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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on  
Government Services**

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Department of Digital Government and Service NL

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

## **GOVERNMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Department of Digital Government and Service NL

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Chair: Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Vice-Chair: Loyola O'Driscoll, MHA

Members: Joedy Wall, MHA  
Perry Trimper, MHA  
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA  
Scott Reid, MHA  
Lela Evans, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Mark Jerrett (A)

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Appearing:

### **Department of Digital Government and Service NL**

Hon. Sarah Stoodley, MHA, Minister

Sean Dutton, Deputy Minister

Gail Boland, Assistant Deputy Minister, Digital Government and Services

Scott Jones, Assistant Deputy Minister, Regulatory Affairs

Jennifer Torrance, Departmental Controller

Tina Newhook, Director of Communications

Kara Connors, Executive Assistant

### **Also Present**

Hon. Fred Hutton, MHA, Minister of Housing

Hon. Krista Lynn Howell, MHA, Minister of Education

Hon. Tom Osborne, MHA, Minister of Health and Community Services

Hon. John Hogan, MHA, Minister of Justice and Public Safety

Ashley Politi, Media Relations, Official Opposition Caucus

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus

Jim Locke, Research Coordinator, Government Members' Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville, for a portion of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Krista Lynn Howell, MHA for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, substitutes for Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Tom Osborne, MHA for Waterford Valley, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville, for a portion of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, John Hogan, MHA for Windsor Lake, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

The Committee met at 1 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

**CHAIR (Stoyles):** Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome, everybody.

This afternoon we will be doing Estimates for Digital Government and Service NL. As I said, I would like to welcome everybody here this afternoon.

First on the agenda is substitutions. So for MHA Trimper, we have MHA Osborne and MHA Hutton; for MHA Sherry Gambin-Walsh, we have MHA Hogan; and for MHA Reid, we have MHA Howell.

Also, before we start, right now we don't have any independent Members but consensus, speaking to my fellow colleagues, we have agreed to give 10 minutes at the very end, if an independent Member should show up. I'm just going to concur that that's okay with everybody. I'm getting the nod that it is so that's the procedure that we will follow.

I guess the other thing we need to do is starting off, the first speaker gets 15

minutes for each heading and then after that it's 10 minutes.

When you're going to speak, please wave to identify yourself and when the tally light comes, say your name. We'd like for you to say your name every time you speak so that the recorder is able to have an accurate name along with the voice and who is actually speaking.

We ask you not to adjust your chairs because other Members will be coming back and we'll only have problems trying to get comfortable in their seat again. So please don't adjust your chairs.

The water cooler is behind us and, of course, the bathrooms are just outside the door. I think everybody is very much aware of that.

Before I ask the Clerk to call the first set of headings, I would ask for everybody to introduce themselves and we're going to start right here with MHA Osborne.

**T. OSBORNE:** Tom Osborne, Waterford Valley.

**A. POLITI:** Ashley Politi, Official Opposition Staff.

**J. WALL:** Joedy Wall, Cape St. Francis.

**L. EVANS:** Lela Evans, Torngat Mountains.

**S. KENT:** Steven Kent, Researcher for the NDP Caucus.

**J. HOGAN:** John Hogan, Windsor Lake.

**K. HOWELL:** Krista Howell, St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Loyola O'Driscoll, Ferryland

**J. LOCKE:** Jim Locke, Government Members' Office.

**S. DUTTON:** Sean Dutton, Deputy Minister, Digital Government and Service NL.

**S. STOODLEY:** Sarah Stoodley, MHA for Mount Scio and Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

**S. JONES:** Scott Jones, Assistant Deputy Minister, Digital Government and Service NL.

**G. BOLAND:** Gail Boland, Assistant Deputy Minister, Digital Government and Service NL.

**J. TORRAVILLE:** Jennifer Torraville, Departmental Controller.

**T. NEWHOOK:** Tina Newhook, Director of Communications for Digital Government and Service NL.

**K. CONNORS:** Kara Connors, Minister Stoodley's EA.

**CHAIR:** Thank you all.

Now I ask Minister Sarah Stoodley to bring opening remarks.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I'm very pleased to be here with our team to talk about the very important work that our department does for people of the province.

So we have two branches, Digital Government and Services, and Regulatory Affairs. Through these two branches we are responsible for more than 175 pieces of legislation. We actively deliver resident protection services in the area of public health and safety, occupational health and safety, highway and road safety, environmental protection, and protection services for consumer and financial services.

So we work very closely with OCIO, which I'm also responsible for, and those Estimates will be later in the House. We

work very closely with OCIO to progress our digital services, both in our department and across government.

I do want to note and thank our over 400 employees located in our offices across the province, say a huge thank you to them for all the work they do. Many of them are customer facing, resident facing and interact with the public all the time. I just want to thank them for the difficult and challenging work that they do – all of our teams.

I'm happy to go through the book and answer any questions that anyone may have.

Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Now I ask for a mover for the minutes of the previous meeting.

I recognize MHA Wall to move the minutes and seconded by MHA Hogan.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

**CHAIR:** So now I'm going to ask the Clerk to call the first set of headings, please.

**CLERK (Jerrett):** Executive and Support Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** 1.1.01 to 1.2.03.

MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

First of all, I'd like to thank your department staff for all that you guys do throughout the year. It is certainly appreciated.

I have some general introductory questions before I get into 1.1.01, I hope that's okay.

Minister, can you please provide a copy of your briefing binder?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes, we will provide a copy.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Madam Chair, just for clarity, do I have to raise my hand every time I go to speak?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Every time, okay.

Last year, the minister stated that there wasn't an attrition target for this year past. Minister, is there an attrition target for this coming year or has government ended that particular attrition plan?

**S. STOODLEY:** We do not have an attrition plan.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, are you still applying zero-based budgeting?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Are you aware of any errors that are published in the Estimates book before we go further?

**S. STOODLEY:** I'm not aware of any errors.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Thank you.

Minister, have any positions been eliminated, and if so, can you please provide what they are?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's a good question. We did have some reorganizations. I don't know who the best person to run through those with you would be.

**G. BOLAND:** As the minister eluded, we have recently received approval for reorganization of the Occupational Health and Safety Division, following an audit that was done by the Professional Services and Internal Audit Division at our request to specifically focus on how we may improve our investigation of serious incidents in the workplace.

Through that process, there is no increase in the positions. It's zero based and we've had some long-term vacancies so we're using that to trade off to create other positions and better utilize our officers so that they can be focused more on these serious investigations and meet the two-year statutory timeline.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Ms. Boland.

Minister, have any positions been added to your department? I know you said you have 400 employees across the province, have any positions been added?

**S. STOODLEY:** Not that I'm aware of.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

How many retirements have occurred during the last year?

**S. STOODLEY:** We've had nine retirements.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, do you have any vacancies that are not being filled right now in the department? If so, how long have they been vacant?

**S. STOODLEY:** We do have vacant positions. We get a lot of turnover in some of our areas, particularly, for example, Motor Registration, other customer-facing, resident-facing areas. I don't have a timeline. We can certainly provide you more information on that.

We currently have three vacant positions in Executive Support, four in Consumer and Financial Services, two in the Commercial Registration, one in Vital Statistics, one in the King's Printer, one in Collections, 19 with Motor Registration, six with the Avalon regional services, two with Eastern regional services, four with Central regional services, one with Western regional services, one with Labrador regional services and two with Occupational Health and Safety.

So, again, this was, I think as of a few days ago, but this would – sorry, this is as of March 31, so this may not reflect the situation today as we have lots of jobs on the board that are going through the HR process.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Understood, up to the end of the fiscal year, I totally understand that. Thank you for that.

Minister, how many layoffs have occurred in your department over the last year?

**S. STOODLEY:** I don't think we've had any layoffs in the layoff sense. We've had nine retirements, 32 resignations/people who are end of employment. No, we haven't laid off anyone.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

How many new hires have taken place over the last fiscal year?

**S. STOODLEY:** We've had 27 new hires this year.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, how many contractual or short-term employees do you have currently?

**S. STOODLEY:** Six, I believe.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Madam Chair, I'll get into the subheading 1.1.01, under Transportation and Communications: Last year, \$29,900 was budgeted but only \$14,700 was spent.

Minister, can you please explain why?

**S. STOODLEY:** So this is for the Minister's Office transportation, so this reflects the actual transportation expenses that myself and my EA have incurred. So, obviously, I live in the metro region so I don't need to travel here. I'm sure if I lived in Labrador, that number would be a lot bigger. I have a three-year-old, so I try not to travel too much. So that reflects our travel expenses.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister, understood.

1.2.01, Executive Support, under Salaries: Last year, the department went over budget by \$92,000 and this year we see a further increase of \$100,000.

Can you please explain, Minister?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes, thank you.

As part of the reorganization that Gail mentioned, we moved two of our Occupational Health and Safety policy roles from Occupational Health and Safety, which you'll see later, into this area so all of our policy experts are, kind of, in one team now. We have two people that have moved.

Also in that budget, we have a graduate recruitment; we have extra cost for a temporary word processing operator. That's just some of the other reasons why that amount has increased.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Under Employee Benefits: Last year, the department went over budget by \$45,100, but budgeted less this year compared to the revised budget.

Can you please explain why?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah, thank you.

We had increased costs for workers' compensation charges, so we've increased the budget to last year anticipating more but we still don't anticipate as many as this year, but we can't know for sure.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Just to be clear, we can move on to 1.2.02?

**CHAIR:** 1.2.02, yes.

**J. WALL:** Yes, okay.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

So 1.2.02, under General Administration, I look at French Language Services, Professional Services: Last year, the department went under budget by \$24,300, but the budget remains the same for this year.

Can you please explain why, Minister?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah.

We have a French team and the team does translation, but we also have an agreement with the federal government to do translation, as well. So we didn't need our full budget in terms of paying for extra translation services, but we still need that money, I guess, in case there is increased translation need.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

1.2.03, Administrative Support: There was no budget for Property, Furnishings and Equipment but there was a revised budget of \$114,400.

Can you please explain why?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah, thank you.

This is the only area in our Estimates where we can have capital expenses. We are in charge of the King's Printer, so the King's Printer purchased a new slitter, cutter, creaser machine and so that is the cost of that machine. It was purchased from Duplo.

So this is the only place in our department where we can put capital purchases.

**J. WALL:** Okay, understood.

That's all I have up to 1.2.03. We're not moving into 2.1, yet?

**CHAIR:** No.

**J. WALL:** Correct.

Thank you, Madam Chair, that's it for now.

**L. STOYLES:** You're more than welcome.

MHA Evan.

Could you speak up MHA Evans, I know last night we had difficulty hearing you.

**L. EVANS:** Yes, thank you, Chair.

Just to clarify, we're only doing the 1s, because I thought you read into 2.2.03.

**CHAIR:** We're doing 1.1.01 to 1.2.03.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, perfect.

Thank you for the clarification.

I thank my colleague for asking some of questions because it will speed things up.

Minister, I do like your direct answers. It's really good and we'll probably be able to get out of here at a reasonable time, if we proceed in that manner.

Just looking at some of my general questions. Has there been any consideration given to amending legislation to end no-fault evictions, especially with those associated with Income Support and social housing?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's an excellent question and I've spent a lot of time thinking and talking, doing research. We're looking at what happens with evictions.

I just have a table I'm going to dig out that's here somewhere. So looking at this specific issue, every province allows residents to evict someone, I guess it's just a matter of how long that is. So we do allow landlords to evict tenants giving three month's notice. Every province allows landlords to evict someone with a certain amount of notice, it's just a matter of how much notice that is. Some provinces require less notice; some provinces require more notice. So it's like where's that happy medium and we do have to balance the needs of landlords and the needs of tenants.

Right now, we are kind of middle of the road in terms of the notice period that landlords need to give tenants, in terms of the other provinces. Landlords do have to give six month's notice if they're giving tenants a notice of rental increase.

It's something I think about a lot. I'm always looking at what other provinces are doing. I mean, if you have any suggestions, I'm happy to discuss further. There are a lot of different needs. There's no perfect answer here.

Thank you.

**L. EVANS:** No and thank you for your honest answer, Minister.

Would you be able to provide a summary of the services that were made available online this year – the services that are now available online?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes.

Again, that would be more like OCIO, because it's like the technical team does the work, but I'm happy to talk about all the great things that we're making online any time.

I don't necessarily – in the past financial year, I'm thinking some of the later ones. OCIO, again, not this department, but OCIO, which I'm also responsible for, we would've worked on to help with moose hunting licences. We worked on the personal health record that Health has had. That's one of the newest, exciting, most impressive ones though MyGovNL.

Most of our licences, for example, the online application form for licensing of insurance adjusters, agents, brokers, real estate brokers, salespersons, mortgage brokers, prepaid funeral sellers, all of that is online; the application for payday lenders, direct sellers, collection agencies, collection reporting agencies, agents and agencies for private investigation and security services. So those were newly launched online.

For Motor Registration, I don't know if it was this year or slightly the year before, you can now transfer your vehicle online; from a business perspective, you can apply for electrical permits; from a charitable perspective, you can apply for lottery licences. We did domestic wood cutting permits this year. We did the mandatory electronic logging. We launched a new dealers' web for all the vehicle dealers to liaise with Motor Registration so that we could keep better track of the payments and who has what licence plates and all that. That was a really big one that we did this year.

In a nutshell that's ....

**L. EVANS:** Okay, that's a good answer, Minister.

Also, just quickly, did you move any services to online only, and do you have any plans to move any services to just being available online?

**S. STOODLEY:** So within our department we have not moved anything online only, except dealers' web. So dealers have to work with us online. We did work with the dealers' association and there were no concerns with that. I believe it's fully rolled out now and there are no outstanding issues. If there were, we could work with them on a case-by-case basis.

No, we don't plan on rolling out online-only resident services. We do understand that's not an appropriate option for everyone.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, thank you, Minister.

What savings were realized by increasing the number of services that were provided online? Do you have that number?

**S. STOODLEY:** I don't have a number I can give you. We are able to realize, for example, last year, with residential tenancies, because we have online applications, we are able to reallocate some staff members so that we could have another adjudicator position.

I know now, we're looking at charitable lotteries. So, for example, we have an online application system and we're looking where we can make things more efficient to have more staff, I guess, doing more kind of meaningful, helping to clear up some backlog and make sure that we are meeting our service levels, rather than having people do kind of manual entry.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

There are many people who find it difficult to navigate basic online services such as seniors; those in my district with poor connectivity; those on low income who may not be able to afford and don't have access to free Internet or computers. What

measures are being taken to ensure that while services are migrated online, that they remain universally accessible, such as mail out of notice for renewal and being able to mail out applications to people who can mail them back in?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's a good question.

We still provide telephone service, so if anyone needed something we could certainly mail it to them. As an MHA, I don't encounter that too often.

I know this isn't related to our department, but Rogers has a low-income program for \$16 a month where they provide high-speed Internet. I'm not sure if that's available in Labrador, but my constituents avail of that, where they can get high-speed Internet for \$16 a month if they're on income support or in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

I guess my short answer is, we would provide services over the phone or would work with someone to make accommodations. Our Motor Registration team does travel in person to various places in Labrador to make sure that people can access services and get up-to-date driver's licences and those types of things.

If there's a gap, happy to discuss and work to remedy that.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister, for your answer.

Just an aside, it's not directly related to this. My mother pays \$207 a month for basic landline service, phone service and high-speed Internet, which is not high speed. So if you know of any deal Bell has for seniors or people on fixed income in my district, please pass that along, because \$207 for the basic service is –

**S. STOODLEY:** Starlink would be cheaper than that.

**L. EVANS:** But it doesn't provide the phone service.

**S. STOODLEY:** Okay.

**L. EVANS:** Anyway, that's a totally different thing.

**S. STOODLEY:** Okay.

**CHAIR:** Minister, there is a package that Rogers has also, and we have all the information in my office, so I will have my staff pass that over to you. It's internet and telephone package for seniors for \$79, so I will pass that information over to you.

**L. EVANS:** Chair, I'm going to take that information. I don't think we have Rogers but I'm sure there's a way we can get Rogers if it's cheaper. So thank you very much.

Moving on, has there been any consideration into making the Registry of Lobbyists more accessible to the public and making reporting by lobbyists more robust?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

You can search online right now, it's not perfect. It's not the highest priority to revamp. We have a big priority list that we work through. I don't get a lot of –

**OFFICIAL:** Searchable online.

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah, it's searchable online, I don't get a lot of complaints about it.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

MHA Evans, your time is up in this round.

MHA Wall, do you have anything else? I know you said you didn't have any further questions on this section, but I just wanted to give you the opportunity in case something else came up.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair, I'm good for this section.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

MHA Evans, we'll put another 10 minutes on the clock for you. You have more questions?

Go ahead, please.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Chair.

The department received work from Rothschild around, I think it was 2022, regarding the value and potential for selling registries. You've now had time to examine these documents, have there been any decisions made on this recommendation?

**S. STOODLEY:** Nothing that I can provide – there's no information I can provide at this time on that.

**L. EVANS:** There's no information, or you just can't provide it to us?

I'm sorry, I've put you on the spot.

**S. STOODLEY:** No, no, both, neither, I don't know. There's no update I can provide.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, thank you, Minister.

Has the department engaged in any new projects or initiatives regarding cybersecurity for the provincial government in the last year?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's an excellent question.

So that would be the OCIO team, the IT team, which is in Executive Council, so I'll be answering those questions I believe in the House, maybe later next week as part of Executive Council Estimates. That would be covered in the OCIO budget. We do lots of

cybersecurity things and I can't reveal them in detail, but yes.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, we'll hold our questions for next week.

Just looking at the traffic cameras: When can we expect more rollout of the cameras across the province?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's an excellent question that changes by the hour. I've committed publicly that we'll have cameras in 2024. I would like to see them much earlier than that and I'm working as fast and as hard as I can to have them as soon as possible.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

This is my sixth budget, this Estimates this week, and I was getting really good at it, now I'm starting to just sort of fade away.

How many child care site inspectors are there currently and how many inspections are conducted each year on the regulated daycare homes and daycares across the province? Out of those, what percentage of the regulated daycare homes and daycares do these figures represent? How many inspections and what percentage?

**S. STOODLEY:** I'll refer to Gail, my ADM, to give more information on child care.

**G. BOLAND:** Our daycare centres are inspected by environmental health officers. At any given time, we have between 30 and 35 across the province. They inspect daycare centres, based on a frequency that's established by the Department of Education. I don't have, off the top of my head, how many were completed last year, but if we are required to complete it every year, it is completed every year.

**L. EVANS:** Okay.

**G. BOLAND:** So I don't know how many are currently registered.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, thank you.

How is work progressing on the rollout of the Personal Health Record and when do you expect this service to be available for everyone in the province?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

That is OCIO and Health, but I will tell if you go to MyGovNL right now, you can click on Personal Health Record and go in and get your code in the mail and then add it. It's available to every MyGovNL account.

My understanding is Health is going to launch it publicly shortly, but if you go into MyGovNL now, you can add it today.

**L. EVANS:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

What policies have been put in place over the past year to help streamline the client experience for all business at the Department of Digital Government and Service NL?

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry, just a quick question, did you mean in terms of business, like working with businesses, is that what you said?

**L. EVANS:** Yes.

**S. STOODLEY:** I guess we haven't made a ton of changes. As Gail talked about, we made some occupational health and safety changes to streamline that. We made some changes to streamline how not for profits work with us for charitable lotteries. We have a team that we can reallocate depending on where the need is. So, for example, between financial services applications versus charitable lottery applications, we have some flexibility there in terms of who can do what to meet demand.

I guess the biggest thing we continue to do is make things available online. I meet with various industry stakeholder groups and if

they give us any feedback, we certainly take that on board. I always ask and there is very little constructive feedback that we get.

I am in charge of multiple self-regulatory bodies, like funeral embalmers and different groups such as the Chartered Professional Accountants will come to us looking for changes to legislation and that would go through the normal legislative processes.

I'm very happy with the service that we provide to businesses, but saying that, we'll certainly take any feedback on board. I always go out of my way to seek feedback and I rarely get any.

Thank you.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

We heard that the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities were upset with some of the amendments to the *Buildings Accessibility Act* – we were all there and they were quite vocal. A lot of the upset was about your department choosing not to follow all the advice provided by the advisory board. Would you be able to just comment on that?

**S. STOODLEY:** So you mean the by-election town hall that the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities had, I was there. I will say that almost everything that was discussed with the accessibility for disabilities act was completely misrepresented and, obviously, in that forum I had no need to respond, but I did meet with the coalition for disabilities following that meeting and we've had a few letter exchanges.

So the issues raised in that town hall were not issues – what we've done and the changes that we've implemented will improve accessibility. There is no area where we will not be improving accessibility.

All these special cases that existed in regulations will continue to apply. The

*Buildings Accessibility Act*, the new one, is not yet enforced because we're still working on the regulations. Whenever there's discrepancy between the National Building Code and the regulations that we currently have now, wherever provides the most accessibility, we will go with the higher of the two.

There was concern around the definition change. That was not a policy change. That was kind of the legal drafting change but there was absolutely no implication on the applicability of the *Buildings Accessibility Act*.

**L. EVANS:** I thank you for that answer.

I'm going to move on, but I think I was focusing on the voice from the advisory board that didn't make it to the act, but, anyway, it looks like you are doing consultation and working on concerns.

I'll just move on to the next question. There were five extra cents added to gas on the Island – you know my question because you're smiling – back in 2020, when the North Atlantic Refinery went into standby, that March, but the charge has not yet been lifted.

Could you just give us an update on any work that you're doing to address this?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you for the question.

It's very delicate because the Public Utilities Board is –

**L. EVANS:** Yes.

**S. STOODLEY:** – very important and I just want to thank the commissioners and staff for the challenging role that they do. They have a very difficult role in regulating gas process.

Saying that, I feel very strongly about the five cents. I went to the Public Utilities Board and, as you may or may not recall,

we changed the legislation; we changed the *Petroleum Products Act* so that we could direct the Public Utilities Board to review gas prices.

When we did that, I anticipated that they would be doing the review shortly and quickly. That is not the case. They are doing a review. It is still ongoing. On the Public Utilities Board website, you can see all the documents. They have a plan. They are working through the plan. Part of that involves getting information from a third party, like the wholesalers and distributors. I believe that's one of the areas that delays them: not getting enough input from companies.

I went to the Public Utilities Board and I asked them directly, and I was not satisfied with the answers that I was getting, but I have to be very careful because they are self-regulatory and I don't think government should be setting the price of gas. I think that is the Public Utilities Board's role.

I went to see them and we had these conversations. My understanding is that the five cents is being reviewed in their overall gas price review, which they are doing, and they're doing it much more slowly than I'd like, but that is that.

**L. EVANS:** Okay.

**S. STOODLEY:** I'm trying to be restrained.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

MHA Evans, do you still have some further questions?

**L. EVANS:** Yes, I do have some.

**CHAIR:** We will put more minutes on the clock for you.

Go right ahead.

**L. EVANS:** Yes, and speed that up.

Thank you, Minister, for your answer to my last question.

Could you give us some details about this department's participation in the digital trust and credential program, and what kind of service does it entail and what kind of commitments from this province?

**S. STOODLEY:** There is kind of a new area of FTP, of the federal-provincial-territorial Digital Government. The first meeting we had we went to Quebec. The Quebec government invited us. I'm very excited that we are hosting the ministers of Digital Government here this September.

In terms of digital trust, if you could elaborate a bit, I'd be happy to answer specific questions. I don't have an update on anything regarding to that. We have not made any commitments. Each province pays into a very small pot of money that can be leveraged from provinces.

It's an area we're very interested in, so personally, and when all the ministers come here, we're focusing on cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Those are two policy areas for the ministers of Digital Government.

Thank you.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you.

I think about the credential program as well, it is new.

Moving on to the next one now; are there any plans in the works to review and update legislation surrounding creation and administration of the co-operatives in this province?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

No one's asked us for changes to the *Co-operatives Act*, so that is not something that's in progress. But we're always looking

at any pieces of legislation to see what we can improve on.

**L. EVANS:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I'll just move on now to 1.2.01, Executive Support. Why was the Employee Benefits over budget?

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry, just a second –

**L. EVANS:** Excuse me, that question was already asked and answered. So I'll just move on to the next section; I apologize.

Section 1.2.02, French Language Services: Could you provide us with just a brief overview of any expansions to the French Language Services that your department has completed in the past year?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So we have not expanded or changed the division; we have signed an updated official languages agreement with the federal government. But we have not made any expansion, or we haven't changed the department in terms of the French Language Services.

**L. EVANS:** Okay. I just have one more question for this section.

Has the death notification project been completed, and if so, could you give us just a brief description, overview of how it's running. Are there any benefits or efficiencies that resulted from its implementation?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So it is completed; I have not heard one complaint about it, so I assume that it's running swimmingly. The biggest value that project provided was a reduction in administrative burden for families and for all the people at the various stages of when someone passes away. So it should make that process easier and smoother.

Thank you.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you.

That's all the questions I have for this section, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, MHA Evans.

Seeing no further questions, I ask the Clerk to call recall the subheads.

**CLERK:** Executive and Support Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.03 carried.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheads, please.

**CLERK:** Regulatory Affairs, 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Under 2.1.01, I just have a general question to start. Minister, what is the current wait time to have a hearing at the Residential Tenancies Board, and what is the current caseload waiting to be heard?

**S. JONES:** The current total applications outstanding, as of March 31 – this is the data – we have 114; the average wait time between an application and a decision is 47 days. There were over 1,200 applications received this past year and they closed just under 1,100.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Mr. Jones.

Under Salaries, Minister, the department under spent by \$96,800 last year; why is this?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

That would be due to vacancies and delays in recruitment.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, can you expand on the delays in recruitment, please?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So obviously, when someone is no longer in a role, there are internal government processes that happen between someone being offered a job and then starting, or maybe it doesn't work out and then you have to go back to the next person. There's a period of time where it might four, six, eight months where there's no one in the role and so that is time that we're not paying someone.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, I appreciate the explanation.

Under 2.1.02, Salaries, again, under spent by \$30,400 but this year we did see a budget increase. Why is that, Minister?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

The increase is due to the salary plan including any union-negotiated salary increases and the decrease is due to a temporary vacancy in the director of Pension Benefits Standards role. The person resigned and then we hired a new person.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

2.1.03, Commercial Registrations, Salaries: Under spent by \$165,300, but this year the

budget is increasing; can you please explain why?

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry, which line was that?

**J. WALL:** 2.1.03, under Salaries. Salaries was underspent by \$165,300 last year but increasing this year.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So that would be the same. The budget is increased because of the negotiated salary increases, and then the decrease this past year is because of vacancies in positions throughout the year.

**J. WALL:** Okay, so similar to the last –

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Under Purchased Services, last year the department overspent by \$168,200. Can you please explain?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

In this line item, we pay the credit card and debit fees associated with deeds registration online. That correlates with activity in the real estate market, so the more house purchases and real estate transactions there are, the more credit and debit card fees we pay. We try and estimate, but there were more transactions than we anticipated.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Under 2.2.01, Vital Statistics Registry, Salaries were underspent by \$125,500 and the budget is increasing this year. Is that the same reason as before, Minister?

**S. STOODLEY:** Correct, yeah.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Madam Chair, 2.2.02, King's Printer. Under Salaries, last year the department overspent by \$94,000. Can you please explain?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We underspent because we had some vacancies, and then we didn't use as much overtime as we had budgeted for. We budget for some overtime because, for example, at the budget, the staff are there all night, sometimes printing the budget documents. Obviously, as the King's Printer, we budget for overtime in case that's needed, and we didn't have as much required this year.

**J. WALL:** It was overspent, Minister, of \$94,000.

**S. STOODLEY:** For the King's Printer?

**J. WALL:** Under Salaries, the department overspent.

Am I reading it wrong?

**S. STOODLEY:** Which line, sorry?

**J. WALL:** Salaries.

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah.

**J. WALL:** Oh sorry, my apologies.

**S. STOODLEY:** That's okay.

**J. WALL:** My apologies, thank you.

Under Supplies, last year the department underspent \$54,200, but the budget is increased this year. Can you please explain?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

The increase is because we're anticipating increased inflationary costs for paper, envelopes, those types of ink. Everything that you need to run a printing place, those costs are increasing. But, this year, we did

spend lower because there wasn't as much printing required, so we had fewer supply costs.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment – and I'm not going to go back to the previous section, but I'm going to refer back to it. Minister, you said earlier, with respect to 1.2.03, the King's Printer – I asked about the \$114,400 – it was for a new machine and it came under that heading, but here we have a heading of King's Printer and it has a Property, Furnishings and Equipment heading, although the new machine was not put here. Can you please explain why?

**S. STOODLEY:** Absolutely. So this is Current and the other was Capital. In my last answer, I said that was the only Capital – I'm not an accountant but –

**J. WALL:** No, got you now.

**S. STOODLEY:** There are either Capital accounts or Current accounts and that was the only Capital account. Do you want to add anything else, Scott?

**S. JONES:** The Capital account has a dollar – once equipment goes to a certain dollar level, it is considered Capital so it has to be put in that account as opposed to into the Current account there.

**J. WALL:** Thank you both for the clarification.

Minister, 2.2.03, Collection Services: I am just wondering how much outstanding debt is owed to the government at this point in time.

**S. STOODLEY:** I'm going to refer to ADM Scott as well.

**S. JONES:** We collect on behalf of multiple departments and we collect defaulted student loans, income support overpayments for individuals that are no

longer receiving income support, and taxes receivable and other types of receivables. We don't collect on everything, so we have access to the balance outstanding that has been assigned to us for collections.

That's just over \$247.5 million as of March 31, gone by. Again, that's the receivables that have been assigned to us for collections. It would not include fines receivable from traffic fines, as that's through the Department of Justice and Public Safety, or through student loans that are not in default because that is collected through the national student loan program.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I would like to add that if you look at Purchased Services, we overspent from \$20,000 to \$50,000 and we overspent because we had higher than anticipated legal statement of claims cost in trying to go to the court to recoup the money owed to government. Each time we file a statement of claim, it's \$300.

So that extra money we spent in Purchased Services is the legal cost that we spent going to court to recoup – when we're not able to recoup then that's the last resort. We would do the statement of claim with the court in consultation with the other department. So that increase is because we've been, I guess, ramping up our efforts in terms of going to court to collect.

**S. JONES:** I will just throw another number at you. So we've collected, this past year, in excess of \$71 million on the accounts that were assigned to us.

**S. STOODLEY:** Good job, what a collections team.

**J. WALL:** Thank you both for the explanation.

Minister, if it's not listed in your binder, can you provide a list of everything that's included for those totals?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Thank you very much.

That's everything for this section, Madam Chair, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

We'll move on to MHA Evans.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Chair.

Going back to section 2.1.01, Consumer and Financial Services, has there been an increase in the staff and funding to the residential tenancies board in the past year, and how many applications were received over the past year?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We did not allocate more resources. We did do a bit of a reorganization to get an additional hearing individual. We're fully staffed. Scott, I don't know if you want to talk about the number of –

**S. JONES:** The total applications received this past year was just over 1,200 and the Residential Tenancy Office has closed just under 1,100 of those applications. So as of March 31, there was still 114 outstanding and in progress of being worked.

**L. EVANS:** Okay.

Has the department considered making it mandatory for landlords to go to mediation before allowing them to evict a tenant legally?

**S. STOODLEY:** I will say we are always looking at ways we can improve the process for landlords and tenants. One big change we are working on is I've committed to us – I can't remember the section number of the act. What number?

**OFFICIAL:** Fifty-one.

**S. STOODLEY:** Under section 51 of the *Residential Tenancies Act, 2018*, we are going to start seeking legal action against landlords and tenants, potentially, who meet potential criteria. We are going to take more of a leadership role in making sure that the act is followed by landlords and tenants.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

The media has reported on the lack of a body that is dedicated to bringing landlord-tenant cases to court. You've committed to looking into that. Could you provide us with some sort of details on where the department is currently?

**S. STOODLEY:** We have a plan – we have reviewed an approach to start on a pilot basis and we are planning to recruit an additional full-time staff member to undertake those activities.

**L. EVANS:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Have there been any reports brought to the department accusing businesses of price gouging in the last year? If so, how many have resulted in investigations and fines?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

No, we have not.

**L. EVANS:** None, okay. Thank you, Minister.

Back in January 2023, the Superintendent of Insurance stated that he expected insurers and brokers to end the practice of best terms pricing by the end of July. Does that mean that the statement is merely a request, or is it being considered to be a mandate?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Our director is a she, and it was a request at that point. My understanding is, at that point, the practice was going to cease. If it

did not cease, then we would take further action. But it was a request at that point.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you for reminding if I'm not sure of the gender, I should go gender-neutral.

Just looking at some line items now and I hope I'm not duplicating; you can point it out to me. Under Transportation and Communications, why is the budget set to decrease?

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry, which number?

**L. EVANS:** I'm still under 2.1.01, Consumer and Financial Services. I'm looking at the line item Transportation and Communications.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you very much.

So the budget is going to decrease because we expect lower travel, landline and mobility costs.

**L. EVANS:** Okay.  
I don't think you answered this one. For Purchased Services, why was it over budget?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We had additional credit and debit costs. There were more transactions than we anticipated, more online payments, so that means that there's more debit and credit costs than we anticipated.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, thank you.

I'm just looking at provincial revenue; why did you take in more than expected?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We took in more revenue – that is a payment related to the number of applications that we received. So there were more applications.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, thank you.

I'm looking at 2.1.03, Commercial Registrations. Why did spending on Purchased Services run over budget?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Just to be clear, so we're at 2.1.03, Purchased Services –

**L. EVANS:** You already did that one, Minister; I wasn't paying attention.

**S. STOODLEY:** No, that's okay.

That's the credit and debit card fees and the real estate market.

**L. EVANS:** Yes, sorry about that –

**S. STOODLEY:** That's okay.

**L. EVANS:** – because, a lot of times, I'm going through and reading them out and I miss the questions being asked.

The next question was: What was the extra money spent on under Property, Furnishings and Equipment?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

In this line item, we replaced four scanners for our Companies and Deeds Online system upgrade project. As we digitalized things, we needed four new scanners.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, thank you.

I'm just moving to 2.2.01, Vital Statistics Registry. Minister, I do have to point out how much help they've been to my office in helping people out in my region where, for many years, multiple individuals were not able to obtain a birth certificate. They would cycle through applying, being rejected and just giving up on it, and then having to actually have the birth certificate.

So, I must say, that department has really helped us out with addressing local regional problems that other regions don't have. I do have to commend them. I really, really appreciate it because it has made a difference in people's lives. Some people weren't able to travel because the first step in getting photo IDs and things like that is this. So it's very, very important to acknowledge the amount of work that they've done to help us.

Am I still under Vital Statistics Registry?

**OFFICIAL:** It's already been done.

**L. EVANS:** It's already been done; I'm moving on to King's Printer, 2.2.02.

Let's see, lack of Employee Benefits – all Operating Accounts were under budget last year. Was it a lack of work that accounts for this being under budget?

I'm going to read the question over again. All Operating Accounts were under budget last year, except for Employee Benefits. Was this due to a lack of work?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

They had fewer costs. The Employee Benefits, the \$200, that is the cost of registering for a virtual conference for the King's Printers Association of Canada.

While we're here talking about the King's Printer, the director of the King's Printer is like a Lean Expert and they run a very tight ship in the King's Printer. I've been extremely impressed with the work that they do and the value that they bring to government. I wouldn't specifically correlate reduction in budget spending with a lack of work, but they run a tight ship.

**L. EVANS:** So it's more on the efficiency side. Okay, thank you.

Staying with King's Printer, why was the provincial revenue under budget?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So we had a reduced requirement for printed materials.

**L. EVANS:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I've got just one last question there; 2.2.03, Collection Services, I'm not sure if this question was asked. How many files have been resolved this past year, and how much money was collected by the province last year in outstanding debts?

**S. JONES:** In excess of \$71 million was collected this year by the collection unit.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, my time has expired and I'm good with this section.

**CHAIR:** Are you finished with this section, MHA Evans?

**L. EVANS:** Yes, I am.

**CHAIR:** MHA Wall, you're finished with this section?

I ask the Clerk to call the subheadings, please.

**CLERK:** Regulatory Affairs, 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.2.03 carried.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheadings, please.

**CLERK:** Digital Government and Services, 3.1.01 to 3.4.02 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** All right, 3.1.01 to 3.4.02.

MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, Minister, some general questions before we start into the line items. What type of volume is this division seeing at the various locations: in person versus online.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I know recently we surpassed one-million vehicle renewals on MyGovNL – very exciting. I don't have volume per location in front of me. We can certainly get that. Motor Registration in Mount Pearl does especially motor registration work. Where I know, in many of the other areas, it is like more of a Government Service Centre and the team does a range of things for our department, plus other departments, so it is not quite as simple as picking a number.

Gail, I don't know if there is anything that you want to provide.

**G. BOLAND:** Yes, we did surpass the one-million mark as well with driver licence renewal as of the beginning of February of this year. We had approximately 183,000 driver's licences renewed; we provided almost 80,000 online driver exam tests; and a little more than 41,000 people were able to access their driver record through MyGovNL.

We continue to enjoy a very high percentage of people who are using MyGovNL to renew their driver's licence and their vehicle registration. The high 90 per cent are doing that, which then helps to free up availability in Mount Pearl as well as our Government Service Centres across the province to provide in-person services for those who require such.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister, and Ms. Boland for the information.

Minister, do you have any data on the wait times for the issuing of documents, either online or wait times in person?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I've never been made aware of an issue with the wait time of waiting for a document, so I guess it is just the time required to mail. Or if someone contacts us and needs an identity document and they don't have time to wait for the mail, we do provide expedited shipping, or we can provide something virtual to people if they need it in an emergency situation.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Minister, the Greene report recommended privatization; are there any new plans to privatize any parts of your department?

**S. STOODLEY:** There's nothing I can speak to right now.

**J. WALL:** There's nothing you can speak to, or nothing moving forward to privatization?

**S. STOODLEY:** There's nothing to speak to.

**J. WALL:** Minister, do you have any briefing notes on privatization regarding your department?

**S. STOODLEY:** I don't believe so, nothing recent. There would have likely been a Question Period briefing note two years ago, maybe. There is nothing in my current binder; it's all online.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Minister, I'm going to get into a couple of questions with respect to traffic cameras. The government says it's going to expand the use of traffic enforcement cameras to create safer roadways. While cameras may

reduce the speeds and improve safety, no doubt it's going to bring money into the coffers. What will be the estimated cost of rolling out the new cameras and enforcing their use through fines?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's an excellent question. I think it's a bit too early to say. We have not yet planned for a certain number of cameras on provincial government roadways. There are also cameras with municipalities and then potentially cameras on school bus arms and red-light cameras, so we do not yet know how many cameras there will be.

**J. WALL:** Minister, do you have any estimated revenue, what you're looking to take in from those fines and where will that money go, to which department?

**S. STOODLEY:** Ideally, there is no revenue, because everyone is going to slow down and not speed. I think that's very unlikely, but at this point it's difficult to estimate. We had a pilot where we had over 94,000 vehicles going 11 kilometres an hour over the speed limit with two cameras, which is quite shocking.

So just from a procedural perspective, any revenues that do come from a speed camera financial penalty would go into general revenues, but we don't have a number that we're anticipating.

We not doing this to make money. Ideally, everyone slows down, and it'll have a downward pressure on health care costs because there'll be fewer accidents, a gamut of societal benefits to having people slow down.

**J. WALL:** Minister, I agree, everyone needs to slow down. I don't know if it's going to happen. I certainly hope it does.

Minister, you spoke about it earlier today when we started, but I'm not quite sure – I didn't write it down. You said sometime in 2024. Do you have any date, any month

that you're looking at rolling out in this current year?

**S. STOODLEY:** All I can say is we've committed publicly to having cameras in 2024. I would love it to be tomorrow, but it's not going to be tomorrow. It's going to be as soon as I can possibly get them.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

A minute ago, you alluded to the 11 kilometres over the posted speed limit. Will that be the standard used going forward with respect to issuing tickets to drivers, or will drivers be dinged if it's under 11 kilometres per hour? What's going to be your cut-off there?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So that's an excellent question. We haven't definitively decided that. I think that could be something that could change. I don't think that would be in regulation or legislation because speeding is illegal.

For the pilot, they were configured; it would only take a picture if it was 11 kilometres an hour over the speed limit. I can't see it being any less than that, honestly. We're not trying to be unreasonable. We're not trying to give people tickets for going three or four kilometres over the speed limit. So I can't imagine it being any less than what we had in the pilot.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Minister, which department will budget for the disputing of fines from the anticipated speed cameras coming online sometime this year?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I don't have an answer to that yet, but we are working on that.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Do you see anything from your department or from your staff that's preventing the rollout as soon as possible? No reflection on your staff; please, don't take it that way, if it came across that way. Or is it another government department that you're working with in conjunction to move forward with these cameras?

**S. STOODLEY:** I would love to tell you – we have multiple government departments working together collaboratively as fast as we can to maximize road safety with the use of traffic enforcement cameras.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I do have a few more questions. As you can imagine, it's a very topical conversation right now.

Minister, we have some drivers, we hear about them on different forms of media all the time, about huge fines that they're carrying, they can't afford to pay, so the individuals ignore them and they keep driving. What's your department planning to do for those who are continuing to speed, have heavy fines, without paying them off? Is there going to be a community service option? Will there be a drivers' education option? How are you going to deal with it going forward?

**S. STOODLEY:** So, right now, speeding ticket fines are managed by Justice and Public Safety. You cannot renew your vehicle if you have outstanding fines. If you can't renew your vehicle, it's illegal to be on the road. You can't drive an unregistered vehicle.

So they would be driving illegally without registration. We have numerous programs in place, over the past few years, to try and reduce the number of people driving around illegally without registration. There's only so much we can do.

You'd have to pay your fines before you renew your vehicle and if you don't renew

your registration, then you're driving illegally.

**J. WALL:** Madam Chair, seeing my time is up, I do have more questions to discuss, so I'll come back.

**CHAIR:** We will come back to you.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** MHA Evans.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Chair.

Section 3.1.01, Motor Registration Division, just looking at the turnover rates now. Have there been any change in the turnover rates at Motor Registration Division, and what measures are you taking to address the retention?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I don't see this necessarily as a reflection on Motor Registration. We do have a lot of employee turnover in Motor Registration. It is a resident-facing part of the government. There is nothing wrong with it, but I do think we get people coming into those roles – you have the clerk IV roles, so you need a two-year office administration program to be a clerk IV. We train you, and it's not the easiest job dealing with the public in Motor Registration. So we do see some people going in those jobs and then looking for other internal opportunities. And I don't blame them for doing that.

I personally don't see that as a reflection on Motor Registration as an employer. It is a challenging environment dealing with the public. We do have a range of different roles within Motor Registration, but it is something that we do struggle in terms of employees coming in and staying in that resident-facing role.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

Has there been any talk or examination of options for updating the IT systems at Motor Registration?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's more of an OCIO thing, but I am certainly happy to answer that. We have multiple mainframe systems that we need to upgrade. Motor Registration is one of them. Student loan is another one and MCP is another one.

This is not this department, but from my OCIO hat, we are currently doing upgrading on the student loan system and, after that, we're going to targeting Motor Registration and MCP. I'm not sure which one will come first. The student loan was the smallest of the systems, so we're testing out a few theories and want to make sure we do a good job with the student loan one and then we'll be looking at the other two big ones.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

How many highway enforcement officers are currently employed by the department under the highway safety program?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you for the question.

All of our highway enforcement officer roles are filled except for one, and we are currently in screening for one in Lab West. The rest are filled.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

Have there been any significant issues with mandating electronic logging devices on commercial vehicles during the intraprovincial work?

**S. STOODLEY:** I'm not aware of any significant issues, no.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, thank you.

Have there been any progress made on transitioning to a plate-to-owner system in the last year, and what kind of benefits do you see arising from adopting that system?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

That would be the same answer as the last question. So, really, we don't have a plate-to-owner system because of the old mainframe system that our current Motor Registration system is on. It's there, it's running, it works well, so it's not desperate.

But we do need a modern system. When we get to the transformation of the Motor Registration system, I think – the future person in this role or department might change their mind. But my understanding is that would be a key component of getting a new system, is that it's designed around a plate to owner.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you.

Next question: Is there any consideration being given to moving to some sort of rule saying that all vehicles have to pass a regular routine inspection for road worthiness, and do you have any figures or estimates on how that may decrease accidents?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So that's an excellent question. Thirty years ago, in Newfoundland and Labrador, there was a program to have mandatory inspections. We have not had that for 30 years. That has been revisited multiple times. Nationally, from a statistics perspective, there is no significant demonstration with the available national data to show that there would be a safety value to doing that.

There are a few different elements to that. One is cost. I really don't want to be the person to tell everyone in the province they have to spend another \$100 a year or \$100 every two years to get their older vehicles inspected, whatever the criteria would be. I don't think my colleagues would like that either.

Considering the safety element of that, though – and I've had some meetings on this lately, so I've thought a lot about this. If you're looking at which vehicles need to be inspected, it's not the new vehicles; it's the older vehicles. So of the people who drive older vehicles, whatever that year would be, many of those people are already going to garages and getting work done by certified mechanics and dealers.

In those situations, mechanics and dealers are not legally obliged to but usually, to also get more work, say oh, you need this, this, this and this done. That's what happened to me when I bring my older vehicle in to get fixed. They say okay, you need new brakes, you need this, you need this and I say okay and then we do it.

So most people with older vehicles are doing that. There are people driving illegally without registration, without insurance. My opinion is that those same people would also not do the yearly inspections. So really, we're targeted – a policy like that which would cost everyone an extra \$100 a year or whatever it would be, I think we'd only be getting at such few vehicles that it would not be worth the overall cost and inconvenience to all the other people who are already maintaining their vehicle appropriately.

I'm happy to chat further about it. I've thought a lot about this lately, so I'm not proposing any changes.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

Will the department be increasing the requirements for ride-share riders to include vulnerable sector checks?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

In order to be a ride-share driver, the ride-share company has to make sure that you have an appropriate criminal record check and there are also no conditions applied by a court that would prevent you from

completing all the duties of a ride-share driver.

My understanding is that that condition, the second part of that, saves the same type of problem that a vulnerable sector check would uncover. So the fact that if you have a court condition that you can't be around children or you can't go in this part of the city – if you have court-ordered conditions, my understanding is it's the company's responsibility to make sure that the drivers don't have any court-ordered conditions that would prevent them from fulfilling their duties.

So my understanding is that that covers a similar – the value that would be provided by a vulnerable sector check.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

Even though the government did not require background checks for management of ride-share app companies, your department did revoke an approval of the event when an owner was found to be facing accusations of a sex crime. Even though other provinces do not require background checks on managers, will that be something that this department might take the initiative on?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you for the question.

I will say that for ride-share companies, the onus is on the ride-share company to make sure that all of the drivers have appropriate criminal record check results. There's an application form. In the instance that, I think, you're referring to, the person filling out the application form, who was not going to be a driver, had charges, which is why we cancelled the licence.

**OFFICIAL:** (Inaudible.)

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry – yes, thank you. We suspended the licence out of an abundance of caution.

We are not requiring every person who works at any company to have a criminal record check. It's the people who interact with the public in their capacity as a driver.

**L. EVANS:** So no initiative there to require the background checks on management, just to drivers? Yeah, okay.

Thank you, Minister, and I didn't mean to put you on the spot, and I know you've faced a lot of public scrutiny there over that incentive and it was probably difficult to navigate and you did take action. So I commend you on that.

Anyway, this was just a follow-up question to what unfolded back then.

**CHAIR:** MHA Evans, your time is up now. We're going to move on. We'll come back to that question again.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** I'm going to pass it on to MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you.

Have you put any more thought into going plate to person as a way forward for some of these fines? I think that could solve it. I'm not sure, but anyway.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Absolutely. When we get the new system, the new Motor Registration system will be designed around that. At the moment, with our current system, it's not possible.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** What do you think the timeline is for that?

**S. STOODLEY:** So I mentioned to our earlier questions –

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I might have missed it.

**S. STOODLEY:** – there are three systems on the mainframe –

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yes, got that.

**S. STOODLEY:** – student loan, MCP and Motor Registration. So it's a major project to transform those systems into a modern system. This is, again, OCIO. That's not this department, but I'm happy to answer the question.

So we've started with student loans. We're currently redoing the student loans system, testing out a few things. Then, after that, we'll be following with either Motor Registration and MCP. We haven't decided which one first yet. There's no dire need. I appreciate it would be nice. So I don't have a timeline.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** No, and you don't know a timeline for when the student loan one is going to be finished and ready to go?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's a different department, so I can tell you in the Estimates for that department. Those officials aren't here.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Just some of these fines that people just go buy another car – I know; I was in the industry. They go buy another car and they don't register it. So when you haul somebody in with \$30,000 or \$40,000 worth of fines, you confiscate that car and not give it back to them, or where does that go?

**S. STOODLEY:** If you have fines, you have to pay them before you renew your vehicle registration and you're not able to renew your vehicle registration if you have fines outstanding. Then if you continue driving, that's illegal.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Right.

So what happens is they go buy a car for \$1,000, another car, and then that gets

confiscated and that's how they keep rolling. That's why the plate to plate is more important. That's why I asked that question because that's what happens, as far as I'm concerned. Maybe you can correct me on that.

**S. STOODLEY:** So Justice and Public Safety, they do the collections of fines outstanding on those types of fines.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

With ambulances, it's Motor Registration, I'm going to say, doing inspections. So ambulances get inspected every six months or every year. Do you do them as your department?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, so every six months, or every year?

**S. STOODLEY:** I can get that for you. We don't have the timeline here.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

And the buses are every six months; am I correct in saying that?

**S. STOODLEY:** So 100 per cent of buses are inspected by October each year, and at least 30 per cent of buses are inspected in the winter. Although I know they try and do a lot more than that, but in addition that, there is twice a year where the owner of the bus has to submit an inspection from an official inspection station.

So all buses are inspected three times a year; many are inspected four times a year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So they do their own inspections, or it's got to be inspected, obviously, every six months or year, whatever it is for a bus. But then your department has to go inspect it every year?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Every bus has got to be inspected, every year?

**S. STOODLEY:** We inspect 100 per cent of all buses in October, and at least 30 per cent in the winter, but the team tell me they try and do way more than 30 per cent.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

The other question would be – and the Member for Torngat touched on it – Motor Vehicle inspections on vehicles. You have to determine at what point that you're going to determine what makes them old. The vehicles come with a five-year, 100 or five-year, 160 warranty. So there are vehicles out there that have got 200,000 or 300,000 kilometres. At what point in a safety standard do we do motor vehicle inspections?

I don't want to pass on any more fees to a person that owns a vehicle; I'm driving a 2010 that my daughter owned. So it's never needed to be inspected. It's 14 years old. Anyway, go ahead.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So I've talked a bit about that already, but I'm happy to say it again.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah. And I was listening, but I wasn't sure –

**S. STOODLEY:** So you do have to inspect a vehicle when you sell it.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah.

**S. STOODLEY:** Mandatory inspections have not been mandatory in Newfoundland and Labrador for 30 years. Subsequent governments have reviewed that on numerous occasions.

When we look at the federally available data around what causes vehicle accidents, there is no significant or statistically relevant amount of accidents caused by issues with

vehicles that would have been solved by annual or biannual inspections.

Recently, I had the Automobile Dealers Association in and they were lobbying for biyearly, every two years, to have an inspection on older vehicles. So I've thought a lot about this. If you look at everyone who gets – yes, all the newer vehicles, you don't need to inspect those, fine. We're trying to target safety. So if you look at all the older vehicles, most of those people are bringing their vehicles to garages or dealerships to get fixed. When I bring my 2013 vehicle in, they say you need new brakes, you need this, you need this and I say, okay. Most people do that.

There would be some people who don't get their vehicle maintained appropriately. I'm not saying that's not true. So if we had biannual inspections required for all those people, that's an extra \$100 cost that all those people are going to have to pay. What are we trying to get at that? We're imposing an extra cost on all those people to try and find the few people who currently aren't getting their vehicle maintained and inspected. If it's only every two years, then how likely, during that two-year period, are you to find something that – a lot of people right now are driving without registration, without insurance, driving illegally and we hear them in the news all the time.

So those people are also not going to pay for their inspections. In my opinion – and I have thought a lot about this in the last few months – imposing a mandatory every year or every two-year inspection on all of the vehicles, five or 10 years older, is imposing a lot of cost on everyone in the province that they can't afford, to get at such few vehicles. You're really only getting at so few vehicles. When the statistics don't show that that's a cause of accidents, the fact that older vehicles are not being maintained, that's not a statistically relevant number of incidents.

When the stats don't show it, I can't bring that forward to say we should charge everyone \$100 every two years for a vehicle inspection, when there are so few things we're trying to get at.

Happy to chat further about it.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** We'll have a side chat on that because I don't agree with that. I'm not saying I want to pass on anything to anybody as a fee, but –

**S. STOODLEY:** Come in and happy to chat.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, okay.

I'll leave that be, but it's certainly a discussion that got to be had. If there's a car out there 10 years old, somebody should be checking it. Now, one person may own it or somebody may try to buy it and it has to be inspected, I get that. If I buy your vehicle today, I have to get it changed over and it has to be inspected but somebody keeps a vehicle for 10 years or they takes a vehicle – to cut down on fines and inspections on some of these vehicles, getting them inspected after, whatever period that may be, seven years, eight years, nine years, I don't know, but there has to be a point somewhere that, for safety reasons – it only takes one but it's safety reasons – and they're out there.

I worked in a garage for 22 years and I can tell you they avoid you and go somewhere else, or they don't go anywhere at all until they're totally done. If you inspect them, you get them done. When you say people spend them on inspections, there's a different number on a ball joint, as an example, or tie rod end when you go to a garage compared to when you go to a side garage. There's a booklet that shows, well, this is within four millimetres. The garage up the road may say this is worn out and it's five millimetres. There are different volumes on how they do it. So, anyway, we'll have that discussion.

Thank you for the answers.

I'm done.

**CHAIR:** You're finished?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Seeing we're over halfway through, I was just wondering what the consensus is about taking a break. I'm just wondering if you want to continue or take a 10-minute break?

**S. STOODLEY:** We're okay.

**CHAIR:** You're okay. Everybody's okay?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** We're all good.

**CHAIR:** MHA Evans, are you okay?

**L. EVANS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** All right, we will continue.

MHA Evans, you're up.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm on section 3.1.01, Motor Registration Division. Looking at Operating Accounts, with the exception of Employee Benefits, they all ran over budget. Can you just give us an explanation for that?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Transportation and Communications: We had higher postage, travel, mobility and landline costs. Supplies: We had higher costs associated with purchasing licence plates and envelopes for mailing. Purchased Services: We had higher costs with debit and credit card fees and a higher volume of licence card printing. Then, for Property, Furnishings and Equipment, we bought new scanners for the front counter, some ergonomic equipment. We had to replace printers, some monitors and brake meters. We also had updated firewalls for weigh scale locations.

**L. EVANS:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

You answered another question, so I'll just go on.

Provincial revenue was down, so why didn't we collect as much as expected last year?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I think this is when someone needs a driver's licence posted overnight or something, so we had fewer requirements for that.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

Moving on to 3.2.01, Support Services. Are there any job vacancies in this section?

**S. STOODLEY:** Are there any job vacancies?

**OFFICIAL:** I think you went through that at the beginning.

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah, I did give a list.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, I'll take that.

**S. STOODLEY:** No jobs in Support Services, no vacancies.

**L. EVANS:** Purchased Services: Why did spending run over budget?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

This was increased banking fees, secure cash collection and photocopier costs. We had overruns, but this was partially offset because we had fewer general purchasing services, fewer membership fees and we didn't spend as much on training.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

Moving on to 3.2.02, Regional Services. I am just looking at Salaries now and it was under budget last year. Was that due to vacancies? How many vacancies are there?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

It was due to vacancies. Regional Services: We have six vacancies in the Avalon, two in Eastern, four in Central, one in Western and one in Labrador.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

Under Operating Accounts, with the exception of Transportation and Communications, all were over budget. Can we just have a brief explanation of that?

**S. STOODLEY:** Of course, yes, thank you.

Under Supplies, we had to reprofile some funds to replace some specialized equipment. We did get two new trucks – TI buys the trucks, but we had to pay for the truck accessories for the highway enforcement officers, like lights and all that kind of stuff. So we had to pay for truck accessories and spill kits for two new trucks.

Under Purchased Services, we moved some money around for training, repairs and maintenance, safe combination upgrades and some other things we had to buy. Then under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, we had to move some things around to purchase colorimeters, some ergonomic chairs and some laptops and tablets.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

Provincial revenue: We're expecting less this year, can you just give us a brief explanation of that?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So this is an accounting thing. We have reprofiled online electrical permit revenue to current account revenue, which is why it's no longer in this budget line.

**L. EVANS:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Moving to 3.3.01, Occupational Health and Safety Inspections: How many inspections were completed last year and how many investigations into workplaces were conducted?

**S. STOODLEY:** I'll pass that over to Gail Boland, please.

**G. BOLAND:** This information is available online. At the end of 2023, we had conducted 4,374 inspections; we issued 7,446 orders and 460 stop-work orders.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you.

How many inspectors are currently employed by the department?

**S. STOODLEY:** So there are 48 positions in Occupational Health and Safety with two vacant positions. I don't know if there's another – sorry, Gail.

**G. BOLAND:** Yes, of those positions that the minister had just cited, 26 of them are Occupational Health and Safety officers, who are out in the field.

**L. EVANS:** Okay, thank you.

Reports of violence against health care professionals, especially nurses and nurse practitioners, have reached alarming rates in the past year. We're all made aware of this situation. What measures has OHS taken to help reduce rates of violence in health care?

**S. STOODLEY:** I will say that everyone has a right to a safe workplace. We set the regulations and legislation and I know WorkplaceNL, under Minister Davis, does a lot of the working proactively and reactively with employers.

Gail, I don't know if there's anything else you wanted to add to that.

**G. BOLAND:** So recently we partnered with WorkplaceNL and did a blitz with the health

care sector to help raise awareness and build knowledge and awareness of how people in the health care sector can protect themselves.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you for that answer.

How many positions are there currently in Occupational Health and Safety? How many are vacant and which positions seem to have the most vacancies?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We have 48 total positions and two are vacant.

**L. EVANS:** Looking at the Salaries: Why was spending on Salaries under budget this year and how many vacancies are there?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

There are two vacancies. The savings are the result of vacancies in hard-to-fill position. So an example of that would be an industrial hygienist is a difficult to fill position and so we often have longer than normal vacancies for those.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you.

Looking at Professional Services: Why was spending over budget last year?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Sometimes in investigations we require the use of consultants, so that is here. This is why that number is much higher, because we had a lot of consultants related to fatal accident investigations.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Minister.

Looking at Purchased Services: Why was spending under budget this year?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So we had some virtual meetings where we would usually have in-person meetings, a reduction in printing costs and we had less than anticipated requirements for professional radiation services.

**L. EVANS:** Okay. Thank you.

3.4.01, Assistance to St. Lawrence Miners' Dependents: How many people are currently receiving money from this account?

**G. BOLAND:** In 2022-23, there were 26 recipients.

**CHAIR:** Your time is up, MHA Evans.

We're going to move it back to MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I'm going to jump back to what we were discussing before, the traffic cameras.

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah.

**J. WALL:** I wanted to ask, will municipalities have the opportunity to put their towns forward for a speed camera because, as you can appreciate, mayors and councillors have to budget and, of course, their budget, once it's set for a calendar year, it cannot be amended. So do you have anything to offer on that one with respect to municipalities?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Absolutely. So we are looking at some criteria to have some objective criteria as to under what circumstances municipalities would request speed cameras or traffic enforcement cameras. I will say that it's currently lawful today to have a speed camera.

So I guess what we're doing, I'm trying to have more of a provincial approach that municipalities can leverage, where, as much as possible it will be outlined, it will be easy. But there's nothing stopping municipalities

now today from working with law enforcement and having enforcement cameras today.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

So if a municipality does have a speed camera, will the government follow through with the administering of fines or where does the fine revenue go then? Is it to the municipality? Is it direct to the province? How does that unfold?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So we are still working on the exact execution of what the program will look like. Any revenues will go into government general revenues.

I think there is an acknowledgement that there would be some amount of revenue sharing with municipalities. That wouldn't be under me. That's kind of a whole government, how do we – anyway, I think that's something that we will answer. I don't have an answer to that right now and that would probably be a combination of working with the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs and in consultation with the Minister of Finance.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Minister, does your department have a plan or are you currently working with another department to review the speed limits that are currently on the roads to ensure they're reasonable and to ensure that the postage on signs are effective in any given area, because that's important?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So that would be Transportation and Infrastructure. We don't set speed limits.

**J. WALL:** Understood, but is your department working with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure as this unfolds?

**S. STOODLEY:** I'm trying to progress this traffic enforcement program. If anyone is concerned with the speed limit posted somewhere, they can certainly send in a complaint and we'll try and get to the right place or we would certainly have those discussions with TI. I'm not aware that reviewing the speed limits across the province is an urgent issue, but I'm happy to ....

**J. WALL:** So just to be clear, your department is not currently working with another department as the speed cameras are unfolding in various areas?

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes, we are working on speed cameras. I thought you meant deciding what the speed limits should be, sorry.

**J. WALL:** Maybe I didn't say it clear enough.

**S. STOODLEY:** We're not working on speed limits; we're working on speed cameras.

**J. WALL:** No, but ensuring that the limits in those areas, where the cameras are, are proper. So that would be just simply back to TI.

**S. STOODLEY:** I'm assuming – I guess I'm not assuming that there are problems with the speed limits. The speed limits are the speed limits and we're hoping to make available cameras for municipalities, put cameras on provincial government roads to ensure that people follow the rules of the road.

**J. WALL:** I simply ask, Minister, again not to confuse or – there was an issue in my district where on one stretch of road going northbound, it was 50 and coming southbound, it was 60. So that's why I only ask when you're putting cameras in specific areas within municipalities, because municipalities oftentimes don't have the staff

to ensure this; it's back to the province. So that's why I asked that question.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We would never dictate where in municipalities there would be a speed camera. That would be up to municipalities.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Minister, how can municipalities go ahead with cameras working in certain areas with policing if the regs are not in place. So are the regs going to be in place by the time this rolls out in 2024, as you said, as soon as possible?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you for the question.

I mentioned speed camera are lawful today and there are no further regulations required. The program that we are working on will be comprehensive. I'm working on that as soon as possible. It is lawful today to have speed cameras and there are no further regs required.

**J. WALL:** And no further regs required, okay. Thank you.

Minister, does your department anticipate or are you budgeting for higher court costs or additional court time, as drivers may challenge their fines with respect to being caught on a speed camera?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So the appeal mechanism of a financial penalty for speed cameras is something we are actively in discussions with multiple government departments on.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

I have a question regarding – I'm going to jump from speed cameras. Before I get into the line item, I do have one on daycares.

Minister, can you elaborate on why daycare inspections are not posted online, the same as you would have for bus inspections?

**G. BOLAND:** So actually, this past year, we were able to post inspection results for personal care homes. No, daycare centres are not currently available online but, as with everything, it's a priorities issue, it's system issues and it's just being able to have the systems to support posting that information available online.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Ms. Boland. I appreciate that. It's something that we look forward to.

Minister, I'm going to get into a couple of line-item questions. Under 3.1.01, Salaries, your department under spent by \$600,700. Last year and this year the budget increases. Can you just explain to us why, please?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Just to be clear, so we're talking about 3.1.01, Motor Registration, Salaries?

**J. WALL:** Correct.

**S. STOODLEY:** So we had a reduction due to vacancies. We do have high turnover in Motor Registration and we have an increase for the coming year due to the negotiated salary increases for staff.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Under Transportation and Communications, you over spent by \$165,000. Please explain why.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We had increased cost for postage, travel, cellphone and landline costs.

**J. WALL:** Postage, travel and landline?

**S. STOODLEY:** And cellphone costs, yes.

**J. WALL:** Under Supplies, again, over spent by \$158,100. Please explain why.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So we had higher than anticipated costs for licence plates and the envelopes for mailing.

**J. WALL:** And that is still being done out of province?

**S. STOODLEY:** We don't print licence plates here, no.

**J. WALL:** Correct, so it's still being done out of province.

Under Purchased Services, over spent by \$62,000 and this year's budget is less than the budget amount for last year. So I'd just like to know why, please, Minister.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We had increased cost with debit and credit card fees. We had a higher than anticipated amount of printing licence cards.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Under 3.2.01, with respect to the bus safety inspections, has the department given any thought to posting the inspections online as they are done, as opposed to batching them and posting them by the season or when requested?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

School bus inspections are extremely important. If they don't pass an inspection, they can't be on the road. So this is more of like a benefit effort thing. We take them in a batch and we put them online but if a bus is not safe, it can't be on the road. We take it off the road and either have conditions where it has to be fixed by the end of the day or fixed in a few days and we'll go back and reinspect it or it can't be on the road.

So I don't see a public safety issue. It's more of a transparency thing. But regardless of whether we put the inspection results online daily or weekly, there's no change in how fast they have to fix the bus if there is an issue. I guess it's more of an efficiency thing of when we take the inspections and we put them on the website.

**CHAIR:** MHA Wall, your time has expired. We will come back to you again.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** MHA Evans, do you have any further questions?

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Chair.

3.4.02, Assistance to Outside Agencies: Looking at Grants and Subsidies, why did Grants and Subsidies come in lower than expected last year?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you very much.

We do give sponsorships, sometimes for different conferences; for example, Occupational Health and Safety Association, the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering, Safety Services Newfoundland and Labrador, Canadian Standard Association, Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council, the Newfoundland and Labrador Construction Safety Association, Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour and SafetyNet.

So we budget \$8,000, but we don't proactively go out – if someone asks us for a sponsorship, we will give it to them. The reduction of spending is because we spent what, I guess, we were asked to spend.

**OFFICIAL:** Through a request.

**S. STOODLEY:** Yeah, we provide it by request and we did not exceed our budget.

**L. EVANS:** That's the end of my questions.

**CHAIR:** That's the end of your questions?

**L. EVANS:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

MHA Wall, do you have some more questions?

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yes, I do have some more questions.

Minister, are there any current vacancies in the department. If so, how many?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We do have vacant positions. I've went through them, I think, twice now. We have 47 vacancies as of March 31. So we have three in Executive Support; four in Consumer and Financial Services; two in Commercial Registrations; one in Vital Statistics; one in the King's Printer; one in Collections; 19 in Motor Registration; six in regional services, Avalon; two in regional services, Eastern; four in regional services, Central; one in regional services, Western; one in regional services, Labrador; and two in Occupational Health and Safety.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Under Salaries, last year the department under spent by \$254,000. This year's budget is more than last year's budgeted amount. Can you please explain why?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Is that for Motor Registration?

**J. WALL:** Yeah.

**S. STOODLEY:** Which line item, which tab?

**J. WALL:** Under Salaries.

**S. STOODLEY:** For 3.1.01?

**J. WALL:** 3.2.01.

**S. STOODLEY:** Okay, thank you, just a second.

So under Support Services, 3.2.01, Salaries were less due to vacancies in hard-to-fill positions, but then we also had an increase due to the negotiated salary increase.

**J. WALL:** Minister, can you define what's a hard-to-fill position?

**S. STOODLEY:** Who wants to give an example?

**S. DUTTON:** Particularly technical positions that there's a smaller labour pool. So elevating device inspector would be an example. We have three positions: two are filled, one is vacant and we've had continual efforts to recruit for a third. We've also had approval from Treasury Board to offer a market adjustment to have the wage more competitive. We've done the same thing on boiler pressure vessel inspectors; they also have a market adjustment. So they'd probably be the most common hard-to-fill positions.

A lot of our other vacancies, such as those in Motor Registration, are mostly clerical or clerk-type positions, so there's just a lot of turnover. We hire four clerk IVs, we suddenly have four vacancies in clerk IIIs. So we still have four vacancies, even though we hired four people.

**J. WALL:** Thank you for the clarification, Mr. Dutton.

Under Transportation and Communications, the department under spent by \$84,000 last year, this year the budget remains the same. Why is that, Minister?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So we had lower postage costs and lower travel costs for inspection services due to vacancies in hard to fill positions. So

because we had vacancies in hard-to-fill positions those people didn't travel as much, because we didn't have them to travel.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

So for clarification, if they didn't have the individuals to travel, were the inspections not being completed, or am I misunderstanding?

**S. STOODLEY:** No, we prioritize, there are no issues with inspections, it's just we had fewer people so there were fewer people travelling.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Minister, 3.2.02, under Salaries, under spent by \$401,000. This year's budget is more than last. Would that be the same answer again?

**S. STOODLEY:** Correct.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Under Supplies, an increase of \$24,900. This year's budget increase is about less than \$3,000. Why is that?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Under Supplies, we have two new trucks. TI buys the trucks but we have to outfit the trucks. We had to get accessories for the trucks like spill kits and lights and all that kind of stuff. That's why we spent more money on the tools and supplies for our two new trucks.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Purchased Services: Increase in \$25,700 but the budget remains the same as last. Why is that, Minister?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I think this is mostly an accounting thing. They moved money around for training, repairs and maintenance, safe combination upgrades and other purchased services requirements.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, an increase of \$96,000. Why is this?

**S. STOODLEY:** You said Purchased Services?

**J. WALL:** Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment.

**S. STOODLEY:** Okay, my mistake, sorry.

The extra under Property, Furnishings and Equipment is we had to reprofile funds to purchase colorimeters, some ergonomic chairs and some laptops and tablets.

**J. WALL:** Can I ask what's a colorimeter?

**S. STOODLEY:** That's an excellent question, I have no idea.

**J. WALL:** I don't mean to put anyone on the spot, but –

**S. STOODLEY:** Anyone know what a colorimeter is? Gail?

**G. BOLAND:** A way to detect chlorine?

I'm joking, I'm not one of those technical positions that are hard to fill that Sean mentioned. A way to test chlorine in water?

**J. WALL:** I've never heard the term.

Anyway, thank you.

**S. STOODLEY:** Minister Howell knows, it's a kit for testing ....

**J. WALL:** Share with the group.

**K. HOWELL:** A device for measuring chlorine.

Pay raise for Ms. Boland.

Thank you, Minister Howell.

We're only going to 3.2.02 correct? That's the heading called.

**CHAIR:** This is the end, yes.

**J. WALL:** I have one more question.

**S. STOODLEY:** Keep going.

**CHAIR:** We're going from 3.1.01 to 3.4.02.

**J. WALL:** Oh, sorry, my apologies.

**CHAIR:** We're doing the rest of the Estimates.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair, for clarification.

Minister, under Revenue - Provincial, there's a decrease of \$52,000. Why is that?

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry, what –

**J. WALL:** 3.2.02 under Revenue - Provincial, please.

**S. STOODLEY:** Okay, thank you.

The decrease in revenue was the reprofiling, it's an accounting thing. The online electrical permit revenue was moved to current account revenue.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

I'll move now, Minister, to 3.3.01 and just ask some general questions under Occupational Health and Safety Inspections.

I think maybe part of this question was asked by my colleague from Torngat Mountains, but how many investigations are

undertaken and what are the various statuses of the investigations, please?

**G. BOLAND:** So in terms of inspections, we've done 4,374. As of the end of December 2023, we issued 7,446 orders and 460 stop-work orders.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Ms. Boland.

Can I get that list that Ms. Boland just referred to?

**G. BOLAND:** It's online.

**J. WALL:** It is online?

**G. BOLAND:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** Thank you kindly. I appreciate that.

Minister, how many businesses or institutions were found not to be in compliance regarding health and safety conditions?

**G. BOLAND:** So that would be a combination of how many orders were issued and how many stop-work orders were issued. So the 7,446 plus the 460.

**S. STOODLEY:** There could be multiple per business though, yes.

**G. BOLAND:** Yes, of course.

**J. WALL:** Per business, correct.

**S. STOODLEY:** And public sector.

**J. WALL:** Sorry, Minister?

**S. STOODLEY:** So that would be a combination of businesses and public sector. We don't have a count per private business.

**J. WALL:** Okay. Thank you for the clarification.

Minister, under 3.3.01, Salaries: The department underspent by \$444,500. I know this is probably to do with vacancies, but have these vacancies increased the average time it takes to complete an inspection? I know it's a couple of questions in one.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So you'll notice here that the number for next year has decreased a little bit. That's because we reorganized and we moved two of our policy people to Executive Support. We had two policy people for Occupational Health and Safety, now, as a department, we have all of our policy people in the same place. So we've moved two positions from Occupational Health and Safety to Executive Support.

I'm not aware of any issue with inspections; we would take that obviously very seriously and we would – it's not a concern right now.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you, Minister.

Under Professional Services, your department overspent by \$235,000. Can you please explain this, and is there a list of the amount that we're spending?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So this additional spend was related to consultants for fatal accident investigations.

I'll have to defer to Gail if – we'll certainly provide what we can in terms of the breakdown of that.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Under Operating Accounts, an increase of \$200,000. Why is that, Minister?

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I guess the Operating Accounts would be a summary of the numbers above, so that would be the extra money for the fatal

accident investigations and then the other decreases.

**J. WALL:** Yes. Thank you for the clarification.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** You are finished, MHA?

**J. WALL:** I have other questions, but my time is out.

**CHAIR:** MHA Evans, you don't have any further questions?

So we will put some more minutes on the clock for you.

MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** I've only got another couple of hours, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** That's quite all right.

**J. WALL:** No, I've just got a couple of other questions.

Under 3.4.01, Minister – and my colleague from Torngat asked a question on the St. Lawrence Miners' Dependents. If I got my notes correctly, in 2022-23, I believe Ms. Boland said it was 26. Is that correct? So, basically, how many dependents are still being supported here or are eligible to be supported? Is that the same?

**G. BOLAND:** Yes.

**J. WALL:** I jotted it down earlier from my colleague, but I wasn't quite sure. Thank you.

3.4.02, Assistance to Outside Agencies, under Grants and Subsidies, can we have a list of those grants? There was \$3,700 under spent. Why is that? We would like to have a list of the grants, please.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

We can certainly provide a breakdown. So we have a budget for \$8,000 but we only give it out if someone asks, so that reflects the requests that we got. We give funding to organizations, when they ask – like sponsorships for conferences and stuff for the Occupational Health and Safety Association, Newfoundland Society of Safety Engineering, Safety Services Newfoundland and Labrador, Canadian Standards Association, Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council, the Construction Safety Association, the Federation of Labour, SafetyNet, and others of similar nature.

**J. WALL:** And we look forward to that list, Minister. Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, that's all the questions I have on this.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Seeing no further questions, I ask the Clerk to call the headings, please.

**CLERK:** Digital Government and Services, 3.1.01 to 3.4.02 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 3.1.01 to 3.4.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.4.02 carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Digital Government and Service NL, total heads, carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the Estimates of Digital Government and Service NL carried?

I need a motion first.

Moved by MHA Hutton; seconded by MHA O'Driscoll.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Digital Government and Service NL carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** That ends the Estimates for Digital Government and Service NL.

Before we conclude, of course, I want to certainly thank everybody for participating in this afternoon's budgetary process, and the next meeting is scheduled for April 26 at 1 p.m.

Before we leave, like I said, thanks to everybody for their time, especially the staff and the Clerk. I'm going to ask the minister if she wants to end with some closing remarks.

**S. STOODLEY:** Sure. Thank you, everyone.

I want to say an extra thanks to the team here and all the people who work in the department around the province. A lot of them have very technical roles and they have to leave their families to do investigations sometimes in Labrador, or they have to be away from their families to do things like that, when needed. So I guess

just an extra shout-out and that we very much appreciate all of their hard work, to all the staff.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'm going to ask for a motion to adjourn.

MHA Hogan; seconded by MHA Wall.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

I call the meeting adjourned.

Thank you, again.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.