



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Fourth Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Public Accounts

Children and Youth Services

Wednesday, October 26, 2011  
8:30 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 27th Legislature  
Fourth Session**

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)  
Blackett, Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC) \*  
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Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)  
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)  
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Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)  
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\* substitution for Doug Elniski

**Also in Attendance**

Knight, Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)  
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL)  
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)

**Department of Human Services Participants**

Karen Ferguson	Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Strategies and Support
Mark Hattori	Assistant Deputy Minister, Child Intervention Program Quality and Supports
Shehnaz Hutchinson	Senior Financial Officer, Financial Strategies
Gord Johnston	Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry Support Services
Steve MacDonald	Deputy Minister
Susan Taylor	Executive Director, Family Violence Prevention, Bullying and Youth Strategies

**Office of the Auditor General Participants**

Merwan Saher	Auditor General
Doug Wylie	Assistant Auditor General
Ruth Schneidmiller	Manager of Audits

### Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel/ Director of House Services
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Law Clerk/Director of Interparliamentary Relations
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**8:30 a.m. Wednesday, October 26, 2011**

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. I would like to call this meeting of our Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order, please. On behalf of all members of the committee I would like to welcome those who have dropped by this morning.

Please note again that the meeting is recorded by *Hansard*, and the audio is streamed live on the Internet.

We're going to quickly go around the table and introduce ourselves. My name is Hugh MacDonald, from Edmonton-Gold Bar. We'll start with the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone. Dave Rodney here.

**Dr. Massolin:** Good morning. Philip Massolin, committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

**Mr. Benito:** Good morning, everyone. I'm Carl Benito, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Good morning. George Groeneveld, Highwood.

**Mr. Vandermeer:** Good morning. Tony Vandermeer, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Good morning, everyone. Teresa Woo-Paw, Calgary-Mackay.

**Dr. Swann:** Good morning, everyone. David Swann, Calgary-Mountain View.

**Mr. Chase:** Good morning. Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity.

I'd like to thank the members of this all-party committee for unanimously agreeing to call for this meeting five months ago with the former ministry of children and youth services. Welcome.

**Ms Pastoor:** Good morning. Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Taylor:** Good morning. Susan Taylor with the Ministry of Human Services.

**Ms Hutchinson:** Shehnaz Hutchinson, Ministry of Human Services.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Steve MacDonald, children's services.

**Mr. Johnston:** Gord Johnston, children's services. Good morning.

**Mr. Hattori:** Good morning. Mark Hattori, Human Services.

**Ms Ferguson:** Karen Ferguson, Human Services.

**Ms Schneidmiller:** Ruth Schneidmiller, office of the Auditor General.

**Mr. Wylie:** Doug Wylie, office of the Auditor General.

**Mr. Saher:** Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

**Mr. Knight:** Good morning. Mel Knight, Grande Prairie-Smoky.

**Mr. Blackett:** Good morning. Lindsay Blackett, Calgary-North West.

**Mr. Xiao:** David Xiao, Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Good morning. Peter Sandhu, Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Allred:** Ken Allred, St. Albert.

**Ms Rempel:** Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

May I have approval of the agenda that was circulated, please? Moved by Mr. Chase that the agenda for the October 26, 2011, meeting be approved as distributed. All in favour? Thank you very much.

Approval of the minutes for the May 18, 2011, meeting as circulated? Mr. Xiao. Thank you. Moved by David Xiao that the minutes for the May 18, 2011, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. All in favour? Thank you.

Of course, this comes to our meeting with officials from children's services. The chair would like to remind everyone that Mr. Blackett is an official substitute for Mr. Elniski this morning. Thank you very much for that, sir.

I would remind you that we are dealing with the annual report for 2010-11 of the former children and youth services ministry, so questions, hon. members, should be centred on that report as well as the April 2011 and October 2010 Auditor General's report as well as any information from the 2010-11 consolidated financial statements of the province of Alberta. The chair would be really appreciative if members could focus on this annual report, please.

Now I guess we can go to Mr. MacDonald, the deputy minister of children's services, for a brief opening statement.

Thank you.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, everybody. It's a real privilege to be with you here today. My staff have introduced themselves, so I'll just get right on with my opening remarks. We are very pleased to be here with you to share our ministry's highlights from 2010-11 and to answer your questions.

Our more than 2,800 staff across the province are deeply committed to the same mission, helping improve the safety and well-being of Alberta's children, youth, and their families each and every day. Last year we invested approximately \$1.2 billion to support strong children, youth, and families in communities, which included a supplementary estimate of \$71 million. More than 60 per cent, \$733 million, was dedicated to preservation and protection, keeping children safe and preserving families.

The reality is that we are the legal guardian for approximately 8,700 children and youth in provincial care. They are among society's most vulnerable people, having gone through difficult and traumatic experiences, including abuse, neglect, family violence, and sexual exploitation.

Taking a child into care is a last resort. Our front-line staff and community partners work closely with families who are at risk to prevent a crisis from developing by helping them overcome obstacles so their children can remain with them or return to their care safely. In 2010-11 we helped to reunite with their families 1,200 children and youth who had been in temporary or permanent care. Equally important, 89 per cent of children who receive child intervention services did not require services one year later.

The ministry also continued helping thousands of families with the challenges of raising a child with a disability. This included approximately \$126 million for resources and referrals that helped parents develop skills in caring for their children along with aide support, respite care, and costs associated with attending medical appointments.

Since 2004-2005 funding for the family supports for children with disabilities program has increased by \$52 million to ensure we continue to meet the specialized needs of children and families. The number of children on our FSCD caseload with autism alone has increased 86 per cent, or 1,250, over the past six years. While approximately 30 per cent of the overall caseload is for families with children with autism, more than 45 per cent of the FSCD budget is invested in supports for them.

We can all agree that the best place for a child to grow up is at home with their family in a nurturing environment. However, when parents are unable or unwilling to care for their child, we act to ensure the child's safety, removing the child from the parents' care. We immediately work to find the child a safe place with a relative or a foster parent, depending on what is in the best interests of the child. In cases where a child is unable to return to their family, we look to find a new permanent home for them. In 2010-11 we secured 551 permanent homes for children and youth through adoption and private guardianship, exceeding our performance measure target for that year.

As well, the ministry invested \$166 million in foster care support, providing 2,400 Alberta foster parents with financial assistance and ongoing training and resources that included counselling, babysitting, homemaking services, legal advocacy, and peer and respite support.

The vast majority of children and youth in care are doing very well thanks to the dedication, compassion, and efforts of our staff and caregivers. However, the sad reality is that tragedies do occur. Last year six children receiving protective services sustained a serious injury that led to a death, and 14 had an injury that led to overnight hospitalization. These numbers include accidents such as falls from playground equipment or injuries that occurred playing sports. Nonetheless, above all, nothing is more important than the safety of our children and youth. One death or injury is one too many. That is why our goal every year is zero, zero injuries and zero deaths. We are committed to learning from these incidents and doing everything within our power to help prevent tragedies from happening in the future through our ongoing evaluation, evolution, and continuous improvement of our services and supports.

In 2010-11 we took many important steps to enhance the well-being of vulnerable children and youth in care. We began implementing 10 key recommendations from an expert panel who reviewed the child intervention system, including the creation of an aboriginal policy and an assistant deputy minister to ensure our supports and services were culturally appropriate in meeting the unique needs of that community. We also created a child and family services council for quality assurance, an arm's-length committee of independent experts who regularly examine our system and make recommendations for improvement. The council will also review all serious injuries and deaths of children and youth in the care of the province and determine when more in-depth external examination of any incidents is needed.

We also implemented the new Alberta Vulnerable Infant Response Team in Calgary, which involves front-line staff working with nurses and police in one office to provide a wraparound service in support for at-risk families with infants.

In 2010-11 we also partnered with Alberta Education to implement the success in schools provincial protocol framework. The initiative, which recently won a silver Premier's award of excellence, involves child care caseworkers and educators working together with children and youth to develop child-focused plans that will help them succeed in the classroom.

One complex challenge that continues as a primary focus for us is the high number of aboriginal children and youth in care. In

2010-11 aboriginal children made up 66 per cent of our in-care caseload. We share the same goal with First Nations communities, delegated First Nations, bands, councillors, and elders, that all aboriginal First Nation and Métis children have the opportunity to grow up in a safe and loving home where they are strongly connected to their traditions, family, friends, community, and culture.

**8:40**

The ministry has invested in an ongoing provincial campaign for additional caregivers, with a particular focus on aboriginal caregivers. Placement with kinship families allows aboriginal children to remain attached to their cultural and community ties. In 2010-11 1,729 children were placed with kinship families. In the last three years 54 per cent of kinship homes that were approved were aboriginal families. We continue to work very closely with our aboriginal partners to develop solutions to those very complex issues facing their communities, and we're continually looking for ways to enhance services and supports for children and families.

In addition to preservation and protection, I would like to highlight our other two core businesses, prevention and partnerships. Last year the ministry invested more than \$383 million to support programs and services in this area; \$219 million was invested to support quality affordable child care options for parents. In 2008 we launched creating child care choices with an aggressive goal of creating 14,000 new spaces by 2011. Three years later we surpassed our targets, creating approximately 20,000 net new child care spaces, attracting 2,000 more daycare workers to the field, and providing nearly 10,000 more subsidies to low-income families and increasing the number of accredited daycare programs at family day home agencies from 296 to 553. Now more than 96 per cent of all child care programs are participating in accreditation.

Another important responsibility we have is helping communities prevent family violence. In 2010-11 we invested approximately \$38 million to help communities prevent family violence and bullying in Alberta and to support victims. We continued to provide funding for women's emergency shelters, sexual assault centres, and outreach services for victims.

Communities know what programs and services best meet the needs of their children and families. They're also in the best position to manage and administer preventative social programs. This philosophy has guided the successful family and community support services program in Alberta. This past year the ministry provided approximately \$76 million to 320 municipalities and Métis settlements to support their local and social programs for children, youth, and families. Municipalities supplemented the ministry's investment with their own funding, bringing the total FCSS program funding to over \$100 million.

Our ministry also continues its commitment to supporting youth at risk through a number of services and supports, including the advancing futures bursary program. In 2010-11 the ministry provided 610 bursaries to help youth in government care attend postsecondary education and realize their academic and career goals.

Our ministry has one of the most important responsibilities in all of government, helping ensure the safety and well-being of children. Our staff are relied upon to make very difficult decisions with the best information available to them while supporting vulnerable children and families facing some of the most complex and challenging circumstances in their lives.

During the government-wide hiring restraint period we remained committed to filling front-line human services positions.

In 2010-11 we hired 319 staff, of whom 260 were front-line workers. As a team our staff are dedicated to the values of the Alberta public service – respect, accountability, integrity, and excellence – and are wholly committed to supporting the best possible outcomes for children and families. We'll continue to work together along with our community partners to help create a brighter future for current and future generations of children, youth, and families.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We look forward to answering your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Is there anything from the office of the Auditor General to add at this time?

**Mr. Saher:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Doug Wylie just has some brief comments.

**Mr. Wylie:** Very brief, Mr. Chair. My comments will focus on our April 2011 and October 2010 public reports. Starting on page 33 of our October 2010 report we set out the results of our audit of daycare and day home regulatory compliance monitoring, which included three recommendations: to improve documentation and training, consistency of monitoring, and follow-up processes. Management has indicated that these recommendations have been implemented, and we plan to conduct a follow-up audit in 2012.

No new recommendations were made to the ministry in our most recent, April 2011, report. However, we refer the committee to page 94 of this report, where we list the recommendations to this ministry that were outstanding at that time. There are four such recommendations that relate to our October 2007 audit of the ministry's systems to deliver child intervention services that have not yet been implemented. In accordance with our practice we will conduct a follow-up audit and report its results in a future public report. The timing of this work has not yet been established.

We'll be pleased to answer any questions that the committee may have of us, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

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

The chair would like to recognize Pearl Calahasen, who has joined us this morning.

We'll start with Dr. Swann, followed by Mr. Sandhu.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Goal 2 is established as: "Families will be supported to provide a safe and healthy environment for children and youth." On page 25 of the annual report the ministry lists the establishment of the Alberta Vulnerable Infant Response Team as one of its accomplishments in 2010-2011. This is a partnership between children and youth services, Alberta Health Services, and the Calgary Police Service. In the absence yet of a government of Alberta framework for enhanced interministry and interdepartment collaboration, how does the ministry ensure the co-operation necessary to safeguard the well-being of vulnerable infants?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Well, thank you. You're absolutely right. The AVIRT team was a major first step in that in terms of creating those partnerships with the health system and the justice system. In addition to that, each of the regions has partnerships in their communities. There are groups that get together with the education system, the justice system, and the health care system to talk about common issues. At a ministerial level there are crossministry committees, some of which I chair, with those ministry partners to ensure that we're focused on common issues:

children with complex needs, mental health issues. So there are a whole bunch of mechanisms in place to ensure that continues.

The AVIRT initiative, for example, while it began in Calgary, has also been expanded to Edmonton, and there are similar examples in other places in the province where we're modelling those opportunities.

In addition, the quality council is a multidisciplinary team. It includes someone from a police service, a medical doctor, from the academic community, and interested citizens. Again, there's another mechanism that brings together that multidisciplinary approach to issues around deaths, injuries, and also systemic issues that we can learn from. So there are a whole range of mechanisms in place.

To get a bit off the past, the new ministry of Human Services, that children and youth services is now a part of, is probably the most fundamental change that'll reinforce that integration and crossministry collaboration.

**Dr. Swann:** Can I supplement that with a question about how you're actually evaluating the effectiveness of these crossministry collaborations?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Yeah. AVIRT, for example, has a very specific measurement going on in terms of days in care and understanding what the implications are, the number of kids helped. There are a whole range of other activities on the crossministry side, and it's primarily focused on outcomes. So on the mental health: what sort of services are available, when, the waiting times. There are a whole range of measures that we're working on.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Good morning again. My questions are on the prevention of family violence and bullying. Page 21 of the ministry's annual report states: "Passed Bill 2, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, to strengthen protection for those impacted by family violence by introducing penalties for breaches of protection orders." Page 25 states: "Increased funding to two of nine family violence victim support outreach projects across the province." Alberta has the second-highest rate of self-reported spousal assault of all provinces. What is the ministry doing to prevent family violence and support those affected?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Thank you. Mr. Chairman, the provincial prevention of family violence program strategy is in its seventh year of implementation. Building on the results to date, the strategy is currently under review to refocus its future direction on emerging trends, risks, and protective factors. The member is absolutely correct. Alberta does have the second-highest rate of self-reported spousal assault in Canada. We do think that that's because of the awareness that we've created and the acceptance in society that that's the wrong thing to happen and that there's a responsibility for the community to report. So we, in fact, see that as a positive indicator that our messaging is working.

The total budget for prevention of family violence provincially across government has grown to more than \$65 million, and each of the nine ministries working together provides important supports and services. We have a whole range of initiatives to strengthen what we're doing in the area. One recently is the passing of Bill 2, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011, that includes penalties for breaches of probation orders, making these penalties among the strongest across the country. These amendments build on improvements

made to the act in 2006 and further strengthen protection for victims of family violence.

**8:50**

We've also established eight family violence victim support outreach sites to serve aboriginal and immigrant populations. Four sites serve aboriginal populations, and four serve the immigrant population. Services provided through the outreach sites include first-language services, supportive referrals, advocacy, support through court processes, and counselling. There is approximately \$925,000 allocated to the eight sites for the third year of service delivery.

We also provide more than \$750,000 to eight safe visitation sites operating across the province to provide a safe environment for children to visit with a noncustodial parent. As well, \$1.7 million was also provided to nine sexual assault centres and their provincial associations to support victims of sexual violence in the context of family violence. Nearly \$16 million was provided to communities through the provincial safe communities initiative fund in the first three years for family violence related projects.

Specialized supports, including family violence police teams throughout the province and the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre, I-TRAC, provide an interdisciplinary front-line response to family violence. Development of the family violence centre response model, which will strengthen the integration of existing resources and enhance the co-ordination of assessment cases, is also under way.

As well, children and youth services and the eight other crossministry partners involved in implementing the prevention of family violence strategy are examining the issue of family violence related deaths and the potential for implementing additional mechanisms to strengthen the overall co-ordination and response to future deaths. This is an area where there's not a lot of work in terms of that learning. Much like we do with the deaths of children in care, there's an in-depth analysis. What could we have done better? How should we change practice in the future?

This last initiative I talked about is very much focused on that, so when there's a reporting of a death and it's related to family violence, for us to drill down and understand: "Did the police do the right things at the right time? Were there social services available? What were health care's roles and responsibility? What were the mental health issues?" So we can learn and move forward on that. We're quite excited about the potential for that one.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sandhu.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you very much. He's already answered my second question.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Allred.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. For the record, Mr. Chair, I'm extremely concerned about the subordination of the former ministry of children and youth services and its amalgamation into the megaministry of Human Services.

Goal 3: "Children in need will be protected and supported by permanent, nurturing relationships." According to page 29 of the ministry's annual report 16 of the 20 children and youth in care who suffered injuries, five of the six who died as a result, were aboriginal. My first question. Less than 6 per cent of Alberta's population is aboriginal. How does the ministry account for this gross overrepresentation of First Nations children and youth among those injured and killed while in care?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Thank you. Mr. Chair, the member is absolutely right. There is a significant overrepresentation of aboriginal children and youth in care. It is 66 per cent, as I mentioned in my opening comments. What do I attribute that to? That portion of the community has serious, serious systemic issues. Again, I see children and youth services and the apprehension of children in care as sort of the emergency room. If you look downstream, you see that there are addiction issues, there are poverty issues, there are education issues. Those manifest themselves in families in terms of violence, the inability to parent. That's the reality. We're dealing with sort of the outcomes of those systemic issues.

As we work with aboriginal communities, we recognize that unless we deal with those systemic issues, we'll continue to see that caseload percentage increase. It's very worrisome. What are we doing about it? The first thing we're looking at is in terms of expanding capacity, capacity on-reserve, and stronger partnerships with our aboriginal communities on-reserve. The previous minister had a number of meetings with the governance side of chief and councils, and I've been meeting with the designated First Nation and aboriginal leadership group to talk about what we can change.

One of the big things is trust. You're well aware of the history of residential schools and the fear that comes with a child welfare worker showing up at a home. We've got to change that. We've got to have those families trust us and recognize that we are really here to help and make a difference. That trust comes from communication and that shared understanding. What I'm very encouraged about is that when we get together, there's no debating. We all agree that something has to change. There's no debating that we need stronger partnerships, and there's no debating that we've got to be bold about what we're doing in the future.

Some very specific examples of what we're looking at there is that for every First Nations there's a designate, someone that we talk to before we go and work with the family to say: "Can you tell us about other members of the family that may help? Can you give us a bit of history of the family? Can you make sure chief and council understand some of the issues here? Can you support us if we have to find a nonaboriginal home so that we can work with that family and look for a permanent, loving home? Can we work with you to make sure there's that cultural attachment that goes on?" A lot of our work is really focused on once we bring that child into care, but we also recognize that unless those systemic issues are dealt with in terms of poverty, addiction, violence – we're very concerned about our ability to sort of stem the flow.

Kinship care is another example where we've been a little more creative, where we've said: rather than a foster home, let's reach out to family. The culture and the value of the aboriginal community is strength of family. They see the child as a child of the community. How can we provide the supports and services to family members so that they can become involved and the child doesn't have to come into government care and leave the reserve, something like that?

You're absolutely right about the challenge. We recognize it. We're working with our aboriginal partners very much to get things moving forward.

Another piece I'd mention very briefly is that there are complex jurisdictional issues. There's the federal government, the provincial government, and, of course, the chief and council. The good news is that people say: "We've got to push jurisdiction out of the way. These are the kids. We've got to do the right things." But the reality is that you need a bit of a framework to make that happen. So we're in discussions with the federal government and the grand

chiefs about a memorandum of understanding to say: “We all agree we want better outcomes for kids. Here are the outcomes we want, and here are sort of the processes and steps we want to follow to make those outcomes happen.”

The previous minister spent many, many meetings with the chiefs to get that prepared, and we’re now meeting with the federal government. We’re optimistic that we could have that MOU signed early next year. That will be the foundation to move forward. Just like there’s a memorandum of understanding around education, you need that shared understanding and vision, especially when you’re working across jurisdictions to make that happen.

So there’s optimism and hope that I’ve sensed in the last year. Now we’ve got to start making a real difference.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. The precedent already exists from Manitoba’s Jordan’s principle that the first level of government to interact sees the case through to its successful conclusion.

My second question: to what extent can these injuries and deaths be attributed to a failure on the part of the ministry’s aboriginal policy and initiatives division to fulfill its responsibility and support continuous improvement in the delivery of services for vulnerable and at-risk First Nations children, youth, and families? We’ve gone from three generations of residential school abuse, which is a very hard obstacle to overcome, but children are still being ripped out of their families as opposed to the families in place receiving support.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** None of the deaths are the result of the failure of that division. That division actually was just created in June of this year, and it was actually in response to the very issue that if in children and youth services the majority of your clients are aboriginal, who on your leadership team brings that aboriginal perspective? That’s a great observation, and we responded to that.

Just recently Catherine Twinn, a very experienced professional, a lawyer who has worked with many aboriginal communities, an aboriginal herself, married to a chief, joined us, and she’s now at our table helping us deal with issues and to bring that perspective. So when we’re talking about policy and we’re talking about program responses, there’s someone at the table that says: “Just a minute. We need to consider this.” There’s someone at the table so that the community can trust that they’re well represented, that it isn’t a white man developing these rules and policies. There’s the influence and the wisdom of an aboriginal person at the table.

Now, the second part of your question was?

9:00

**Mr. Chase:** Basically, how do we get past the obstacle of three generations of residential school abuse being replaced by a new system of seizing children and putting them into government care custody?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** The one point I’d like to make around that one is that in terms of the aboriginal in-care population, a significant portion of those children are, in fact, through the DFNAs. Those are the child welfare agencies working on-reserve. Just as a point of clarification around that, it’s not all sort of the government swooping in. This is the aboriginal community themselves saying: “These families are dysfunctional. These children are at-risk. They need help.”

Back to the core of your question: how do you get past sort of the difficulties of the past? That’s back to my point about trust and relationships. In fact, tomorrow we’re meeting with the DFNA directors in that community to talk about how to move forward. I do sense that there is a belief that we can move forward together. I

think there’s a recognition that you can blame the past and ask for some sort of . . .

**Mr. Chase:** Truth and reconciliation.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** . . . reconciliation.

I think everyone has acknowledged that, but how does that help us deal with the addiction, the violence, the problems on-reserve today? That’s what makes me optimistic. People are saying: “We know that exists. That wasn’t right, but how do we move forward?”

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

We’re going to move forward now to the next question. Before we do that, please, hon. members and Mr. MacDonald, yourself and your staff, if you could be concise in your answers, we would be very grateful, because it’s a very interesting issue, and there are a lot of members who have indicated that they would like to direct questions to you and your staff.

Mr. Allred.

**Mr. Allred:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m a little disappointed you cut Mr. MacDonald off. I really appreciate his very comprehensive answers to Mr. Chase’s questions because that is an area I have concern with. I know it’s a difficult issue, and I really appreciate those answers.

My questions are really quite general, and I’m going to refer to the research paper that we have before us. On pages 6, 8, 10, and 12 there are a number of tables, and something that really jumps out at me in those tables is the difference in costs between Calgary and Edmonton. Edmonton is almost 50 per cent higher in all four situations. I wonder if you would give us a bit of an insight as to why Edmonton is so much out of line with Calgary or Calgary is so much out of line with Edmonton. I’m not sure.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** I’ll try to keep my answers general and at a high level.

I’m not exactly certain what tables you’re looking at.

**Mr. Allred:** Do you not have a copy of this research report?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** I don’t believe so.

**Mr. Allred:** Oh, I’m sorry. I thought you did.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** I think I can still attempt to answer on a general level some of the variables that drive cost. Edmonton has a very, very large urban aboriginal population. The complexity of issues that face children in those communities: they tend to be not just issues of neglect. There tends to be addiction issues, mental health issues. So the cases tend to be more complex. As the cases become more complex, they tend to require longer time in care and more interventions and range of services provided. So that’s a part of it. Now, I think that’s changing a bit. We’re seeing Calgary’s aboriginal population growing as more and more aboriginals are attracted to the urban centres.

Another variable is the immigrant population. They have many of the same issues. They don’t have a strong social safety net and family support systems, so we’re seeing some of that drive the costs.

I’m surprised that the numbers indicate that it’s 50 per cent higher. I know that there were some issues. We, in fact, recognized that there was some difference, and the ministry has created a team that includes a CEO of the region, from Calgary and Edmonton, working with staff in the corporate office to assess what’s driving those cost differences. In terms of the staffing model there’s not a big difference. In terms of the range of

supports and services available in the community there's not a huge difference. So it's the nature of the intervention and the clients they're seeing that's driving those costs.

I don't know if it's good news or bad news, but the differential is actually decreasing. We've seen Calgary's costs and volumes rise significantly, especially in the last year.

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you. I guess I sort of surmised that a lot of the problem was because of the difference in the aboriginal community, which you related to earlier. Are the issues relating to that community more serious and harder to resolve in the urban setting as opposed to the rural setting?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** It's difficult to generalize on something like that because it really is on a case-by-case basis. I think the variable that really matters is the sense of community. In a rural setting, you know, smaller communities, especially for the aboriginal, they may be closer to reserve and family, and that family safety net is the most critical piece.

So if I were to generalize – is rural easier than urban? – the availability of family in that social safety net is important. The challenge, though, becomes access to services. The urban settings have more sophisticated services, a broader range of services. In the rural settings there may not be the same scope and range of services. So it's difficult to generalize that one is easier than the other because of all those different variables.

**Mr. Allred:** Perhaps I used a bad term. Are the problems more complex in the urban setting?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** You know, when you look at caseloads: in volume, absolutely. Overall, is there more complexity because of more violence, drug issues? Maybe. It's really on a case-by-case basis. I've learned myself over the last 14 months that it's very difficult. Using averages in child and family services is a very dangerous business because no one is average. And I'd say, unfortunately, that's the answer to my question, that it's not that simple.

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

David Swann, please, followed by Mr. Benito.

**Dr. Swann:** In October of 2007 and again in 2010 the Auditor General recommended that the department of children's services improve its compliance monitoring processes in part by incorporating risk-based testing in case file reviews. According to page 94 of the April 2011 report the recommendation remains outstanding. Please explain why the department has waited four years to accept and/or implement this recommendation.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** I think it's fair to say, first, that we have accepted the recommendation. It's the implementation, and the implementation has been going on. In terms of process – and the Auditor General may want to add to this comment – a recommendation is made. We accept the recommendation, and then we begin to implement. They allow us some time to make some progress before they come back in and then assess whether we've made progress or not. The Auditor General hasn't yet followed up to give us feedback on how much progress we've made, so it may be a bit misleading to assume that it's just sitting there. We're working on that.

Maybe I can get Mark to supplement a bit and tell you about some of the processes we've put in place to respond to that recommendation.

**Dr. Swann:** That was going to be my second question.

**Mr. Hattori:** Thank you. We have proceeded in terms of looking at the risk-based monitoring and assessment. Examples of what we have been doing, as Deputy MacDonald has alluded to in terms of the delegated First Nations agencies – as we go through standards monitoring, the six core safety and well-being standards that were created, what we take from there is a deeper look at areas in consultation with a delegated First Nation agency, where there may be further risk or further examination.

The information that's coming forward from the monitoring process can be value-added in terms of continuous improvement. As an example, Little Red River delegated First Nations up north, Siksika. We've gone into some of the other organizational operational entities, whether it's the 10 child and family services authorities or the 18 delegated First Nations agencies. Based again on the premise, "Here are the core standards; what else do we need to know? How do we have a deeper look?" then what do we do with that information to improve the services' practice at the operational level? Then we examine whether policy needs changes at the departmental level.

**9:10**

**Dr. Swann:** I guess the supplementary, then, would be: do the staff have the resources to follow up on high-risk cases? One of the major complaints I hear about the service is that they simply have too large a caseload and cannot follow up appropriately on the highest risk. How are you evaluating the resource capacity?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Maybe I can start, Mark, and then you can supplement.

I think a high caseload isn't the issue. I think you've gone down the right path. It's the complexity of the caseload. I think that there is the capacity out there. I think that what we have to do is a better job of learning from each other in terms of when events happen. What happens is that some of the caseworkers feel a bit isolated on those complex cases and don't feel that they have enough information and support around those cases as opposed to that there's not enough follow-up and time.

We spend a lot of time on compliance, making sure that the right forms are filled out. In the last year we've recognized that that doesn't add a huge amount of value, that it's more face-to-face time. So we've done two things. One is that we've simplified some of the paperwork. We've streamlined the forms and said, "Here's the information that you must do," but we've gotten rid of some of the noise around those forms. So there's more time to be face to face and less time with checking boxes.

The other big piece is that we've implemented a new case management system, ISIS, that was rolled out at the beginning of September. That again will free up time for more face to face and less paperwork. That's more the issue, I think, that balance between the forms and process required because of the legal processes and freeing up time to actually have face-to-face conversations.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Benito, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to refer you to page 41 of your annual report, the comparison of 2010-11 actuals to 2009-10 comparable actuals. Page 41 of the ministry's annual report identifies an increase of \$14.4 million in child care expenses due to an increased demand for subsidies and strong participation in the accreditation program. My question is: what were the actual increases in child care expenses for both the child care subsidy and accreditation program? If you can identify the amount, how do you monitor and make sure that this increase is worth the amount? Is there a given time that you have to make sure that this increase occurred and was given as a subsidy and that it is really worth the dollars that you have spent? What's the time frame for your evaluation of this?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Okay. In terms of the question on the increase, the subsidy has gone up \$16.9 million, and the accreditation piece has gone up \$6.1 million. So there have been approximately 20,000 new spaces created since May of 2008, and between 2009-10 and 2010-11 we had 3,000 more children in subsidized child care spaces, which is about a 16 per cent increase.

In terms of the second part of your question, you asked in terms of the value for that?

**Mr. Benito:** Yeah, and how do you evaluate in terms of time frame? Say, for example, we delivered the child care space subsidy. How do we measure that there is really a worth for the dollar that we're giving for this support?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** In terms of the child care subsidy the value is based essentially on the test that we have to meet: is there a need? And that's an income threshold. It's based on income threshold and size of family. That's how we know it's working. The policy is based on the assumption that people from lower incomes need some subsidy in order to attend work and have a safe place for their children during the day. So if people meet the tests of income and family size, they receive that subsidy.

In terms of "Are those people actually entitled to it?" there are audit procedures that we go through to ensure that they are meeting those tests. We require income verification, annual updates of income, and then there are audit processes done of the daycares themselves because the subsidies don't actually go to the parents; they go to the daycares.

Is that answering your question?

**Mr. Benito:** In a way. For example, a child care centre in, say, Mill Woods receives \$28,000, and when we deliver the cheque, there are no children in the space. Well, they still will advertise for families in the area to bring their children to the centre. In the meantime they got the money. There are a number of available spaces in the centre. We have given the money. How long do we expect the daycare centres to make sure to report to you that, you know, we have the space and that we have the child? How do you confirm that it was already filled up?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Gotcha. I'll get Karen to supplement my answer.

**Ms Ferguson:** Okay. If I understand it correctly, you may be referring to a child care program that receives space creation innovation funding.

**Mr. Benito:** That's correct.

**Ms Ferguson:** That was to assist with start-up and to help them get supplies, infrastructure in place. They have up to I believe it's

a year to establish that, and we go and we audit. They also have to be licensed for the spaces, so our licensing staff also check. There is follow-up to that.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, my second question. I notice that in the Mill Woods area the foster children I always see are basically aboriginal and First Nations children. Now, you mentioned that on the board that makes the decision on this you have representation like the lawyer that you mentioned, married to a chief. There is some representation, but, you know, how come there are still a lot of children who are aboriginal in nature in the foster homes if in the decision-making there's some input from some people who really know the case? What about the number of people being represented on the board or in the decision-making body? What I see is an increase of children in foster homes that are aboriginal and First Nation people.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** The member is absolutely right that the numbers are increasing. Like I said in my earlier comments, I'm very concerned that they're going to continue to increase until we see those basic systemic issues dealt with. That is a reality. The numbers are increasing. So what are we doing to try to help that? One is that we're increasing the number of aboriginal workers themselves, not just at the assistant deputy minister level but also recruiting aboriginal staff to help with that, and that builds that trust and understanding so that we can focus more on sort of the preservation side – how do we keep the family together? – and on the prevention side: how do we get involved with a family early so they're not in a crisis situation?

I really don't have an answer for you in terms of, you know: what's it going to look like a year from now, two years from now? We believe part of the approach has to be more aboriginal workers, having aboriginal leadership around the table, having more aboriginal families available, expanding kinship care opportunities. Rather than taking the child out of the family and putting them with strangers, we search for aunts, uncles to keep that cultural tie and build that strength, and if you have that strength surrounding you, the length of time and care diminishes greatly. When you remove a child from their culture, from their family, from their community, it's very, very hard to reintegrate them. They lose touch, they lose a sense of identity, and that in itself creates other issues that we have to deal with later.

The other thing is working with the federal government to deal with some of these systemic issues on-reserve. We have issues, of course, in the urban centres, but we need to create more support services there. We need to do things in terms of the education outcomes.

Even in hiring aboriginal workers, we originally said: let's just go and put out a recruitment. Well, we found out they're not going to school. We don't get graduates from the bachelor programs to hire from, so we have to work our way back. How do we keep kids engaged in school? How do we encourage them to go on to get a bachelor of social work? So everything is back to fundamentals in terms of the problem.

But you're absolutely right. What you're seeing is the reality in Alberta.

9:20

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Goal 4: “The well-being and self-reliance of Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities will be promoted and supported.” First Nations are the most rapidly growing segment of our population and in full partnership could assist greatly in the solution of many of Alberta’s challenges, from education to employment. According to page 19 of the ministry’s annual report the ministry failed again in 2010-11 to meet its target of placing 50 per cent of aboriginal children who are in foster or kinship care with aboriginal families. The first question: given that within six months of the ministry’s placement in 2008 of six Métis siblings with their aunt one of them was dead from blunt-force injuries to the head, is this necessarily a reliable, relevant, and understandable performance measure?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** I think it’s reliable and relevant and understandable for a number of reasons. Back to this theme we’ve been on about the growing aboriginal population and the need to come up with more meaningful responses to that, placing a child within their culture, within family is shown to work. I can’t comment on a specific case, but I always worry when the exception becomes sort of a condemnation of the whole system and what we’re trying to do because that’s not the case. There are incredible success stories out there, a thousand to one from that incident.

Do we learn the things that we can do better? The case you talked about, in 2009, put a spotlight on it, and like when all these tragedies happen, we learn from that. Were there proper supports in place? What sort of education and learning goes on? What are the standards? If it’s family, do they need to go through the same criminal record checks, the same assessments that a stranger would have to go through? To some degree absolutely yes, but how do you do that in a respectful way? If I’m a grandmother and the government comes to me and says, “I need to do a criminal record check; I need to understand your entire history, your life,” will they step up to the plate? How do you find that right balance to respect and value what family means and what comes with families with the government’s obligation and assurance role that we don’t put children in a situation that turns out to be with a tragic outcome? That’s the balance.

I think it is the right measure. I think it demonstrates something we’ve got to do a better job of. If there are aboriginal children in our care, ideally we want them to remain with aboriginal families. Our progress on that is part of that. How do we create that trust? How do we create the systems that support them so that, in fact, they’ll step up to the plate? By bringing the strength in those families, they become role models for other families and that sense of trust that comes in there. When the government comes, there’s actually an opportunity to help, not take our kids away. We can build on those sorts of successes.

**Mr. Chase:** There is no doubt that there is a balance between being intrusive and being supportive. Background checks are absolutely essential. We cannot, however, assume that placing a child in a kinship relationship is going to be the solution, and therefore that background is important.

Thank you for your comments.

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

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by David Swann.

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I recognize that I won’t have the opportunity to ask all three sets of my questions, so I’m trying very hard to be succinct with my only set of questions. I’ll ask all of my questions all together, and hopefully that will make it a little bit more efficient.

I’d like to first recognize that I think there is an incredible increase in recognition and awareness of the complexity and the meat of the issues, especially when this ministry deals so much with families and children of aboriginal background and an increasing number of immigrants and so forth. However, I think context is still very important.

You talked about the systemic issues a lot. I think I’d like to also recognize – I think it’s important that we recognize – that the reserve system was 500 years in the making, the colonization of our aboriginal people, the fact that our reserve system was the base model for the apartheid system in South Africa. We’re talking about trying to rebuild a people from a purposeful, systemic destruction of a people. We’re trying to compare these people with people who had the privilege of not having to go through this the past 300 to 500 years. I think we need to recognize that and acknowledge that every time we start to talk about aboriginal issues.

Anyway, moving forward, as a former social worker I do recognize that your ministry has many competent and very caring people working very, very hard to improve things in the system. I do see indicators of the recognition that we need to address this in a structural way, health and education and whatnot.

My questions. First, you talk about systemic issues from the impacted groups. I’d like to talk about your recognition of the systemic change that’s needed for the ministry. On page 12 of the annual report you recognize under Aboriginal Policy and Initiatives that your ministry needs “to enhance the capacity and cultural competency of the Ministry to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children, youth and families.” I’d like to know: what capacity and strategies does the ministry have in place in order to achieve this goal? To me, this is transferable to serving people of all diverse backgrounds. That’s part 1 of my question.

Secondly, I’ve been dealing with this kind of issue for the past 25 to 30 years in the community. You know, 25, 30 years later I’m still hearing that when people of diverse backgrounds, racial minorities, go to a child care, a daycare centre, they are told and the parents are told to stop talking using the heritage language at home with the children if they want the children to do well in the daycare. That happened to me 25 years ago, and it’s still happening today in Calgary. Seriously. People do not have the capacity to handle racially based bullying and disrespectful treatment of children and families in places like daycare. My question is on whether the ministry has considered including cultural competency as part of the accreditation process. Many universities are looking at it. Many health centres, hospitals are looking at it. Looking at it: that means 10 to 20 years. Anyway, I’d like to know whether the ministry has considered including cultural competency as part of the accreditation process for foster care, for daycare.

The last part of my question. I’m very pleased to hear that you have four sites with some enhanced services to serve the diverse population that’s ever increasing in our province. Glad to hear that. I was asked by the former minister to help the office in Calgary to address some of the issues in Calgary. I’m just wondering whether that pilot project is part of the site. I have to say that I’m pleased to see the progress, 20 years. Some of those families have been waiting for 10 years.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms Woo-Paw, the chair has been very lenient with your rather long question.

Mr. MacDonald, there are at least two questions there, one related to page 12 and the other on cultural competency, I believe. If you could briefly respond to that, I would be very grateful.

Mr. Chase, I hope you weren’t paying attention.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the comments from the member.

In terms of the first piece, how we're moving forward on that aboriginal issue, again we are building those strong relationships with the aboriginal community, and I think we're making a difference there. I think the MOU is going to help us because it's going to set the framework. This is a partnership between the federal, provincial, and the chief and council. I think we have a major aboriginal recruitment and attraction and retention program under way. What we found is that even when we attract and we hire aboriginal workers, a lot of times they feel isolated, and they don't stay, so what are we doing to be a welcoming organization that is culturally sensitive and warm and welcoming? That's a big change for us. We are making great progress on that front.

Maybe I can ask Karen to respond a bit around the cultural competency piece around daycares and Mark around the foster parent piece.

9:30

**Ms Ferguson:** Sure. You mentioned the accreditation standards in child care, and those are standards over and above those that are required to meet licensing standards, and they determine quality. One of the emphases is on outcomes for families and parents, not just for the children.

We are actually reviewing the accreditation standards right now, so I've written that down. I want to make sure that that is in there. I know we emphasize it, but I have to check if it's clear enough for the practitioner. We will ensure that we follow up on that.

Thank you for that.

**Mr. Hattori:** Just in addition, I'd like to say that at the request of and through the work of the minister and the deputy minister with the governance tables, with the First Nations chiefs and councils, then with the CEOs and delegated First Nation agency directors there was a review that started as a cultural training review but has now developed into exactly what you've spoken about, consultation with all of the delegated First Nations member agencies and then looking at what training was available. Really, the conclusion was that it comes down to cultural competency, and cultural competency is the acceptance and respect of alternate world views on behalf of not just staff to First Nations but First Nations and other nations, so a larger perspective.

We are going forward with a request for proposal to help, again, do more work with other groups to say, "How do we build a staff development program for all of what used to be children and youth services but now is an extension to the Human Services ministry?" and to say, "How do we build cultural competency of staff?" and that is exactly respect for an alternative world view.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to move on now, please, to David Swann, followed by Ms Calahasen.

**Dr. Swann:** Goal 5 is described as: "Communities are responsive to the needs of vulnerable children, youth and families." According to page 19 of the annual report the percentage of expenditures in the children/youth/families project and service category of FCSS has steadily declined since 2007-08. In the 2010-11 report the ministry fell short of its target by almost 10 per cent. In the absence of adequate expenditure how has the ministry ensured that Alberta's children and youth have access to those preventive supports that obviate the need for crisis intervention?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** I guess I'd begin by saying that this is one measure of one funding source. This is an indication of the total

level of services available out there. This is basically how FCSS has been allocated by communities.

In my opening comments I said, you know, communities are best placed to make decisions about how to invest their monies in terms of the social services. For measurement purposes we do ask them to report on the primary beneficiary of those services so we can categorize and come up with our performance measure. From where I sit, I don't know if this means kids are receiving less because we are providing more to seniors or to other outreach services. It is a community base, and a strong community helps kids. This is one of those measures that I think is helpful because it's sort of a tracking on where the money is being spent.

But in terms of the outcomes I don't think this suggests that the outcomes for kids are somehow deteriorating as the share of the funding isn't targeted specifically at kids. If you're helping seniors be stronger, is that bad for kids, or is that making your community stronger? If you're helping 18- to 25-year-olds with some outreach services, is it better? I think it's helpful for us as a ministry given our sort of narrow focus, but I don't think it suggests that somehow there's an erosion of service. It's about stronger communities, and I do think communities are making those choices in the best interests of the community.

I hope that answers your question.

**Dr. Swann:** Yeah, it does. The implication, though, is that we are investing less in prevention.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Less in that one category, but overall the funding still remains in excess of a hundred million dollars across the board.

**Dr. Swann:** Can you comment on whether that was increased or decreased?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** It's held constant for the last three years, I believe.

**Dr. Swann:** While the problems have increased.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Again, our share has remained constant. There are opportunities for communities to supplement that, and that's why it's risen to a hundred million dollars. It's an 80-20 split. There's nothing preventing communities from going beyond the 20 per cent. In fact, a number do if I remember correctly.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms Calahasen, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First of all, I guess I'm going to be on the same mantra as many of my colleagues on the aboriginal side. Sixty-six per cent, as you indicated, of aboriginal children in care is unacceptable, and I've said that so many times. Yet I can't seem to see any kind of decrease in the percentage of children in care.

When I look at your information on page 34 of your children and youth services annual report, I see that you are going to be doing a lot of things, and I commend you for that. I just commend you for being able to do those: "continued support for kinship care as a permanent placement option for Aboriginal children, giving them the opportunity" to be able to connect. Yet on page 35 we see that 40.7 per cent of aboriginal children in foster or kinship care were placed with aboriginal families, which is a beginning. However, could you tell me – I don't see it anywhere in here – if aboriginal families get the same kind of money for taking care of

those children as foster parents that are recognized in your system?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** I've been asked this question before, and the answer is yes. In terms of the basic support levels kinship families get exactly the same as foster parents. Where there is a difference is that foster parents, since they are not family – it's a professional relationship, essentially – are required to take additional training, and as they get more and more training, we supplement the level of assistance we provide. But in terms of the basic living and shelter allowances that we provide, foster families and kinship families get the same, and it doesn't matter if aboriginal or nonaboriginal.

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you very much. I'm glad to see that because that hasn't happened in the past, so you've made some major strides in that respect.

The other question I do have has to do with the various cities, and I'm looking at page 8 – oh, you don't have this report. It talks about child and family service authorities and what kind of child intervention expenses are being spent in the various regions. I see that Métis settlements are the lowest, and maybe it's because the numbers are not as high. But when I look at Edmonton and Calgary, Edmonton has the majority of aboriginal people that have moved into the cities, and then Calgary, I think, was second and then Lethbridge and other places. I'm just wondering. How do you, then, divide that money based on the fact that there are regions that have the majority of aboriginal children who are in care and the majority of the concerns that have been expressed to be addressed? Is that taken into consideration?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Absolutely. Yeah. The reality around the budget for us: it very much is demand driven. We look for efficiencies. We look for new models of delivery. But if there's a child in need, we respond. That causes me some issues when I appear before Treasury Board and the minister. Last year we needed a supplementary estimate of \$70.8 million because, again, it's demand driven. The numbers you see here: they do reflect the reality in those communities.

**Ms Calahasen:** The foster care program was \$1 million under budget. Why would that be if there is an increase in kids that are now being placed? Could you tell me why?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** If I understand, the reporting in the numbers that you're looking at doesn't reflect the supplementary estimate that was provided. In fact, there was a \$4 million increase added in-year, so in fact we went over because of the increased numbers.

**Ms Calahasen:** So that would then be able to balance what you're reporting in terms of the increase.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Exactly.

**Ms Calahasen:** Okay.

9:40

**The Chair:** For the record, members, the authorized supplementary is on page 76, schedule 3, of the annual report.

Okay. Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Xiao.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Department compliance monitoring. In October of 2007 the Auditor General recommended another improvement to the department's compliance monitoring process, the provision of feedback to caseworkers on the monitoring results of case file reviews. According to page 94 of the April 2011 AG

report this recommendation remains outstanding. In speaking with a number of front-line caseworkers, there is frustration and fatigue associated with the top-down communication and the lack of support when front-line issues are reported up the chain of command. Why is this feedback failure to front-line workers still occurring?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** I don't believe there's a failure. I think that's a fair comment, that in the past as critical incidents occurred, there was a lot of communication going up. You know, the public demanded an explanation, there were questions in the House, and there was a lot of sort of analysis of the problem.

In terms of the learning we do do a special case review on those incidents, and out of those special case reviews come recommendations for improvement. They could be around policy changes, practice changes, and that happens now.

But we can do better. I think of the recent review of the death in Calgary of the young child and the expert panel report that was commissioned by the previous minister as sort of a bold new direction in that public accountability. We did see that we can do a better job, and we spent a lot of time talking with health practitioners. When an incident happens in a hospital, they get together with all the caseworkers and that and say: "What could we have done better? What could we do differently?" That's now the practice in the ministry, to actually share back to each of the regions and to have conversations around what happened and how we can get better, in a more almost informal way.

I'll give you an example, the supervisor and caseworker involved in the incident in Calgary. We've actually asked them to meet with staff and say: "What did you learn? What would you have done differently?" They can look each other in the eyes as colleagues and say, "Man, you know, I wish I would've phoned the police and understood better what they meant by this point" or whatever.

We're trying to make it rather than a defensive, blaming model – and that's the challenge with this ministry, to be very candid with you. The focus tends to be on what went wrong rather than on the thousands of things going right. How can we change that culture so we learn from mistakes and move forward? That's what's happening. We almost normalize it. When something goes wrong, you don't try to say, "Jeez, I don't want to be part of this," or a CEO in a region says, "Jeez, I'm glad that didn't happen in my region." Let's get hold of that CEO and find out what happened there and what we can learn.

The reality is that when I leave this room, I know there's going to be another tragedy. We've got to turn that into an opportunity to learn and get better, not an opportunity just to sort of hide and try to get through it. I firmly believe that under the previous minister and over the last 14 months we've really started to change that culture and that attitude. People will be held accountable. If you don't follow good practice, if you do things that you know are not correct, you will be held accountable for that. But when you're using your best judgment and you've followed all the right processes and things still go wrong, we're going to look at it, and we're going to get better. That's the approach we're taking. Workers, I think, are feeling that now, too, and they're seeing that.

**Mr. Chase:** This relates directly to my question. Is the lack of whistle-blower protection for front-line workers preventing information from being passed along and solutions from occurring? As you indicated, there's a tendency to circle the wagons, but that's not in the best interests of children.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Yeah. People in this ministry care about the families and children so much that they put them before themselves. On a personal level, from the e-mails I get, the letters I get, staff are not letting things happen that they feel are wrong and trying to cover them up. I've never worked in a ministry where people are so passionate and vocal. If they feel something is not working well – I don't get any sense that things are being suppressed. In fact, at times I wish some of my e-mails would get suppressed. There is that. But I think we can do better, and again we're doing better with the quality council that we're creating. That will allow staff to be interviewed without the fear of sort of legal implications and things like that, and hopefully the legislation comes forward at some point that there will be some protection around evidence and things like that so there's not that fear that if they say something, they'll wind up getting sued or something like that. So I don't think there is an issue.

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

We have to conclude with questions orally with Mr. Xiao, please. If you would proceed now. Any members that want to have written questions, let me know.

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is related to the three years of creating child care choices. On page 21 the report states that the ministry has "successfully concluded a comprehensive plan that supported the development of additional, quality child care by creating 19,875 new child care spaces [over] the past three years," which basically exceeded the initial target of 14,000 spaces. My question is: why is the space creation plan not being continued?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** The member is absolutely right. The original target for the plan was 14,000 spaces, and we've exceeded that target and reached 20,000 spaces. The space creation innovation fund provided up to \$1,500 for each newly created space to help operators with the planning and start-up costs. That was one of the incentives we provided.

The reality is that when you do such a rapid expansion and exceed your targets, the system needs to stabilize a bit, and I think that's the process we're in right now. With more than 90,000 licensed spaces available to families, we need to get the accreditation pieces in place, get those spaces filled, and start to assess, going back to an earlier question: are we getting good value for the subsidy programs, and are there different mechanisms we can use in creating spaces? As part of the leadership conversation maybe there are different approaches we can take. Rather than direct subsidies, can we use the tax system to incent creations? Those are some of the pieces that will be looked at.

I think it makes good sense that when you grow by 20,000 spaces so rapidly, you need to stabilize, get those spaces filled, make sure that all your quality assurance pieces are in place and working well, and then look to where the need is next.

**Mr. Xiao:** Okay. My supplementary question is this. Given that we are anticipating a labour shortage in the next few years, what is the ministry doing to ensure a stable child care workforce in the future?

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** That's an excellent question. The child care system does very much get impacted by demands on the workforce, and as a labour shortage occurs, there are concerns about child care workers being drawn into other systems. One of the key initiatives in creating child care choices was targeted to that very issue of stabilizing the number of workers in the

workforce. In fact, we were successful in attracting roughly 2,300. What we've done there: there are wage top-ups that we provide, there are staff attraction incentive allowances where we give lump-sum payments for staff that return to work, and there are free online child care orientation courses that are under way.

We believe that is the right tool set right now. We're seeing some stability out there. The fact that as they improve their education, they receive additional top-ups is another incentive to keep them in the system because as you get better and better training, you tend to become more and more attached. We're pretty optimistic right now. We're going to keep our eye on it, and if there's a need for adjustment, just like on the subsidy side, we'll look at the incentives that are focused on the worker side.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

There are three members who are interested in reading questions into the record for a written response through the clerk to all members. We will start now with Mr. Chase, please.

**9:50**

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Goal 1: "Support families to create the foundation for children and youth to grow and reach their potential." According to page 18 of the ministry's annual report the percentage of Albertans who have the information they need to help in situations of bullying remained unchanged between 2007-08 and 2009-10. The percentage for 2010-11 is unavailable. Bill 44 interferes with the teachers' and students' ability to openly discuss the bullying of LGBT students. New York teen Jamey Rodemeyer is just the most recent in a rash of well-publicized suicides committed by bullied lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. What public awareness programs has the ministry implemented to assist LGBT youth and their families, in particular, to better cope with bullying?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Allred, please.

**Mr. Allred:** Yes. My question relates again to the charts on pages 6, 8, 10, and 12 of the staff research report. I'm referring particularly to the bottom line in each of those tables referring to Métis settlements. If my figures are correct and if those figures are cumulative, there's a total of \$21,536,000 directed specifically to Métis settlements. By the latest numbers I have, which I'm sure are out of date now, there were less than 6,000 residents on the eight Métis settlements. So that works out to more than \$3,000 per capita, for every man, woman, and child on the Métis settlements. I wonder if you would check that and give us a per capita figure and give us a rationale for that.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

To conclude, David Swann.

**Dr. Swann:** According to page 19 of the ministry's annual report the percentage of adoptive families indicating that their children were well prepared for adoption has dropped significantly since 2008-09 and in 2010-11 is nearly 10 percentage points below the ministry's target. How does the ministry account for the declining satisfaction among adoptive parents with the preparation given to their children, and when and what supports are provided through the supports for permanency program?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms Calahasen, do you have a question for the record, please?

**Ms Calahasen:** Yes, I do, please. Up to 1995 there were 50 per cent of aboriginal children in care. In 1999-2000 I believe it went down to 27 to 32 per cent, if I recall correctly. Today it's 66 per cent. There has been a drastic increase of aboriginal children in care. Have there been any research studies done to see why this increase has occurred?

The other question I have is: has there been any kind of investigation as to whether or not the reasons used to take the children into care have been investigated at all?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Groeneveld, I'm sorry. Did you have a question as well?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Chair. Yes, I did, but I think my question has been sufficiently answered with the answers that have been there today.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. MacDonald and his staff for the quality of answers that we've received here this morning. We rarely see that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Groeneveld.

Mr. MacDonald, on behalf of all committee members thank you very much for your time this morning. You are free to go while we have a couple of other items on our agenda. Again, thank you, and the best of luck in your department.

**Mr. S. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, all.

**The Chair:** Now if we could quickly move on to other items on the agenda, we have to set a schedule from now until December. There will be no meeting next week, of course. I would like to thank all the members who responded over the summer with the suggestion that we hear from the Sustainable Resource Development department. I certainly would like to have that meeting take place now on November 23.

I don't know whether we're going to have a new Auditor General's report. Last October we had a report sent over to the Legislative Offices Committee on October 15. Mr. Saher, will there be an additional report from your office this fall?

**Mr. Saher:** Yes. There's every likelihood that there will be a public report in November. I can't today give you the precise date, but that is the goal of the office, to release our next report in November.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll possibly have that report.

We have November 30 and December 7, potentially, for meetings of this committee at 8:30 in the morning. On Wednesday, November 30, are there, quickly, any departments you want to bring before the committee?

**Mr. Allred:** Can we bring specific agencies as opposed to departments, like AGLC?

**The Chair:** You certainly could. AGLC is in the Solicitor General – now I could be wrong with the transition. Is it still in the Solicitor General?

**Mr. Saher:** Excuse me. Maybe I can help. Solicitor General is now a part of the Ministry of Finance.

**Mr. Rodney:** Yeah, but it still could be called, correct?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Allred:** I'd like to have the AGLC in.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Anyone else?

**Mr. Chase:** If possible, I'd like to meet with the Alberta Utilities Commission. I'm wanting clarification as to their independence and their responsibility.

**The Chair:** Well, we're looking at setting up not winter meetings but meetings for two dates in the fall. Sustainable Resource Development is certainly going to be in on November 23. They are getting prepared, and we have that date set.

We need a meeting for November 30. All those agreed that we should see the department which has the Alberta gaming and liquor control board, or whatever it's called these days?

**Mr. Allred:** I don't want the department. I just want the commission.

**The Chair:** Okay. Are you satisfied with that from Mr. Allred?

**Hon. Members:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Okay. Then the chair and the vice-chair have received direction on that, so on November 30 we will see the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. We will have a look at their report. Okay.

**Mr. Benito:** Did you say November 30?

**Mr. Sandhu:** The 23rd.

**Mr. Rodney:** No. The 23rd is SRD.

**The Chair:** The 23rd is SRD. November 30 is as we've discussed. December 7. Mr. Chase.

**Mr. Chase:** I'd like to recommend meeting with the former ministry of international and intergovernmental affairs. We haven't heard from them – I don't recall – in years.

**Mr. Sandhu:** They were here this year.

**Mr. Chase:** Pardon me.

**The Chair:** We've got Energy. In fact, there was a chat this summer about having Alberta Energy. I didn't hear from anyone regarding that and the usefulness of the drilling stimulus initiatives. That's a thought.

**Mr. Rodney:** Just one other thought, Mr. Chair. You mentioned the Auditor General's report, and I heard the Auditor General say sometime in the month of November. Perhaps a question for the Auditor General: would he be comfortable, not on the 30th because that's AGLC, perhaps on the 7th if we have a meeting? Would that be a time that we could discuss?

**Mr. Saher:** If the committee wishes to devote the majority of that meeting to our November report, that would be very good from our point of view.

**Mr. Rodney:** If we have a meeting, that may be a grand one to discuss.

**The Chair:** Well, who knows what's in the report – right? – if it's like the last one. I think, to be quite candid, that we should be looking at some of the departments, particularly now that we've got new annual reports for 2010-11.

**Mr. Rodney:** Just an idea, following up on your comments.

**Ms Calahasen:** But it's a good idea. I like that. Personally, I do.

**Mr. Allred:** I think it would be a good idea.

**The Chair:** Okay. You want the Auditor General's report. So it will be the Auditor General's report, the stand-alone report that we have not yet seen, that will be hopefully issued sometime in November. The chair appreciates your direction. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The date of the next meeting will be November 23 with Sustainable Resource Development at 8:30 in the morning.

If there are no other matters, can we please adjourn?

Mr. Chase.

**Mr. Chase:** I would request that Dr. Philip Massolin assist in reviewing the Auditor General's report, highlighting the number

of outstanding recommendations that have yet to be fulfilled by the previous ministries and extending it to reflect the new positioning of the ministries that are having to pick up the leftovers.

**The Chair:** That's a good idea.

**Dr. Massolin:** Yes, we will be able to do that for the committee.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Sandhu, did you have a motion to adjourn?

**Mr. Sandhu:** Yes, sir.

**The Chair:** I appreciate that. Okay. Moved by Mr. Sandhu that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour? Thank you.

Have a good month.

[The committee adjourned at 10 a.m.]





