee voted against Health to be here to answer questions, so I'm wondering if you can just give me, like, a quick overview on if and how your department collaborates with Health.

Ms Wagner: We collaborate with both Mental Health and Addiction and Alberta Health Services. We collaborate with them on specific

cases where perhaps front-line staff were unable to resolve a gap in service. Those are then escalated through our respective systems for resolution. We join up and partner on service delivery, whether those are placement types, specific therapeutic services that a child or children may need. We partner with them on new initiatives, whether that is new initiatives by our department or theirs, particularly around addiction and the impacts of human trafficking and items like that.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up, MLA Chapman?

Ms Chapman: No. That's okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect.

Well, I'd like to thank you and your team for coming out today. You're more than happy to stick around if you wish, but we'll be moving on to some deliberations, recommendations. So, again, thank you for your time, and thank you for all the work that you folks do in your ministry. It's, yeah, big hearts. Thank you.

The committee has now received two separate presentations as part of our consideration of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report '22-23. To prepare for our discussions today and pursuant to Standing Order 52.041, committee members wishing to propose substantive motions were asked to put them on notice earlier this week to ensure all members would have a chance to consider the various proposals that may be raised today. There are currently two motions on notice on the proposed amendment. If there are committee members that wish to move a motion that is not on notice, we think we know how that process works. They must first request permission of the committee.

With that in mind, I'll open the floor to discussion. MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Do we have to read in the motion? It's already read in, basically, right?

The Chair: Yeah. If the one was submitted before, it still has to be up on the screen and read in. If you're proposing something that wasn't given a substantive motion, like we went through today, then we'd have to have the consideration and approval of the committee.

Mr. Hunter: My question is: do I have to read this motion into the record now?

The Chair: I don't know what you're looking at.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. I will read my motion into the record.

The Chair: Perfect. The one that was on notice. Excellent. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices recommend that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate continue to work together with the relevant ministries to improve outcomes for children and youth in care in Alberta based on the recommendations made in the 2022-23 annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you.

Having heard the motion, we'll open it up for discussion.

I'm being told we should get it on the screen first. We're all a little gun shy here today.

Let's open it up for discussion. I'm starting a speaking list here right away. Is anyone from the floor wishing to discuss? MLA Shepherd, you caught my attention, sir. The floor is yours, MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Yeah. Sorry. A bit of a lag on the technology there. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe I have submitted an amendment that I'd like to move at this time.

The Chair: Okay. Please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: My amendment is that the government of Alberta, all impacted ministries, prioritize implementation of the recommendations contained within the 2022-2023 annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate and continue to work with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to achieve those results.

The Chair: I just want to confirm with the table, given that we've gone through a few items, that this was all submitted in advance. Just give me a second, MLA Shepherd.

Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: What we're doing here, MLA Shepherd: the wording was a little bit different, what was submitted versus what you've just brought forward . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Okay.

The Chair: . . . so please have a look and see if there's a difference. If not, we'd have to get consensus of the committee to bring something different.

Mr. Shepherd: All right. So, yeah, the difference is not having the word "prioritize" and not having the final phrase "to achieve those results." I understand, Mr. Chair. If that's what is submitted, then that is what I will move.

The Chair: Okay. I appreciate it.

With that, we'll open it up to debate.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I believe that all committee members agree that the government should continue to work to improve the outcomes for children and youth in care in Alberta and that the recommendations are a very important part of what we do. However, as was mentioned by both the OCYA and the ministry, the implementation of recommendations can be a complex process. Timelines can change. The lead ministries in the government for specific recommendations are sometimes different ministries than the ones mentioned by the OCYA. Sometimes recommendations are accepted with intent but need a different policy and implementation path. The one suggested by the OCYA or government analysis may show there are other ways or avenues to achieve the same goal or recommendation, or it may show that a recommendation will not achieve the end goal.

The initial wording has direct language to direct relevant ministries, Mr. Chair, to continue to work collaboratively with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to ensure a better and safer future for children and youth in care. This is the reason why I don't believe that this amendment is necessary, and I will be voting against it.

The Chair: Okay.

MLA Renaud, you've caught my attention.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. I believe the aim of the recommendation is to improve the outcomes for youth, and in order to make that

happen, these recommendations need to be implemented. It's only ministries that have the power and ability to implement or meet the recommendations – and I think we all know that – and this amendment puts that responsibility precisely where it belongs. The original motion puts responsibility on the advocate, and that is a message that the members of this committee should not be sending to the advocate or to the Alberta public.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other items for discussion?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question on the amendment to the motion. All those in favour of the amendment to the motion, please say aye. All those opposed? On the phone, all of those in favour of the amendment? All of those opposed? I believe the noes have it.

The amendment has been defeated.

We're back on the main motion. Any further discussion on the main motion?

Seeing and hearing none, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour of the motion presented by MLA Hunter, please say aye. All of those opposed? On the phones, all those in favour, please say aye. Opposed? I believe the ayes have it.

Motion carried.

12:55

Mr. Dyck: I have a motion to bring. I would like to move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices conclude its review of the 2022-2023 annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate and that we direct research services to prepare a draft report on the committee's review of the 2022-2023 annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate and authorize the chair to approve the report after making it available to committee members for review.

The Chair: Okay. I'll open this up for discussion.

And it was put on notice? Yes? Okay. Thanks, guys. We're all just making sure. We're a little gun shy here today.

So open for discussion.

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour, please say aye. Opposed? On the phones, all those in favour, please say aye. Opposed?

Motion carried.

Are there any other motions? Okay.

With that, are there any items for discussion other than the business from today's agenda?

With that, the next meeting will be in January at the discretion of the chair. We'll try to get those Doodle polls out to you really quick to make sure we've got some times lined up that are as amiable as possible for everybody.

And, with that, we'd be on to the last item, which would be adjournment. Is there any member so inclined? We've got everybody throwing hands up here. Let's throw Rowswell on the record. It's a motion to adjourn by MLA Rowswell. All in favour? Okay.

And I just want to take a chance here. Everybody, have a safe and Merry Christmas. Thank you so much for all the work that you do, the extra work that you're putting in here today. I really appreciate that.

With that, we'd like to close debate. The motion is carried. Meeting adjourned. Have a great Christmas.

[The committee adjourned at 12:56 p.m.]

