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Social Services**

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Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

Chair: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA

Vice-Chair: Chris Tibbs, MHA

Members: Perry Trimper, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA
Jamie Korab, MHA
James Dinn, MHA
Paul Dinn, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Gerrie Smith

Appearing:

Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development

Hon. Paul Pike, Minister
Alan Doody, Deputy Minister
Sara Dow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Performance Improvement
Tracy English, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Programs
Aisling Gogan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Prevention and Early Intervention
Lori Rose, Assistant Deputy Minister, Child and Youth Services
Dave Martin, Departmental Controller
Margot Pitcher, Executive Assistant
Gayle St. Croix, Director of Communications

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

Hon. Sarah Stoodley, Minister
Alan Doody, Interim CEO
Joe Mercer, Executive Director, Regional Operations and Engineering
Melanie Thomas, Executive Director, Community Partnerships and Homelessness
Mike Tizzard, Executive Director, Financial and Corporate Services
Nancy Walsh, Manager of Corporate Communications
Bradley George, Executive Assistant

Also Present

Hon. Steve Crocker, MHA, Minister
Hon. Fred Hutton, MHA, Minister
Hon. Elvis Loveless, MHA, Minister
Helen Conway Ottenheimer, MHA
Craig Pardy, MHA
Joedy Wall, MHA
Eileen Anderson, Government Members' Caucus
Ashley Politi, Official Opposition Caucus
Megan Winter, Official Opposition Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Craig Pardy, MHA for Bonavista, substitutes for Paul Dinn, MHA for Topsail - Paradise.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Joedy Wall, MHA for Cape St. Francis, substitutes for Chris Tibbs, MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, for a portion of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Steve Crocker, MHA for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Elvis Loveless, MHA for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, substitutes for Jamie Korab, MHA for Waterford Valley.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, MHA for Harbour Main, substitutes for Chris Tibbs, MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, for part of meeting.

The Committee met at 1:13 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): All right, we're going to call the meeting to order. First, I'll announce the substitutes and then any other reminders.

Substituting for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, we have Cape St. Francis, MHA Wall. Substituting for Lake Melville, we have Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, Minister Crocker. Substituting for Mount Pearl North, we have Conception Bay East - Bell Island, Minister Hutton. Substituting for Waterford Valley, we have Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, Minister Loveless.

Typically, we take about a 10-minute break halfway through. Just some reminders, please. When you're about to speak, wave

so that Broadcast can see you. Wait for your tally light to come on and say your name. If your light doesn't come on, I will say your name. Often, they leave the minister's light on so you can go back and forth but the other Members, your lights will go on and off.

The water coolers are in the back, in behind here. Please don't adjust the chairs.

We're going to start with introductions over here for the Committee and substitutes and then we'll move over here to the minister. The minister will introduce herself and then the other Members and then we will adopt the minutes. When we start after the Clerk calls the subhead, the minister has 15 minutes to speak.

Okay, so I now ask the Committee Members and the substitutes and caucus employees, please, to introduce themselves. So start here in the front row on my right.

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

A. POLITI: Ashley Politi, Opposition staff.

E. LOVELESS: Elvis Loveless, Fortune Bay, Cape La Hune.

F. HUTTON: Fred Hutton, MHA, Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

S. CROCKER: Steve Crocker, MHA, Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

E. ANDERSON: Eileen Anderson, GMO.

CHAIR: We have MHA Craig Pardy sitting as an observer.

Okay, Minister.

S. STOODLEY: Sarah Stoodley, Minister of Housing.

A. DOODY: Alan Doody, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

M. TIZZARD: Mike Tizzard, Executive Director, Financial and Corporate Services.

M. THOMAS: Melanie Thomas, Executive Director, Community Partnerships and Homelessness.

J. MERCER: Joe Mercer, Executive Director, Regional Operations and Engineering.

B. GEORGE: Bradley George, Executive Assistant to the Minister of Housing.

N. WALSH: Nancy Walsh, Media Relations Manager, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

CHAIR: Before we start the Estimates process, I ask for an adoption of the minutes from April 16.

Can I have a mover, please?

The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune has moved the adoption of the minutes.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

CLERK (Smith): 1.1.01 to 1.1.02 inclusive, Housing.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.1.02 inclusive carry?

The hon. the Minister of Housing.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much, team, and thank you everyone, and thank you to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing staff for being here today.

I've been in this role a few weeks now. I think my district has the most housing of any district, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing apartments and houses and units. I guess coming into this role, I felt very experienced with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

I like to think Mr. Follett and I are best friends. But the team at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing does amazing work in helping people of the province. It's been an honour to learn more about the organization in this role.

Obviously, housing is a huge problem for Newfoundland and Labrador, for people in the province, as is the country. The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing mandate, I try and remind myself, is to help those on low income with housing challenges.

I think, as a government, we certainly own the responsibility of overall housing. How does everyone afford housing? Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in particular is around those with low income, public housing.

Saying that, there's the five-point housing plan because we recognize that we need more of all levels of housing. The government, we've made record-high investments in housing for the last two years and *Budget 2025* continues that. So we recognize obviously there's not one magic bullet for this, but it's really a mix and we have to do a lot of things in order to make a difference.

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing owns houses; they own units; there's private and community sector ownership and active

construction in terms of building more units in the private and community sector. We maintain and repair a very large collection of properties. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is the largest landlord in the province.

We also do rent supplements to help people in the private market. Obviously, there's people going in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing-owned apartments, houses, but there's also then rent supplements that we give to people from an affordability perspective when they meet the criteria to help them rent in the private market. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing also is responsible for transitional and supportive housing.

In terms of building new home construction, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing are currently building hundreds of new homes, new units. This includes more than 180 affordable rental homes through the Affordable Rental Housing Program, more than 40 market rentals through the five-point plan loan program with support through provincial funding, as well as active construction on 32 units in Pleasantville here in St. John's completed later this year.

I guess in terms of just overall housing, we are seeing other apartment buildings come up. I know in my own district of Mount Scio, near the university, there's I think three towers of apartments going up. The company has in mind that they're going to rent those out to students, but that frees up a lot of other rental properties around St. John's that students usually go in.

I think, obviously, it's a complicated mix of private, public sector, community partners, but overall, I know the government is seized with how to improve affordability and how to make sure that everyone has a safe roof over their head.

The Affordable Rental Housing Program is supporting projects that will build approximately 800 affordable rental homes,

and the loan program has approved funding for projects that will build over 450 market rentals.

As a government, and I would say this goes beyond Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, but we're also making government land available for development. The first meeting I had as Minister of Housing was with a developer looking for land to build low-income properties on the Avalon. The team kind of leaned in there and worked with people across government to find out where is Crown land that we can work with a private developer on to develop the land for more low-income housing. Then we have over 100 homes announced in last year's budget in Western, Central and in Labrador West.

We're going to see shovels in the ground on 50 provincially owned homes in Western Newfoundland this year, a 40-unit apartment building in St. John's and four new homes in Lab West. *Budget 2025* had \$40 million to continue ongoing housing construction this year. Then, in addition to adding more stock of units to the marketplace, obviously, as the biggest landlord in the province, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing does significant work in maintaining and fixing properties that are in the market. They are a landlord of more than 5,500 homes and units. That is an extensive property collection of which to maintain and fix and turnover and repair for the clients of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

This is like routine maintenance with over 14,000 work orders completed every year, to major repairs when someone leaves a property. Over the last two years, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing has turned around, refurbished, over 800 units. Obviously, there are always people leaving their rental property. So you think about if you had a basement apartment, if someone moves out and you want to advertise it, they have to move out, you have to go have a look and you have to clean it out. You have

to estimate the damage. You have to fix the damage, if there's any. You have to put a new coat of paint on. You have to do the work.

Then once it's all done, you have to say who's going to go in this unit or in this house and get them to come and see it. They have to accept it. The time between when someone moves out and when someone moves in, essentially that's the vacancy rate in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Obviously, we prioritize the quick turnovers because we want to get as many people into Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units as possible, but sometimes there are fires where a whole unit or multiple units are destroyed. So, obviously, the turnover time between someone moving out or the fire and someone moving in is a lot longer.

Budget 2025 includes \$26 million in cost-shared funding for repairs and maintenance which continues the \$8-million increase that was introduced last year. We have work under way in repairing homes in the Nunatsiavut communities of Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik – a four-year \$12 million investment introduced last year. Housing is not an overnight solution. Building houses, building apartments takes a long time. We have gotten started. That work is under way.

I also think that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is impacted by the scope of the available contractors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have, as a government, a very large infrastructure agenda and there are only so many companies who do that work in addition to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing staff in terms of builds and then fixes. That is also a constraint of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

I also want to highlight that homelessness is a critical part of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I've learned a lot about this so far in the few weeks in this role. There's the partnership at Horizons 106 with

End Homelessness with individuals living there. There are new supportive and transitional housing units at The Gathering Place which I was fortunate enough to tour last week. Now we're working towards 210 supportive and transitional housing units in the province.

We also oversee the staff to emergency shelter beds with 120 added since 2020. Ideally, you know, no one would need a shelter but, unfortunately, we do find ourselves in a position where more and more people need emergency shelter for a range of reasons. Those are people, and a lot of them have complex challenges so I know that is a particular challenge, it's not just the roof. If it was just putting a roof over their head, that would be the easy part, but they have a lot of unique needs and I think our community partners and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing takes great care in helping those individuals.

We now have new shelter standards; they were released last year. There's a new shelter standard supervisor that is working and an implementation committee seized with making sure that our shelter standards are in place and are enforced across the province.

Aside from the 12,000 residents who live in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units, obviously then there's the Rent Supplement. We help low-income renters afford their private market with \$23 million in cost-shared funding for rental assistance that supports over 2,600 individuals or families. In addition to the 5,500 units that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing owns and maintains, we also have 2,600 individuals or families benefiting from rent supplements.

Then the five-point plan really getting at how we improve the situation across the province overall in terms of housing, and it's not just in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. This includes \$4 million for the Secondary and Basement Suite program,

with over 40 such units approved, and \$225,000 for the First-Time Homebuyers Program. So far over 240 individuals or families have purchased their first homes as a result of the five-point plan.

That is my introduction. Thank you very much. Between myself and the excellent team at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

The MHA for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks.

I, as quickly as possible, was trying to make notes as you were speaking, but if I do have a question to touch from your opening remarks, we'll go from there but thank you for that.

First of all, the grant to NL Housing has been reduced, according to the Estimates, from \$136 million to \$113 million. Please explain why and what does this mean for programming?

S. STOODLEY: I'll pass that over to Alan Doody, please.

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: Predominantly, that reduction reflects the cash flow related to the Affordable Rental Housing Program. It is important to note that there's no reduction in services or cuts to services being provided by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

J. WALL: Thank you, Alan, for that.

Minister, last year in Estimates, the minister at the time said that work was ongoing to

meet with the more immediate and longer term housing needs; it was said in his opening remarks. Could you please give us an update on how you forecast the longer term housing needs and what does your department consider long term?

S. STOODLEY: Excellent question.

I've had a few in this department, you know
—

J. WALL: Understood.

S. STOODLEY: Sure, Alan, if you want to take that.

CHAIR: Alan Doody.

A. DOODY: Yes, and thank you for the question.

For long-term housing needs, there has been a lot of work been done over the last 12 to 18 months on housing needs assessments across the province. Many people are aware CMHC had predicted that Newfoundland and Labrador would need up to 60,000 units built by a certain time frame, but the work that's been done at the provincial level actually indicates that that's roughly around 9,000 homes that would be required to be built.

I think based on what the minister had indicated in her opening remarks, there are a host of different programs being offered through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and through provincial government at large. Not just building housing that's affordable, but housing and affordable housing. I think those are the programs that are in place to address that.

The minister can speak to these but there are some of the planned builds for example. There's a 40-unit apartment building being built in Pleasantville that's intended to start sometime or at least go to tender some time this summer. There are a host of different programs that are being leveraged to

address that need and that's happening across all forms of government as well. It's just not the provincial government; the federal government are engaged and so are municipal governments on solving that problem.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

With respect to consider what is longer term, do you have a time frame? Going by the previous minister's remarks, what would be longer term?

A. DOODY: A 10-year time frame I think, from the longer term perspective.

J. WALL: Thank you.

Madam Chair, am I okay to –

CHAIR: Yes. The light is on.

J. WALL: Yes, but I'm okay to refer by first name or is it Mr. Doody, because I think I may have called you Alan that time.

A. DOODY: I'm happy with either.

J. WALL: Okay, just no disrespect intended.

CHAIR: Yes. The seating plan says Alan Doody.

J. WALL: Okay. All right, thank you.

Minister, I'd suggest that we have a current and immediate shortage of housing units as we know from the media and from, of course, all of our conversations, both NL Housing units and units in the broader community. So any factors from your department on what would've caused this had it been forecast five or 10 years ago? Is there anything from your department as to what would cause this immediate housing shortage, not just with NL Housing, but in the broader community as well?

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I guess my understanding, obviously, it's people moving from rural Newfoundland into urban. I think we see that. I've also learned and been surprised about how many people come from out of province and end up calling the emergency shelter line.

I don't know if they come here with that plan. As an MHA, I've actually helped numerous individuals who are here and they call and they say I'm from Ontario and I don't have anywhere to live and I don't have any money and I can't get home, so just helping those individuals as well.

It is a challenge. I don't know if anyone else had anything to add? Oh sure, Alan.

CHAIR: Alan Doody.

A. DOODY: I mean, this is coming out of COVID and there have been lots of changes, I think, across the whole spectrum as far as items are. It's a national trend. This is not just something that's unique to Newfoundland and Labrador. We're seeing this across the whole country and the demand for housing. I think that's just important to know.

J. WALL: Thank you.

Last year in Estimates, Minister, an official said there had been meetings with modular providers. Could we get an update on modular providers for the province, please?

CHAIR: Alan Doody.

A. DOODY: Yes, thank you for the question.

We have staff that attend different types of programming and shows in Toronto and areas like that to meet with modular companies. There are some modular companies that are working here in the province. Some of them are more about smaller builds than larger, complex builds, but we are engaged with multiple modular companies even out of Quebec where some of them have a track record of doing some

builds in the Lab City area for different programs.

Modular is always part of the discussion. The last tenders that we've issued, we're not saying specifically what type of build it has to be so modular companies are also welcome to bid on those tenders.

J. WALL: Good to know. Thank you.

Minister, again last year in Estimates, there was a suggestion on using the Grace Hospital site for affordable housing. I understand you're only in the department a couple of weeks but did this conversation happen? Is there any movement with respect to that particular area?

S. STOODLEY: At the moment, I do not believe the former Grace Hospital site will be used for low-income housing.

It's important to note, we have Horizons 106 and there are 70-something individuals there at the moment, as of last week. I think it's important to note that that model has seen success in terms of putting wraparound supports around people with really complex needs, housing being the one that brings them in the door but then they have a range of other needs that we have to help them with while they're there in order to help them transition to more permanent or community housing.

That model, I think, is moving people along the housing continuum to more long-term housing. I think part of that conversation is: What is the right size of facility for that, and it's probably always going to be in flux, and then, where is the long-term location of that? I don't think it'll be in that location because that was kind of an emergency situation, so I think now we're thinking about what does that space look like.

The Gathering Place just opened, I believe it's 50 – I think there's 10 people there now at Mercy House. They're going to be housing up to 50 people at Mercy House,

which will be the same sort of thing where they're providing wraparound supports to individuals at The Gathering Place, just next to The Gathering Place and run by The Gathering Place. Once all these supports are in place, where's the gap? Ideally we don't need a facility with wraparound supports but if we do, then what does that long term look like? I don't think the Grace site is one of those.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

If the Grace site is not one of those, is there any conversation with respect to anything in the centre city because of the sheer volume of numbers of homelessness that we're facing? Anything in the centre city area or no?

S. STOODLEY: Well, I would say that I've been in this role for a few weeks now. I'm very excited for the new Premier and I guess the new government under Premier-designate Hogan will – I don't want to necessarily assume that anything that has been, will be.

I think those are discussions that the new government under Premier Hogan will be having in terms of what that landscape looks like. I haven't had the opportunity to chat with the Premier-designate about that issue yet but I know housing is a key issue of this government and all those decisions will be coming.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

I'll go back to Estimates again from last year. The previous minister of Housing committed to using provincial lands for development of affordable housing. You mentioned that in your opening remarks with respect to Crown lands.

Can you share how many units have been constructed through this process and are any occupied through this change in policy?

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

We are nearing completion on the 32 units in Pleasantville. We have another 158 units under construction through the Affordable Rental Housing Program. Overall, in the five-point plan loan program as well, there were 461 in total, 46 of those are currently in active construction. That would be where we've seen some companies use Crown lands.

Again, there are still a lot of organizations in the planning process. My first meeting was with a developer who wanted Crown land or government land for a smaller scale residential low-income development, so our team then connected and they presented. There were six or seven parcels of land and they said, would any of these work for you?

It is, I would say, collaborative and we do really want more low-income housing. If anyone else is out there, please send them our way.

J. WALL: Thank you for that.

With respect to what you just described, has there been any development agreements put in place for those parcels of land? Anything that's in the works, in addition to what you said, over and above that or land that has not been developed yet or any agreements in place?

CHAIR: Alan Doody.

A. DOODY: I'm just going to defer that to Joe Mercer, because I don't want to misquote. I believe there are four active agreements on government land being executed.

CHAIR: Joe Mercer.

J. MERCER: Yes, there's the agreement in Lab West, where we're building four – literally waiting for the frost to come out of the ground. The contractor checks in with us on a weekly basis and gives us the reduction of frost each year. We're also

looking at a piece of land in Gander, which we're hoping to get around 50 units in.

There's also a piece of land that we currently had that we tore some housing down that was no longer salvageable and a tender went out for that and now we've kind of revised the tender a little bit to sort of get what we wanted. That's another 50 in the Western part of the province.

Then, of course, here in the city, we mentioned the 32 units that are almost done. They should be done this summer. We've recently built eight across the street from those, so they are done and lived in. We are also looking, in the centre city area, a new model of microunits, to try that.

There's a fair bit, in addition to the things that have already been mentioned.

J. WALL: Thank you, Joe.

Minister, I just want to go back – I was again trying to write some notes as you were speaking. Just to confirm some numbers, did you say 46 out of 461 are active from the five-point plan? Did I write that correctly?

S. STOODLEY: Correct.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

Minister, the Seniors' Advocate recently said that more access to home repair programs could help seniors stay in their homes longer, reducing the demand for personal care homes and long-term care homes. What has NL Housing done in response to the Seniors' Advocate's comment?

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

We do have obviously funding in the Home Repair Program which we're maintaining. I don't know if anyone else has anything they want to add to that.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, we received the report recently, so we're still officially reviewing our actions to that report.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

On new builds, last year the budget included \$36 million over four years to build 100 homes in Corner Brook, Central and Lab City, as were mentioned earlier. Can you give us an update of these 100 new homes, how many are built and occupied?

S. STOODLEY: Who wants to take that?

CHAIR: Joe Mercer.

J. WALL: Sorry, Joe, I know you just mentioned with respect to the numbers Lab West, Gander but with respect to those 100.

J. MERCER: They're the same ones. All three projects are in different stages right now. Like I said, the four in Lab West are tendered, awarded, the contractor is literally waiting to break ground. In Central, we're currently going through the process for the underground infrastructure. There are going to be well over \$1 million, we're estimating right now, of underground infrastructure before we can actually start construction above ground.

In Western, the tender was out. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful. So we've revised how we put the tender out now to break it up. Instead of doing one major, 50-unit build, we're breaking it up into multiple smaller builds, hoping to attract more bidders, more contractors.

Like I said, all three of those are three different stages but the groundwork, I guess you can say, has been done and we are just waiting now to push it over the finish line to get them started.

J. WALL: Thank you for that.

You answered my next question, too.

You mentioned earlier, Minister –

CHAIR: The Member's time is expired.

J. WALL: Apologies.

CHAIR: We will start again.

The MHA for Cape St. Francis.

Sorry, but we have to restart the clock.

J. WALL: No worries.

Are we good?

CHAIR: Go ahead.

J. WALL: Thank you.

I know it was mentioned earlier, Minister, with respect to the 32 units in Pleasantville. Have they been fully completed and now all occupied? I know that was mentioned earlier, but I didn't get it in my notes.

J. MERCER: No, the 32 units are still under construction, but part of that agreement was that all 32 units had to be worked on concurrently so that rather than stretch it out that just eight are there and being in a construction site, we wanted them all done the same time. Right now, we are on schedule for the end of the summer, at which point then we'll be able to make selections to move people in.

J. WALL: Thank you for that.

Minister, in your opening remarks, you mentioned about the \$3 million over the next four years, \$12 million for the care homes in Nunatsiavut. Again, you may have mentioned that and I just didn't get it in my notes. How many are left to be repaired and how much of the \$12 million has been spent?

S. STOODLEY: I will add before I pass over to the team for that, one of the things – and I've met with MHA Brown about housing in Labrador. I know that's a very important issue. Unfortunately, just on Labrador, we didn't get any applications for the affordable housing program from Labrador. So I've reached out to the Labrador Chamber of Commerce and we'll be engaging with the Construction Association and whoever we can to figure out why did no one apply from Labrador and what can we do to get applications from Labrador. If there's a tweak we need to make or something, we certainly want to do that. Because if the programs are not meeting the needs, then we've definitely want to tweak them so that they are. I just want to add that for Labrador.

In terms of your question, the work has begun on the work that we're doing to repair the homes in Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik. There are approximately 50 homes that will be repaired and renovated when it's finished. Work has been completed, so work is finished on 40 homes at this stage. They're still working through the others.

This funding also allowed the hiring of a maintenance and repair work who lives in Nain, and they're responsible for the ongoing maintenance for that region.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

Minister, I have to be honest, I'm quite surprised that you had no applications from Labrador, given we hear regularly about the need in Labrador. That one was is really surprising.

S. STOODLEY: Yes, us too.

J. WALL: So now do you have a new target date or new cut-off date for other applications, or is it just open ended?

S. STOODLEY: I don't think we've opened the program up. I'm trying to figure out why didn't anyone apply. Is there a problem? I'm

proactively trying to figure out what I can do to get them to apply.

J. WALL: Okay.

S. STOODLEY: If you have any ideas, please let me know.

J. WALL: We'll certainly work on that one, thank you.

Minister, last year in Estimates, I was told the Affordable Rental Housing Program was given conditional approval to build 900 new affordable rental units. How many of these 900 units are now occupied?

CHAIR: Joe Mercer.

J. MERCER: Actually occupied, to be honest, I'd have to find out that information for you. Staff would have that. There are a few of those programs that have completed. There are a lot more that are coming close to completion, and then a lot more that this summer have their plans in place to get under way.

I'd like to add, if I could, one of the great things about this program is it's providing a mixed market in areas where these are being built. So it's not just low-income housing. In the neighbourhood it's low-income housing, along with market rentals, so there is a mixed community.

A perfect example is one that's getting very close to completion in Pouch Cove and it's going to be a beautiful neighbourhood. I think that's really important as well, when we talk about some of the issues around housing, not just the roofs over our heads, it's also those.

Having a mixed market, I think, is very important as well, and this Affordable Rental Housing Program is going to provide that for us, because with almost all of the applications the developer has plans for both. They're using our money where rents are going to be kept at an affordable rate for

15-plus years, but they're also using that opportunity then to build more market rentals that will help offset their project as well.

I can get the numbers, how many actually are currently moved in. I know it's not a great deal completed yet. But there are a lot nearing completion and a lot more that are starting this summer that are hoping – they're saying – by the winter it'll be closed in so they can work on them through the winter.

J. WALL: Thank you for that, Joe.

I do echo your comment about the development in Pouch Cove. That is going to be quite nice. People are certainly looking forward to it.

Minister, through the Secondary and Basement Suite Incentive Program, how many units have been created and how many approvals have been given under that program?

S. STOODLEY: 40.

J. WALL: It's 40?

S. STOODLEY: Four, zero.

J. WALL: Thank you.

How many people have received assistance with the First-time Homebuyers Program and how many have been approved versus how many are secured homes?

S. STOODLEY: 240.

J. WALL: 240, that's how many received assistance. With respect to how many approved versus how many have secured homes, do we have that number?

CHAIR: Mike Tizzard.

M. TIZZARD: There has been 240 applications received for assistance and

approved. I'll have to get the number for you to say how many actually completed their purchase.

J. WALL: I'd appreciate that, Mike. Thank you.

Minister, with respect to the Estimates book for Housing, Housing receives revenue from other sources. It was also supposed to be brought into the core of government, but it's still an outside corporation and not a line department.

Has the thinking changed, because last year in Estimates it was announced that it would be brought into core government? Has the thought on that changed or is that still the thought going forward?

S. STOODLEY: My understanding is that that has not changed. I think that's an not easy – you know, the mechanics are still going through the process.

I was always interested when I was in OCIO from an IT perspective, the NLESD came into government and there are still parts of IT that still being integrated from the NL Schools into core government. I know that that takes a while, but I guess all I can state is that it's still in progress.

J. WALL: I appreciate that, thank you.

Minister, the total revenue for NL Housing this year, how much comes from the federal government? What's your income from rentals? Do you have that breakdown?

CHAIR: Mike Tizzard.

M. TIZZARD: Through the Government of Canada this year, which comes from CMHC, NLHC should receive \$60.9 million; rent revenues \$22.3 million and there are some other revenues included. We have some cost-sharing agreements with the City of St. John's and some interests.

Overall, with the provincial government grant of \$113.8 million, \$201 million is the total revenue of NLHC planned for '25-'26.

J. WALL: Thank you, Mike.

Minister, what is the total staffing complement within NLHC?

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

We have 333 positions. There are currently 307 active employees and 26 vacancies.

J. WALL: Thank you.

How many of these vacancies would be in the trades?

S. STOODLEY: Ten.

J. WALL: Thank you.

With respect to our tradespeople within NLHC, how many do you currently have on staff – total staff in tradespeople? Would you have the breakdown of what the trades are with respect to carpenters, plumbers, electricians and what have you?

CHAIR: Joe Mercer.

J. MERCER: Yes.

Currently, across the province, we have 93 maintenance staff positions. Because of some classifications within union and that, there are a number of different classifications. They range between carpenter, electrician, crew leaders, custodial workers, abatement workers, labourers, maintenance repair persons, maintenance repair person B, maintenance repairer, electrician, plumber, painter and plasterer.

There is a list there. I can read them all out to you by region but it's 93 in total with a range of various trade backgrounds.

J. WALL: Thank you, Joe.

Minister, can you provide a list of companies that do maintenance work or renovation work for NLHC?

S. STOODLEY: We can certainly provide that, yes.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you. I'll look forward to that.

How many social workers are currently employed within the department?

S. STOODLEY: While the team looks that up, one thing I've learned recently from my role as MHA, it's challenging in terms of keeping units repaired and habitable. I have a unit in my district where it's actually unsafe for staff to enter and the contractors have also refused. They've tried multiple times and now all the contractors are refusing to access the unit, and it's unsafe for staff to access the unit. So it gets very tricky in terms of who maintains different units.

To answer that question, we have 17 social workers.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

With respect to wait-lists and the statistics within NLHC, how many people are currently on the wait-list for housing?

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

As of April 7, the wait-list was 2,535.

J. WALL: Do you have the breakdown by region? Where that's a provincial number, do you have the region breakdown?

S. STOODLEY: We do have a breakdown. I can tell you by region for 2025, this would be of March 28 – sorry, just to clarify, the number I gave you was as of April 7, but all this is of March 28.

March 28, the total wait-list was 2,498. Then the regional breakdown: Avalon is 1,218,

Marystown is 70, Gander is 287, Grand Falls-Windsor is 385, Corner Brook is 286, Stephenville is 146, Goose Bay is 106, for a total of 2,498 on the wait-list as of March 28, 2025.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

Would you know or do you have any statistics on how many of these families have children or how many are seniors that are currently on your wait-list?

S. STOODLEY: I will say, I know a significant portion of the wait-list is in the affordability category. I don't know if anyone has a breakdown?

Yeah, we can certainly get that for you.

J. WALL: Thank you, that would be appreciated.

With respect to people on your wait-list how many are experiencing homelessness – they don't have anywhere to lay their head?

S. STOODLEY: I guess on that, if anyone calls the emergency shelter 1-800 number which Newfoundland and Labrador Housing operates, they'll get a roof over their head and then there's a whole team who works to kind of lean in and help them get, not only just a roof over their head for that one night, but whether they have to go to the Gathering Place or somewhere else. Then, how do we move them up to a place where they have more long-term housing.

The answer is 433, but I can't remember what the question was.

J. WALL: My question was, Minister, how many of these on the current wait-list are children or seniors? That's next one was homelessness, yes, how many are experiencing homeless? My apologies.

S. STOODLEY: We have 430.

J. WALL: Thank you. I apologize for the confusion.

Minister, the people on the wait-list, how many are waiting for an accessible unit?

S. STOODLEY: The team will have a look.

I know we are, for all of our current and future developments, planning 10 per cent of our units to be accessible, which is very important, and the rest universal design.

As of March 28, 2025, we have 22 applications and 12 transfer requests for fully accessible units in the Avalon region. The other areas of the province, there are eight applications and one transfer request for a fully accessible unit.

J. WALL: Thank you.

Minister, I know you alluded to earlier with respect to renovations and the difficulty that you're having with respect to that, and that is appreciated, no doubt. How many units are currently unoccupied because of the need of renovation?

S. STOODLEY: I will, I guess, just reiterate while the team – when someone moves out and someone moves in, that period of time is where someone has to go in and see what repairs need to happen. We need to plan those repairs, execute those repairs, offer it to someone officially, and then have them view it and accept it, and then they move in.

So that time is the vacancy rate, essentially and, obviously, I believe 20 per cent of the units are long-term vacancies. Maybe the house was very nearly destroyed, needed significant work, a fire, something like that. Most of the time they're able to put a coat of paint, fix some cabinets.

I will say, yes, as of March 28, 4 per cent, a total of 244 were vacant. Those are the people within that spectrum. There are no housing units sitting around ready to go,

vacant, obviously. They'd all be somewhere in that spectrum of fixing, offering to someone, someone moving in.

A hundred and sixty-nine of those are in areas of demand which require minor to moderate repairs. So all of these units are being readied for occupancy and that period, obviously, we try and make it as short as possible. Forty-four units require major repairs. So 22 of those are scheduled in the next three months onwards; 16 of those have scopes that are going for tender; and six of those are kind of longer term – because we can't do everything at once and there are only so many contractors.

Twenty-nine of those have been offered to wait-listed applicants or in the process of being offered. I know as an MHA, I'm sure you and the others have as well, someone will call me and say I was offered this, but I don't want this. I want something else. I want to be in this other location. Obviously, that person who was offered, that would be a vacant unit because they're going through that process of accepting and no one is living in it there, but it's ready and available. We have to give them time to come in and see it and then they decline it and then we move to the next person.

The other thing I'll mention is that two of the units are in areas with no demand, so I'm guessing one of those is Bell Island. I've had a few constituents who've been offered this house in Bell Island and they'll call me saying, oh my God, Housing offered me this place in Bell Island. I've had a few of those calls – sorry, Fred.

Two units are in an area with no demand, so those have been vacant for a longer period and if your constituents on the wait-list would like those, please let us know.

Thank you.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

No disrespect to the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

Minister, with respect to shelter beds in the province, how many shelter beds do we have and is the number at capacity? Are they always full or is there any vacancy rate within shelter beds?

S. STOODLEY: Thank you for the question.

Obviously, there are different categories as you progress through. I know at 106, there are currently 73 individuals. Now, those people have signed an agreement to live there and it's not long term but we do have a team providing them with supports. They get meals. They also get programming. I think people might take for granted the fact that I know how to budget and pay my bill on time and live with other people.

I recently was that The Gathering Place and they were telling me how not everyone knows that you can't just eat raw chicken and you can't cut up vegetables on a cutting board and eat them after you've just cut up raw chicken. I knew that, but a lot of people just don't have that ground basic knowledge and apply that to rental situations.

A lot of our people in the province living in the shelter system, they don't have those basic life skills that a lot of other people have. A lot of the supports for those individuals, to get them to a place where they go up in the housing continuum, is helping them – I've seen single seniors who their partner might pass away and then – I remember one person called me and he said I've never made toast in my life. I'm going to starve to death. He didn't know how to make toast. So those kind of wraparound supports, I think, are a big part of what the team does.

To answer your question, we currently have 305 shelter beds. This includes over 250 staff-supported beds and so 82 per cent of those are in Eastern, 12 per cent in Central, 2 per cent in Western and 4 per cent in Labrador.

So that wouldn't necessarily be the emergency shelter but all the shelter places.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

How many beds are women transition houses? Is that within this same 305?

S. STOODLEY: Yes, that would be within the 305. So we have 10 transition houses, five in Labrador, five on the Island for transition houses, specifically.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

Minister, how many people are residing within hotels that are currently being funded by NLHC?

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, the answer to your former question was 127 beds.

At 106, we currently have 73 individuals. We have had, I think, it was 18 individuals successfully transitioned from there into more stable housing. We kind of put wraparound supports in place, help them learn some life skills that they need to be able to live independently. Those would be at 106, so I'm assuming you're including –

J. WALL: No, that wasn't my question.

S. STOODLEY: You said hotel but that was a former –

J. WALL: With respect to hotels outside of 106.

S. STOODLEY: Okay.

Does that include 106?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

S. STOODLEY: Okay, that's 89.

J. WALL: Thank you.

Last year, we had approximately 100 so the numbers are still pretty close.

Again, just correct me if I'm wrong from your opening remarks, rental subsidies people receive from NLHC, you said it was 2,600. Did I get that correct: 2,600 rental subsidies provided to people of the province? I think I got that from your opening remarks, Minister.

S. STOODLEY: Sure, I'm just going to triple check that.

As of March 31, there were 2,405 clients as a result of the rent supplement –

OFFICIAL: Plus 319.

S. STOODLEY: – plus 319. Okay, I'll have to go back to my speaking notes, sorry.

There are over 2,700.

J. WALL: Okay.

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, apologies. It's 319 plus 2,405. There are two different programs.

J. WALL: No worries. Okay, so 2,724. Thank you.

Minister, how many units does the NLHC have with partner-managed housing?

S. STOODLEY: There are 1,116 units operated under the partner-managed housing program throughout the province.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to get into some discussion about 106 Airport Road. Last year in Estimates we certainly talked at length about 106 and, at that time, one of the officials said, "the hotel is envisioned to be a very interim and temporary measure."

I'm just wondering, is that still the case for 106 Airport Road?

S. STOODLEY: Yes, that is absolutely the case.

I think we need those wraparound supports for people with complex challenges. I know The Gathering Place has opened 15 at Mercy House with that in mind. There are 10 currently in there now and they're slowly ramping up I think up to 50.

I think based on the needs of the population – because if we can take someone without these life skills with complex needs and give them the supports and the knowledge and the life skills so that they could transition into longer term housing, everyone wins. We're still working on the population that needs help. I don't think we're at a point yet where we know how many beds we're going to need with that supportive housing model in mind. As society changes different needs appear, we might need more health and we might need more addictions support at different times.

So 106 is still an interim and temporary initiative. I think we will always need supportive housing. We're still working on what the next step is and how big that is.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

So we have a three-year contract for 106 Airport Road. We're approximately halfway there. Does the department have any plan on when the contract does expire with respect to what's next? What's going to happen after the three-year contract is up?

I know you just mentioned a bit with respect to the needs of those in society but, from a department point of view, what is the plan for when the contract expires after three years?

S. STOODLEY: We are still working on that.

I will say Health is also availing of that facility. We have Health Services in there at the moment. We're trying to use the space to the best of our ability. There are some other uses I can tell you about which I feel, for privacy, I probably shouldn't because the numbers are low and I don't want to single

anyone out. I'm just thinking off the top of my head.

Yes, so the planning is actively underway, but I know we are looking at what other health services we can use at that facility for at the moment as a government.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

Again, last year in Estimates, an official did say that the End Homelessness St. John's contract for '24-'25 was projected at \$3.6 million. What was the cost? That was the projected cost, what was the actual cost for End Homelessness St. John's?

S. STOODLEY: That was the cost.

J. WALL: Great. Thank you.

Do you have a projected cost for '25-'26?

S. STOODLEY: It's \$4.8 million.

J. WALL: It's \$4.8 million for '25-'26. Thank you.

Again with respect to cost, Minister, what was the cost for security at 106 for '24-'25? Do you have a projected cost for '25-'26?

S. STOODLEY: For this year it's \$1.2 million and a portion of that for last year.

J. WALL: Okay, and projected cost for '25-'26?

S. STOODLEY: It's \$1.2 million.

J. WALL: Again, with respect to costs and projected costs for meals at 106, what's the cost for meals for '25-'25?

S. STOODLEY: That would be part of the End Homelessness agreement. That would be within that.

J. WALL: Okay, understood. Thank you.

Minister, when we look at everything, the whole ball of wax, when you calculate everything with respect to the building, meals, security, health care and wraparound services, do you have a total cost to date for 106 Airport Road?

S. STOODLEY: We can certainly get that. I will say, though, we are actively looking at how to best use that space from a government perspective and part of that I think has and will be from a NL Health Services perspective.

There is currently Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services work under way there. That is currently very much in development in terms of using that space and any extra available space. Because we have some health services in there for the 73 individuals who have very complex needs, we're looking at how else we can use that space from a health care perspective.

J. WALL: Understood, but with respect to the cost of everything. You don't have a total cost now with respect to building and meals –?

S. STOODLEY: We can come back to you on that.

J. WALL: You can come back, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

You just mentioned, Minister, 73 individuals; is that the current number at 106?

S. STOODLEY: Correct.

J. WALL: Would you have any idea on the average length of stay? I know that would vary from one individual to the next, but do you have an average length of stay at 106 Airport Road?

S. STOODLEY: I think 18 people have transitioned out and up, let's say, to more stable housing. There have also been a few residents who weren't a good fit, because

we have to keep in mind the safety and the productivity, I guess. We want this to be a positive experience where they can learn skills and move on and upwards to more stable housing. We have moved out individuals who were not a good fit.

I don't have the average length of stay, but it's not designed to be long term. Everyone's unique needs are different so they're being supported as best they can. They're being provided a lot of help to try and get them to a place where they can live independently.

J. WALL: Understood and appreciated. I'm glad to hear 18 individuals have transitioned further. That is good to hear.

If you have 73 individuals currently and 18 transitioned out for a total of 91, is that how many individuals have gone through?

S. STOODLEY: We also had 18 discharged that were not a good fit.

J. WALL: Okay, so 73, 18 and 18.

Thank you, Minister, for the clarification on that.

Minister, with respect to emergency shelters, how much did the NLHC spend on emergency shelters in '24 and '25, and how does that compare to the year before?

S. STOODLEY: The 2025-2026 budget this year is \$17.9 million for the emergency shelter program. That includes shelter to 1,736 individuals throughout the province.

J. WALL: Okay, \$17.9 million and 1,736 individuals. How does that compare to the year before, Minister? Do you have that comparison?

S. STOODLEY: We'll have to go back and get that for you.

J. WALL: Okay, so we'll make note of that as well.

I'm not sure if you answered this question already. How much is budgeted for emergency shelters in '25-'26?

S. STOODLEY: The emergency shelter program is \$17.9 million in 2025-2026.

J. WALL: In '25-'26, okay. Was that the same amount for '24-'25?

S. STOODLEY: I'll have to get back to you, sorry.

J. WALL: Okay.

Minister, again, you touched on this in your opening remarks. I think you mentioned 14,000 work orders completed for annual maintenance.

What specific criteria does NLHC use in determining the quality and the timeliness of repairs? Do you have any metric that you look at with respect to those work orders and the quality and time of the repairs?

S. STOODLEY: So I will say, I don't know if you have this kind of experience, I have a lot of housing in my district. I have a low-income seniors' building and there's one resident who puts toothpicks in the locks. There was one week where every night they put toothpicks in everyone's locks in their doors. So then everyone wakes up and they can't use their door anymore because they can't stick their keys in. So then Newfoundland and Labrador Housing has to change tens of locks for everyone because one of the residents is sticking toothpicks in everyone's door locks.

It's a complex world Newfoundland and Labrador Housing operates in. They have to do normal repairs like you would imagine in your own basement apartment, let's say, but they're also dealing with malicious repairs that impact tenants and also other tenants. Like I mentioned, I have constituents in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units where it's not safe for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing staff to enter the

property, and the contractors have all refused to enter the property. So it is a complex – I don't know if you want to add anything else, Alan.

CHAIR: Alan Doody.

A. DOODY: First of all, I'd like to take the opportunity to compliment all the hard-working staff at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and the maintenance staff, because they are quite busy. I think if I understand correctly, you're asking about metrics, about measurements. The complexity ranges. It's really hard to have set metrics. You know, how long it takes to paint a house and stuff like that, it's probably very simple, but if they have to replace cabinetry and things of that nature, it adds time to it.

The short answer is that everyone is working diligently to get housing back on the market as quick as possible, and of course, there's oversight of those processes. But, like I said, it ranges through plumbing, fixing electrical problems, depending on how major the repair is. The goal is to try to get the house on the market, back available to be occupied as soon as possible.

J. WALL: No doubt. I'm sure that the staff at NLHC are doing what they can. I was not aware that putting toothpicks in door locks was even a thing. But that does put a lot of things in perspective when you're looking at timewise and hours spent. That's a new one. Thank you both for that.

Minister, how does NLHC plan to ensure, with respect to maintenance standards in provincially owned homes, are met to prevent further deterioration – and I can appreciate and understand full well, as you've just explained, the metric system is not cut and dry with respect to work being done. However, do you have a maintenance standards plan that's met province wide?

S. STOODLEY: I'll pass it over to the team to comment, but my personal opinion is

there's so much – I've had constituents who move out of their Newfoundland and Labrador Housing unit, rip the door off and not tell anyone they're leaving, and then the whole place is ruined. They do a great job. You know, kudos to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing staff.

I guess it's really just so much more than having a standard. I have a seniors' building, and when a resident moves out or is no longer living there anymore, they come in and they replace the flooring and they give it a coat of paint. They might replace the cabinets. Depending on if someone has been in there 20, 30 years, they kind of do a refresh. The people moving in, they sign a contract and they're paying a portion of their income and they want a good, a safe – not super modern but not too worn place that they're moving into.

I don't think there's a question or an issue with the quality of the work that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is doing. I don't know if anyone else wanted to add anything.

CHAIR: Alan Doody.

A. DOODY: Just to answer the question, there is a standard and a plan for maintenance. Every house is listed and every residence is listed in that maintenance plan. For example, exterior maybe upgrade every five years, for example, so that's the type of plan. Of course, we're also inspecting homes as well. Like I said, we're doing drop-in visits or scheduling visits and inspecting homes. Inspectors will pick up on things that may need to be done earlier so then they're slated and it may readjust the plan a little bit, but there is actually a standard and a plan being applied.

J. WALL: Okay, that's what I was looking for, Alan, thank you for that. I understand working with the day-to-day events does throw a monkey wrench into these plans and what have you – understood.

Minister, how many of NLHC buildings have elevators? Do we have any? Do we have any of these buildings with elevators that elevators are not working?

CHAIR: Minister Stoodley.

S. STOODLEY: I have a building in my district with an elevator. Putting my former hat on, I know there is a shortage of elevator repair technicians in Newfoundland and Labrador. I know something that the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL is seized with. But I don't know if we know the number of elevators that we oversee.

CHAIR: Joe Mercer.

J. MERCER: I can get you exact number. Right now, off the top of my head, I can think of four buildings where we have elevators in. They are all operational. One of them, we have had issues periodically in that it breaks down and it's pretty well aged and very difficult to get the parts that are required for it. We're able to come up with ways to get it working again, while we're trying to think of a bigger plan to fix it on a more permanent basis.

We can get you the exact number across the province.

J. WALL: Okay, would that be online? Is that something we can just check it online or is that something that has to come from, as you mentioned DGSNL?

S. STOODLEY: Newfoundland and Labrador Housing would know for sure how many elevators we're responsible for, so we will get you that.

It's just Service NL is responsible for the overall elevator regulations and legislation – elevating devices.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you, Minister.

The strategic allocation of increased funding with the recent \$8-million increase in repairs, maintenance and renovations budget, how does government plan on prioritizing the allocation of these funds to make sure those repairs are completed?

S. STOODLEY: I'll pass it over, but I will say that we want to get as many people into housing as possible. I know that historically there was large families who would need housing and now the trend is more single people. That changes the makeup and need and mix, and houses don't appear overnight. Does anyone else want to – Joe or Alan?

CHAIR: Alan Doody.

A. DOODY: I just want to make sure you're asking about the maintenance budget for the corporation?

J. WALL: Yes, there was an \$8-million increase in the renovations, repairs budget and how does government prioritize those funds, making sure that the repairs are done in a timely manner?

A. DOODY: The buildings that need major work, a little bit more planning and tender are involved. From a Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation perspective, the priority is really set on those that we can get back on the market as quick as possible. So through the assessment, whatever can be done quickly is done quickly first. That's how we move through them.

Also, it's not as simple as that, of course, it's also based on areas of high need and things of that nature as well. There are many factors that contribute into how that works.

J. WALL: Understood, thank you.

Minister, what specific plans are in place to track the effectiveness of this increased funding to reduce backlogs or to improve

living conditions in provincially owned homes? Any plans to track the effectiveness of going forward?

S. STOODLEY: I'll ask the team. I would just add, I guess, we've talked about how complex the nature of things that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing deals with and how complex the repairs are sometimes. There are fires. There is malicious damage.

I don't know, Alan, do you want to add anything?

CHAIR: Alan Doody.

A. DOODY: Specifically to that question asked, we are doing performance management to track turnaround times and things of that nature as part of our accountability framework.

J. WALL: That's what I was looking for, thank you for that.

Minister, the eligibility for NLHC program is based on net income of \$32,500 annually, or in Lab West or the North Coast is \$65,000. You may be eligible if you meet that criterion. Is government planning on changing the net income for people to qualify from those amounts listed?

S. STOODLEY: So that is not currently an initiative. But we do recognize, obviously, that as affordability becomes a challenge, as a government, what levers do we use to help people. I can't speak to all the initiatives that we have in the budget. Minister Coady certainly could – you know, the initiatives for those on low income. I think everything that we do would help them a little bit.

We do have a review ongoing from the Department of Finance on all income tested programs, because I know it is tricky for people when different programs have different income cut-off thresholds. So that's

something the Department of Finance is undertaking.

I note that there is a lot of demand, and it's just kind of a cost thing and where, as a government, we invest money to help people. So I'm not saying it doesn't need to change. That's not currently something that we've committed to, but we are obviously looking at how to best help people with their affordability challenges.

J. WALL: Thank you.

Minister, this year government is investing over \$30 million in housing-focused responses to homelessness across the province from 2024 to 2026. So I'm just wondering what portion of the \$30 million will be used this year in 2025, and what initiatives will government implement?

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, what number are you referring to?

J. WALL: So there was \$30 million announced for housing-focused responses to homelessness across the province from '24 to '26. I'm not sure the date of the news release. I'm looking for that now. But I'm just wondering, what portion of the \$30 million will be used for this year? Because it was announced for '24, '25 and '26?

S. STOODLEY: We'll have to take that away and get back to you.

J. WALL: Okay. That was from a news release. So that's why I had that question. No worries on that.

In February of this year, government announced that they're investing in new homes in Newfoundland and Labrador with respect to partnership with the Canadian government, and \$44 million to help build over 280 homes in the province. It's, again, part of a federal initiative, adding to the 965 new homes that were announced.

I'm just wondering, with respect to that, how will government ensure that the combined funding of over \$44 million for new homes is allocated efficiently and effectively? Is there a joint committee with the federal representatives or is it all through provincial?

S. STOODLEY: That program is all federal government. My understanding is that didn't have any provincial component. That was all federal.

J. WALL: Okay.

With respect to that, it's all federal allocation, it's going to be administered through the province? Is that correct? It's all strictly done through the federal government?

S. STOODLEY: It's not administered by the province, no.

J. WALL: Okay. Thank you for the clarification on that.

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, that program was a federal program that can be stacked on top of provincial government programs, but it is not a provincial government program and it is not administered by the province. You could have a proponent using a Newfoundland and Labrador program and that federal program.

J. WALL: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, you alluded to, in your opening remarks, the five-point plan. How has government evaluated the impact of the \$80 million investment in the Affordable Rental Housing Program? I don't know if I heard you correctly, did you mention 800 new homes for that amount of money in your opening remarks? Again, I was trying to make the notes as you were speaking.

S. STOODLEY: Well, I think, we're still executing. I don't think we're in a place yet where we can evaluate the success. I'm still

trying to get Labrador to put in some proposals. We're still trying to drive and shape those programs to help with housing so that's not concluded yet. For example, I'm hoping Labrador will tell me: This is where your programs could have been approved, and we'll tweak them because we need and want more applications.

Specifically to the five-point plan, 46 of the 461 elements of the program are in active construction: 51 basement and secondary suites have been approved and then 270 individuals or families have taken advantage of the First-time Homebuyers Program.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

I'm just wondering is there a public report detailing how these funds have translated into actual housing units and what criteria is used to determine the success of these units? Is there a public report or is this all internal within NLHC?

S. STOODLEY: My understanding is this is internal, and maybe we should be celebrating it more. That's a fair point.

I think we're still trying to get demand work with organizations like – you know, I reached out to the Labrador Chamber of Commerce to see how we could drive more proposals in Labrador. This is still very much the going concern and I take your point that we should probably celebrate what we're doing a bit more.

CHAIR: Okay.

Given the time, we are going to take a 10-minute recess.

Thank you.

Recess

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): Okay, we will call the meeting back to order, please.

The Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I just want to go back to what we were speaking about before, government's investing in new homes in Newfoundland and Labrador, and you said that the initiative was all federal.

I'm just going back to the provincial government news release. I thought I had misunderstood what I was reading; however, if I can quote the release from the provincial government: "The Governments of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada are providing combined funding of more than \$44 million to help build over 280 new homes in Newfoundland and Labrador. These homes are part of a broader federal initiative, adding to the 965 new homes already announced in Newfoundland and Labrador since 2021."

So it says in your news release – that's where I misunderstood – it's a combined funding announcement. Can you just elaborate on that, please, if you could?

CHAIR: Mike Tizzard.

M. TIZZARD: Sorry, I was confused from the source of the number at first. The minister cleared it up after, it was stackable.

Some of the applicants in the \$44 million may have been approved on the, for example, Affordable Rental Housing Program. They already had a commitment from the province through NLHC for that and then they got a low-interest loan through CMHC. So that's where the federal money comes in. It could have been a developer under the five-point plan who's developing under the province's loan program, and now the federal government is also stepping up to support the builder or contractor to build.

I can get the split on what the province's portion of the \$44 million is, but for example, say we got 50 applicants under our Affordable Rental Housing Program, 20 of

them might have also gone to CMHC to get some low-interest financing as well for the project. I can get you a split on what the province investment is in that \$44 million.

J. WALL: Yes, Mike, that will be great. Thank you for the clarification on that because I was definitely missing something there but that's understood now. Thank you kindly.

Minister, I just got a few more questions. What specific measures have the government undertaken to ensure that the affordable units being developed truly meet the needs for low- and moderate-income families? What do you have in place there to ensure that?

S. STOODLEY: Well, I'll tell you off the top of my head, I know – because I've had complaints about it – the company, as part of the contract to get the funding, they have to offer low rental rates, I think it is for 10 years. I've actually had people reach out to me wanting exemptions because they make too much money and they want to get in and the landlords won't let them in. I'm like, I'm sorry. No, I can't help.

I don't know if, Alan, if you want to elaborate on that?

OFFICIAL: Joe will elaborate on that.

CHAIR: Joe Mercer.

J. MERCER: I'm sorry. I apologize. I missed your question. I couldn't hear you.

J. WALL: No worries. That's the crowd behind me. I'll ask it again, no problem.

What specific measures has government undertaken to ensure that the affordable units being developed truly meet the needs for low- and moderate-income families?

J. MERCER: Part of that agreement is we don't have any say as into who they select, but any tenants who are selected are

income-tested and they need to provide that information to us on a yearly basis as an annual statement.

CHAIR: Minister Stoodley.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, yes. Apologies, I just wanted to correct what I said. The homes have to remain under those rights for 15 years; I said 10, sorry.

It's 15 years for private sector projects and 25 years for community sector projects. There was more funding the longer the proponent agreed to maintain the affordable rates, between 15 years and 30 years. The longer they would commit to maintain affordable rates, the more funding they could get.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Joe.

How often are these homes inspected? Did you say it was on an annual basis with respect to inspections for these homes? I believe Mr. Mercer mentioned that earlier.

CHAIR: Joe Mercer.

J. MERCER: No, not on inspection. They send us an annual report about people's income. That's to make sure that people who are living in the units do meet the income threshold for the affordable rates,

The inspections are not part of ours, because they are private units. Once the developers have them built, our only hold to them is that, because of the money upfront, they have to keep the rates affordable whether it's 15, 20, 25 or 30 years.

J. WALL: Understood. Thank you.

Minister, how will the government address any potential affordability gaps that may exist in the housing market after the implementation of the five-point plan?

S. STOODLEY: It's a difficult question to answer, what's our future policy going to be after the implementation.

Personally, I know we have a problem in Labrador. We didn't get any applications from Labrador so I'm actively trying to find out why and how can we change the program to respond. That is something, actively, that we are trying to find: Were there any issues, were there unforeseen challenges, because we do want more projects in Labrador in particular. If there were any barriers that prevented companies from applying, please reach out. We want to tweak these. If we need it, we can certainly tweak these programs to maximize the number of low-income housing available across the province.

You know, housing is a core part of – I imagine it'll always be a key consideration, for the government in terms of the affordability mix and what mix housing plays with it and homelessness. I can't tell you what our future policy will be.

J. WALL: Okay. Understood.

Minister, you mentioned several times about Labrador and trying to make it fit. When did the application date close in Labrador and you had no applicants apply? When was that date? I'm not aware of it.

S. STOODLEY: We can certainly get that. I say that, I guess, because MHA Brown brought it to my attention and we had a meeting with him a few weeks ago in looking at how are we going to help Labrador. I'm going to continue my discussions with MHA Brown and my colleagues from Labrador about that. That's one thing that we recognize, there were no applications.

I'm not sure when the program closed –

OFFICIAL: August 23.

S. STOODLEY: So that was August 2024.

J. WALL: August 23, 2024.

S. STOODLEY: Yes.

There are still some streams still open, but the private one closed last year. I mean, we want to help people from Labrador so if there are any issues, any reasons why, we would certainly tweak it and bring a program back.

J. WALL: Okay, thank you.

Minister, given the significant increase in housing starts, what long-term strategies does government have to ensure that the progress is sustainable beyond the initial rollout of the five-point plan?

S. STOODLEY: Well, I think the solution is more housing. These are different tactics that we're implementing. It's more housing but also helping people with the life skills, like the wraparound supports. Like the 18 that we've moved out of 106 into more longer term housing.

I can't speak to the future government's future housing policy but, essentially, I know the solution is more units in all levels – low income, medium income.

J. WALL: Okay.

I know you can't predict or speak to future policy. I totally understand that but with respect to future budgets, have you, your department or government given any consideration to adjustment of budgets to address the ongoing housing issue? I know more housing was your previous answer. Has any discussion been taken around that point with respect to future budgets and housing for the province?

S. STOODLEY: Well, every year there's a budget process and all departments have to put in requests and then that process is overseen by the Department of Finance. Departments can put in requests. Then the

government chooses which budget items they want to move forward with.

We're always assessing what to request, I guess, and as a government then, where do we focus and where do we spend taxpayers' money. We have had two record budgets. We are maintaining the extra \$8 million for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

That would be part of the normal budget process. I can't get ahead of what the process looks like. I mean, we're going to have an election between now and the next budget, so who knows. We have to have an election by October, November.

J. WALL: Thank you, Minister.

Of course, I'm sure you'll have no issue providing a copy of your binder today.

S. STOODLEY: Of course.

J. WALL: Marvellous. I appreciate that.

Minister, that's all I have for today. I'd just like to take this opportunity on behalf of His Majesty's Official Opposition to thank you and all your staff and your officials for the hard work that you do. I know that you said in your opening remarks, you mentioned Mr. Wayne Follett. I've said it in the House before and I'll reiterate it again, my CA and I have a wonderful working relationship with Mr. Follett. We speak to him on a daily basis. I thank him for the work he does and, of course, for your staff and all the staff through NLHC with respect to what they do, it is certainly appreciated.

Thank you, Minister.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing staff. Thanks for all of the people across the province who do the 14,000 work orders and who work with Crown Lands, they work with IET and they work with private and public, and the homelessness line and all the social workers. A lot of social work that

they do in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is far beyond putting a roof over people's heads. I just want to thank them for everything that they do.

Thank you for your questions.

CHAIR: Okay, seeing no further questions, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.1.02 inclusive, Housing.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.1.02 inclusive, Housing, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.1.02 carried.

CLERK: The total, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, 1.1.01 to 1.1.02 inclusive, carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation carried without amendment.

CHAIR: This meeting will now recess so we can readjourn with CSSD.

Thank you very much for your time.

Recess

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): Okay, we're going to call the meeting to order.

I'm going to announce the substitutes first and then, typically, about an hour and a half in, we'll take a 10-minute break.

Some reminders also to the Members, when it's your time to speak, you may have to wave so that Broadcast can see you. I ask you to identify yourself. Often the minister's light and the corresponding Member's light is left on, so that's fine to go back and forth. Do not make adjustments to the chairs. There are water coolers in the back and, behind me, there are some glasses and water coolers.

After I do the substitutes, I will ask for the Committee, the substitutes and the caucus employees to introduce themselves. Then we'll go over to the government side, I'll ask the minister to introduce himself along with his staff and then when we start, the minister gets 15 minutes.

So substituting for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, we have Harbour Main, MHA Helen Conway Ottenheimer; for Lake Melville, we have Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, Minister Crocker; for Mount Pearl North, we have Conception Bay East, Minister Hutton; for Topsail - Paradise, we have Bonavista, MHA Pardy; and for Waterford Valley, we have Minister Loveless for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

All right. We will start on my right with introductions.

C. PARDY: Craig Pardy, the MHA for the District of Bonavista.

M. WINTER: Hi, Megan Winter, Research and Policy Analyst with the Office of the Official Opposition.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Helen Conway Ottenheimer, MHA for the District of Harbour Main.

E. LOVELESS: Elvis Loveless, MHA for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

F. HUTTON: Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

S. CROCKER: Steve Crocker, MHA for the District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

E. ANDERSON: Eileen Anderson, Researcher, GMO.

P. PIKE: Paul Pike, Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Minister Responsible for the Community Sector.

A. DOODY: Alan Doody, Deputy Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

S. DOW: Sara Dow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Performance Improvement.

A. GOGAN: Aisling Gogan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Prevention and Early Intervention.

L. ROSE: Lori Rose, Assistant Deputy Minister of Child and Youth Services.

T. ENGLISH: Tracy English, Assistant Deputy Minister of Policy and Programs.

D. MARTIN: Dave Martin, Departmental Controller.

G. ST. CROIX: Gayle St. Croix, Director of Communications.

M. PITCHER: Margot Pitcher, Executive Assistant to Minister Pike.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

I now ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

CLERK (Smith): 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive, Executive and Support Services carry?

Minister Pike.

P. PIKE: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for participating in this year's Estimates for the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

As many of you know, my department consists of 10 lines of business which includes Child Protection, In Care and Adoption, Youth Services, Youth Corrections, Adult Protection, persons with disabilities, Seniors and Aging, poverty reduction, Income Support and the community sector.

I'd like to take an opportunity before we begin today just to highlight some of my department's key areas of progress since last year.

As you know, across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, our seniors play a very important role in our communities, as business owners, members of service organizations, churches and volunteers. As a matter of fact, I think if you go anywhere in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and you meet with any service organization or whatever, a lot of them are our seniors. They're very involved in their communities. Our seniors

want to live safely. They want to enjoy good health and stay active in their communities as they age. Our government is very committed to ensuring that they can. I'll also say at this point that seniors are very vocal about issues in their community. They want what's best for their communities.

The Seniors and Aging Division focuses on helping seniors to remain healthy, active and engaged citizens in our age-friendly communities and address the province's aging population. Our Seniors' Health and Well-Being Plan ensures that the supports and services available to seniors enable them to age well at home. We all know people who want to age, not only in their own homes, but in their own communities. They want to be part of those communities.

Budget 2025 includes \$24 million to build on that plan. That includes \$10 million for initiatives under the Seniors' Health and Well-being Plan, and that includes the Aging Well at Home Grant, which is a grant that's available through Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services for low-income seniors to assist with services such as snow clearing and grocery delivery. This is going over very well, by the way, in a lot of our communities and, being the minister responsible for seniors, I get an opportunity to visit many seniors and many seniors' clubs and so on. They are welcoming these announcements very well. They like what they're seeing and, of course, they want us to continue to do the great work that we're doing, and we will.

All of us would agree that seniors are our greatest resource in this province. They have – I'm not on script, by the way – seniors' clubs that I've been into, you look around and I see people there who are accountants, they're teachers, construction workers, carpenters and so on, they bring a great deal of wealth to these 50-plus clubs, these seniors' organizations. They're very well-oiled machines, these seniors' clubs. They're accounting, the activities that they're involved in – I remember one time

last year we gave a door to a group, an entrance door. I asked them what they needed for the door. They told us the price and I said, what about installation? Oh no, we do that ourselves; don't worry about that. That's the good thing about our seniors. They appreciate what you give them. It's so important that we, as a government, continue to do that.

The Caregiver Benefit is also offered through Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, which provides enhanced support to eligible caregivers of lower income seniors with complex care needs. It's important that you, as Members here, get out and talk about these programs that government has. I mean, we're all in this together and we all do great work. It's important that you communicate that to seniors. Because when I speak of some of this, a hand will go up and they say I didn't know about that. It's important that we do that.

A \$500 grant for food and heating for seniors in coastal Labrador communities, offered through the Department of Finance; increased investments for home repair and modifications through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to help seniors stay in their homes longer. We get calls on this all the time, you as Members get calls all the time from your constituents, talking about wanting to fix a roof or whatever, make the home more accessible, whatever it is, and we're there for that. We're there to help with that.

I'm sure your offices and your CAs are involved and they certainly make calls and it's usually – I don't know of anybody that hasn't received it, unless it's for some reason that's beyond our control. When these calls come through, we act immediately. I know Newfoundland and Labrador Housing does a great job in administering that.

Our expanded 211 navigation services to connect seniors with essential government

community programs. Just to let you know as well, our services and programming guides, we're doing more print of those. I don't know how many is in the office now, but there are a fair number. We'll be getting out to all of your district offices to distribute those so you can get them seniors' groups. It is great when you're going out to any kind of a seniors' function to have a handful of them with you or a box full. So we're going to try to get those in the hands of every senior in the province. Just let our office know and we'll get them to you.

We're also investing \$4.7 million for our targeted basic income pilot for people aged 60 to 64 who receive income support, as well as supported services and or financial assistance through Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services Community Supports Program. I've done some checking on numbers on that and our numbers are going up, as you remember in the House, previously, that we talked about the numbers were still low. They are going up and hopefully, in the next little while, I'll be able to report more on that.

In this program, participants receive benefits comparable with combined federal and provincial benefits for people aged 65 and over. It's making a big difference to those who have actually availed of this. What that is, basically, is the federal and provincial benefits combined equals \$1,937 per month for a single person, and \$2,282 per month for a couple.

That's quite substantial and it hopefully will help our seniors in that predicament. I know a lot of people – I didn't know a lot, but I knew a few people that were in that predicament because at age 60 they didn't have work and so on and they had to wait for the transition. It's certainly something that has been identified as a need for that particular age group.

In *Budget 2025*, through strategic investments and targeted programs, we are ensuring that seniors can live with dignity,

independence and maintain that connection to communities. We're committed to age-friendly inclusive communities that support health and well-being. We're investing \$200,000 through the Seniors' Social Inclusive Initiative. This will help seniors and groups with intergenerational programs and services.

We already as well have a handbook out of these, an intergenerational guide that most of the clubs have right now. We're seeing a lot more of that. Last year when we looked at CYNs we asked CYNs, because we increased funding, that they would do more intergenerational things with seniors.

So that's a great program and it's working quite well. Sometimes when I look at my Facebook, I see these activities on there and it really does the heart good to see it.

We are providing \$95,000 for the Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Communities Program, which helps ensure seniors can remain healthy, active and engaged citizens.

Reliable transportation is key to staying engaged in the community. Through the Newfoundland and Labrador Community Transportation Program, we continue to support the development of accessible and inclusive transportation, services that will improve mobility within communities and regions. This will help all residents, all our seniors and especially persons with disabilities stay connected and be mobile.

We included \$300,000 for this program in *Budget 2025*, and I think the ridership in Clarenville – I don't think I'm off by too much – it's around 75 to 80 per cent of the ridership persons with mobility issues. It's high. I remember it being said. It could be less, but that's a good thing anyway because all these buses that are out there, they have accessibility access.

Building on the successful bus pass pilot in the St. John's metro area, we have

collaborated with the City of Corner Brook and St. Anthony Basin Resources Inc. to improve opportunities for affordable busing in those areas. As a result, people on income support, the Guaranteed Income supplement and department's Youth Services Program will be eligible for free bus passes, and that started in April of 2025.

My department has recently launched Bridging Generations: A guide to Intergenerational Programs. We talked about that and also the new guide to provincial government programs and services. This certainly supports our commitment to developing an inclusive, community-oriented, age-friendly province.

Disability policy: The Disability Policy Office works closely with persons with disabilities, organizations of and for persons with disabilities, including advocacy groups, and with the federal, provincial and territorial governments and departments. We established, in June of '22, the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board, following the enactment of the *Accessibility Act* in December of 2021.

Following the principle of Nothing About Us Without Us, this board plays a pivotal role in advising and developing standards, regulations and policies to identify, prevent and remove barriers to inclusion. The Government of Newfoundland remains committed to building a more inclusive and accessible province and ensuring equitable opportunities for all to participate in society.

This year, we're very pleased to announce the details of a new benefit to support persons with disabilities. *Budget 2025* includes \$17.5 million for the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit. Eligible individuals may receive up to \$400 per month in addition to the \$1,200 annual contribution to their Registered Disability Savings Plan. That's very well received and appreciated by the persons with disabilities.

Budget 2025 also includes \$400,000 for the Accessible Vehicle Funding grant and the Accessible Taxi Program, which supports families and businesses to retrofit or purchase new vehicles to accommodate passengers with wheelchairs or scooters; \$94,000 to support ongoing operations of the GoBus Accessible Transit; and \$50,000 for the Summer Camp Inclusion Grant, which helps ensure children with disabilities can attend and participate in summer camps.

Poverty reduction and income support: We all recognize that these are challenging times that continue to deeply impact individuals and families and those living in poverty across the province, across our country and our world, I guess. Our government is committed to investing in programs and services to support individuals and families impacted by the high cost of living, especially those living in poverty and seniors living on a fixed income.

We are investing over \$3.3 million to support youth-serving organizations in the province, such as the Community Youth Network, the Boys and Girls Clubs and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Last year, we were pleased to increase funding to the Community Youth Networks by 5 per cent as well as provide funding to implement a guaranteed minimum salary for executive directors of the 27 community networks serving youth. Now we have 34 CYN sites across this province.

Our government's Poverty Reduction Plan has increased support for low-income individuals and families with significant increases to benefits that reduce childhood poverty, support seniors and keep more money in household budgets.

CHAIR: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

The Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: You got squeezed for time there, Minister.

P. PIKE: Yes, but I know that it's important, and I know you were listening quite intently.

C. PARDY: Yes, but do you wish to finish?

P. PIKE: I think it's important that I outline all of what – I'll certainly do the Coles Notes on the rest, if that's okay, and just touch on some things?

CHAIR: Okay. Continue.

P. PIKE: Well, thank you so much. I appreciate that.

C. PARDY: You're very, very welcome.

P. PIKE: In reducing poverty, government is investing \$34.5 million to support families with children including the 300 per cent increase to the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit, which is administered through the Department of Finance, and the expanding Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement to age five. An additional \$30 million to continue to streamline and improve the Income Support program benefit structure, building on changes over the last two years.

A couple of things that I really wanted to say on this one is all qualifying single people now under the age of 30 in receipt of income support are now eligible to receive the same basic benefit rates as recipients in other age groups. That's new and it's great. Two separate board and lodging rates based on household type were consolidated into one rate. People boarding with relatives are now eligible to receive the higher monthly rate benefit. If you're talking to people who are actually experiencing this, they are saying it's very important for them that they can help contribute to the family. A lot of them are living with relatives and they can contribute.

Those over 65 who qualify for income support now receive an additional \$105 per month regardless of whether they're eligible for federal Guaranteed Income Supplement. Income support recipients who have boarders living with them do not have any of their benefits clawed back. It's making a big difference.

In July of 2024, we announced the details of an enhanced funeral benefits. I don't think I'll go into those today but we all know how important that piece of legislation was and how important that was for all of us.

Also, we have the All-Party Committee on Basic Income that we're working through. We have a document ready for the Committee to review and, in preparing that document of course, we met with a lot of jurisdictions at the national level and local level and we met with experts in the field which included people with experience living in poverty.

I'm just going to give you: All persons deserve the right to exercise legal capacity without discrimination and have the right to make their decisions. Our department now has certainly been committed to ensuring that these principle of autonomy and support are reflected. In 2024, Children, Seniors and Social Development, Justice and Public Safety and Community Engagement conducted public engagement around decision-making. Right now, we want to ensure that we are continuing our work on this. We're getting close, I'll say that – a little bit of a half a turn – and we want to ensure that people are supported in making their own decisions.

Child welfare: Again, something that is very important to our department. CSSD directly provides and connects with families and supports and services that build up on family strengths while addressing safety threats and reducing risks to children. We've recognized, where at all possible, it's best to keep children at home and with their families, therefore, we are focused on

exploring options that way. If a home placement is needed, children are placed with next of kin and significant others. We deal with foster families – so important. They play a vital role in the lives of children. By the way, there are approximately 545 foster families throughout the province who are dedicated to helping children and youth through complex situations.

I think I'll end there but, again, thanks for listening. There are so many things that I want to outline today about this department and about the great people that work in the department as well, because I've often said to you and said to everyone, it takes special people to work in my department and we have them, which is great.

Thank you.

CHAIR: All right.

The Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Minister.

That was a pretty extensive coverage.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

C. PARDY: I thank you for that.

Seniors are a rich resource. I think you painted that picture and I think we would all agree with that. I would also agree with the fact that we got to have a greater awareness; because, at the office in Bonavista, we'll often find that people would come in and they have a discovery of programs that would be available for them, and here it is. Like I said, I've been there since 2019, but, boy, still someone new comes in and they're not aware of an existing program.

You had stated in your preamble that the guide that was recently put out, which I've had 10 copies of and I've circulated out, that there's one for every senior in the province?

P. PIKE: That's our intent, to put it in the hands of every senior in this province.

God willing, we're going to do a road show soon and, when we visit 50-plus clubs in other communities, we are going to be bringing these books along. For example, I would think if we go to your district, we'll be giving them all to you to distribute from your office or at that particular event. That's our plan.

C. PARDY: Good, thank you.

Just to start now some overarching questions, just for my own clarification. The write-up in the Estimates booklet gives an overview of what the department does. One of the founding components is that you will review policy. I ask the question how often do you review policy and what policy would be the longest span without a review? I bet you weren't expecting that one, but it's just the one –

P. PIKE: We're constantly, I guess, it's ongoing – that's what I always say to people. We're always reviewing our policies and so on, and it's so important to us. We understand that times change and so on and that we really need to develop these policies because, most times, you're working across more than one department and you're working across departments to do that. It involves a fair bit of time, as you know. Because you sit on one of those with us, an all-party Committee, in looking at basic income and you know how much it takes.

Our general rule is our policies last no longer than five years in the sense without having some changes.

C. PARDY: Okay, that's what I was wondering.

P. PIKE: Okay.

C. PARDY: Usually, you're guiding principle is to review within five years.

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: Unless something precipitates an earlier review or tweak.

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: You also stated in the preamble as well, Minister, in the booklet that the department leads initiative to foster poverty reduction and improve well-being – two noble goals. Is it possible that you have some data that would indicate how successful we are in those two domains: poverty reduction and social well-being? Would we have some data that would indicate that we were making inroads and we're productive with our investments?

P. PIKE: Again, I totally agree with your line of questioning because basically, if we bring in policy, then we have to make sure that what we're doing is working and our department is gathering that information because that information is so important as we move forward and to evaluate the policies and procedures that we have. I've asked all the department, and so has my deputy minister, to measure how well we're doing, to ensure that what we're doing is having a benefit on our seniors, our children, those on income support and so on.

The new initiatives that we have, some are somewhat difficult to measure as well, but we can, and we need to. Again, the changes that we've implemented lately, it's going to take us another year to get some data on that, but we will provide that. I hope next year, when you're asking the same question and you're there and I'm here, that we'll be able to give you that information, but our staff and our managers and so on are constantly seeking that type of data.

C. PARDY: Good, thank you.

What would be the total expenditure in your department from the negotiated salary increases? We're going to go through each

department heading that would be in the Estimates. Each one is going to have that component in it. You've got a very large department. I'm just wondering what the total expenditure would be for that 2 per cent negotiated increase. If you don't have it there, we can move on and just find that and report for the sake of efficiency.

P. PIKE: We can get that to you. We'll calculate it and get it to you. We talked about that a few days ago, and it is broken out by division, not the whole department, but that's fair enough. It'll show up on your desk.

C. PARDY: Good, thank you.

Has the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and the Office of the Seniors' Advocate made suggestions to you in the most recent past on legislative amendments or policy suggestions for going forward?

P. PIKE: We work very closely with the advocate offices. In their reports, we take them very seriously. We certainly adhere to a lot of what's being said there. One of the things that we do is we go down through those reports with a goal to make sure that we're meeting the needs of our seniors and of our children, whatever. We take the reports made by the advocacy offices very seriously – I'm getting a note here now, so hang on.

Yes, basically, what I said. We're working on the recommendations of these reports. They're very important to me, by the way because when these reports come out, we want to make sure that we're working through the report with the Advocate. So we'll provide updates on a regular basis, but these are good questions that need to be answered. I know my department is working diligently on all recommendations made by the advocacy offices.

C. PARDY: We're all aware of the tragedy that occurred in the Lapu Lapu Filipino festival over in BC – a devastating tragedy.

But I know that the premier of BC had called a review of impending legislation that they would have, and he referenced the *Mental Health Act*, and I know we just recently had the Adult Protection Act. I think the words he had used was compassionate mandatory care. They wondered as to whether the individual ought to have been using a vehicle.

I'm just wondering if you had any discussion about a future direction for us in looking at the Adult Protection Act. I know that it's not in your bailiwick as far as the *Mental Health Act*, but I'm just wondering as to whether we're going to look at our policy to look at where we are in this province.

P. PIKE: Again, we certainly have our Adult Protection Act under review as we speak. The things that are happening in our world now and in our own country is certainly causing us to reflect, and hopefully we'll be able to bring forward something that will cover off more than – you know, when you start doing your review, as you know, your terms of reference can expand. That's what we'll see happening here.

C. PARDY: Minister, we're ready now. Remember the Reach for the Top where I think there was a section where they had some quickies.

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: Well, I'm going to fire some at you now, real quick ones.

P. PIKE: Fair enough.

C. PARDY: How many staff are employed with CSSD? I'm not sure if it was referred to as quickies or not, but it was some segment on that Reach for the Top.

P. PIKE: I've got it all here.

As of March 31, 2025, CSSD had 1,065 approved positions, 819 are active incumbents, 718 permanent and 101

temporary or contractual. We have 246 vacant, including incumbent on leave or no active incumbent in position, 201 permanent and 45 temporary contractual positions. That's what we have vacant.

C. PARDY: Good.

We mentioned last year about the social worker, and I think we did in the House as well. Can we update on the social worker personnel that we have?

P. PIKE: I should be able to do that off the top of my head. It's there in the notes.

C. PARDY: I think last time you may have mentioned it in the House was 277 social workers and 65 assistants.

P. PIKE: Yes. As of March 31, 2025, we had 92 social worker vacancies out of 369 positions within three regions; 24.9 per cent of positions vacant. In the Labrador region there were 18 social work vacancies for 57 positions. In Central West there were 53 social worker vacancies for 135 work positions. In Metro, 21 social work vacancies for 177 social work positions.

One thing that we are doing, as you know, is the social worker assistants. We have 65 of those and they're making a real difference. For you and I who have educational backgrounds, they mean the same to a social worker as a student assistant would mean to a teacher. It takes a lot of the workload away from the social worker. It's a big help and we're still hiring those positions and will continue to until we think it's an appropriate level.

It's unbelievable the difference that it's making. I talk to social workers and I also talk to some of the people that have taken on those positions and they really love what they're doing.

C. PARDY: Good.

We just had Housing before and I really didn't know that they had 17 social workers that they stated that were in the Housing element. So many social workers in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I can see that you'd have movement.

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: Would you have any idea or an estimate as to the tenure, the length of social worker in CSSD? Now, I don't know where you would start as far as (inaudible) but would you have – what percentage are pursuing 30-year careers?

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: Thank you.

It's a great question. I think it's important to highlight that over the last 10 to 15 years the workforce for social workers changed a lot and there's more demand in the mental health and addictions and within the health system. A good opportunity to acknowledge that child protection social work is, by far, I believe, the most demanding and the hardest work to do as a social worker.

We can probably go back and do some math and get you the exact data on the length of tenure but I think our workforce is mixed. Where work is so hard and we're recruiting, we have a lot of a lot of young people coming in. Just out of the graduating class this year, we're in the process of offering 30 social workers positions across the province.

Some people get into that field and realize this is not the field of work that they want and they'll leave early. You'll see some folks that have been long-time in the field of child protection who get to a certain point in their career and will say I just need a change and they'll leave.

But we're also seeing a trend of people coming back, so it's a bit of a mix. It is very revolving and I think just to highlight the

demand of that work specifically and how hard it is and the great work that group of social workers do and acknowledging that there is going to be some movement across the system.

C. PARDY: No, it's probably an unfair question. I don't know how I would go about trying to determine that, but I probably have a ballpark as to what we would have. That's all the intent of the question was.

What would be the caseload of the average social worker? If I can qualify that question a little further, last year I think we had one-third of our social workers or the positions that were vacant, and we did an investment with the social worker assistants.

I've often told people in my district when we talked about social workers, or they may not have been in a positive light in speaking, all I know is that there were vacancies that had to be filled which would put a greater workload on the existing social workers.

When you look at the average caseload, probably in the average caseload under full complement, what you would expect, and what we've had with the vacancies?

P. PIKE: I'm going to give you the caseload ratio by region. This is as of September 30, 2024. This is actual staff, not positions.

C. PARDY: Will we get that as well in the package? Do we have that?

A. DOODY: Yes, it's in the binder.

P. PIKE: And if you don't see it there, we'll get it for you, of course, anything we have.

Region Metro, we have 151 social workers. We have 2,874 number of cases, but the ratio is 1-19, one social worker per 19. Central West, we have 80 social workers with 2,118 cases, and the ratio is 1-26. In Labrador, we have 42 social workers. We have 1,021 cases for a ratio of 1-24. Provincial total is 273 social workers.

Number of cases is 6,013, and our ratio for the province would be 1-22.

Factor into that then the idea of the social worker assistants – I think you and I had a conversation about that, and we both agreed that that's something that we need to be looking more towards. The planned ratio, by the way, which is what we're looking at, where we're heading for, is a provincial ratio of 1-20.

C. PARDY: I would think that would be good for that section, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Okay, I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive, Executive and Support Services, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.02 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01, Child and Youth Services.

CHAIR: 2.1.01, Child and Youth Services.

The Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: How many children are in CYS care, currently?

And maybe as a follow-up to that, because I'm sure you've got it broken down, how many would be in the Level 4 category?

P. PIKE: The number of children and youth in care reached a high in 2016 of 1,035 children and youth. That was in December. The numbers have been declining since that time. Nine hundred and twenty-five in care as of September 30, which is an 11 per cent decrease.

And the number in Level 4: 225.

C. PARDY: How would that compare, Minister, to previous years?

P. PIKE: Well, that is an increase in level four.

C. PARDY: That's an increase over previous years?

P. PIKE: Yes, we're finding an increase there in those numbers, which of course has an impact upon the workload and the number of positions that we have.

C. PARDY: Do you have any experience with the Canadian Tire Jumpstart foundation?

P. PIKE: I do, yes.

C. PARDY: I think that was a wonderful program that served a lot of children of which we may have on our caseload. I don't think we participate now financially in that program but, when we did, I know that as an administrator in Clarendville we reached a whole lot of children through that program.

I'll just say that, if we're not – well we're not, but I am an advocate for that program knowing what it did in reaching youth.

P. PIKE: Again, that's under TCAR but I will agree with you on that, because you and I being principals of schools would have known what a difference that made in the lives of a lot of children when it came playing hockey and sports and other recreational activities.

C. PARDY: There were 4,900 children, I think, receiving child support payments. I remember I presented a petition in the House on a couple of occasions. There's a regulation – I know that's not your area, but your area is children, so I'm just going to throw this out to you. I think you listened intently with that petition and we talked about it after.

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: I'm familiar with several of those child support payments that don't come at the start of the month and the child, with often the single mother, has received no income because the payment hasn't come and sometimes, whether it was orchestrated or not, it came in small increments because the understanding was they have 30 days to pay it, and whether through necessity or whether it through ill intent, it was trickled in.

I know the payment rate is good, but I know they have that regulation of 30 days. In that meantime, the single mother with the child or children can't pay their rent on time at the first of the month because it's not dependable, that child support payment coming in, and I would assume that it would be a food insecurity issue that you don't have that money at the start of the month.

The question posed was: Why don't we pay the child support payment and garner the funds from the person who is paying it? If the payment is not a problem, why do we have the trickling in over the system?

Again I state, when we're looking at child and youth services and serving the children to make sure that these situations don't occur, then I would think that's probably something the department can look into. If you see merit in it, it's probably one that you may be able to advocate for. At least it's something I think we need to look into, and I don't know how widespread that is but I know that I've got three that I know of that, every now and then, they'll send me what the payment comes in at the start of the

month. They get \$24, where it should be \$590, but \$30 comes in and then away it goes.

P. PIKE: If I might just respond to that. I mean, this is the Department of Justice.

C. PARDY: Yes, I realize that.

P. PIKE: But you and I did have a conversation and, from that, I did have a conversation with some of my colleagues about that. I'm going to certainly bring this back again to my colleagues to have a chat about it. There's no need for that to be happening and we're going to take it under consideration and work on that.

When you made that point to me was the first time I've heard of it, but I can see how it can be very, very problematic.

C. PARDY: Yes, thank you.

How many Indigenous children are currently in the CYS care?

P. PIKE: Okay. Is it just the provincial total you're – we'll just do the provincial total.

C. PARDY: Yes.

P. PIKE: Provincial total is 300.

C. PARDY: I think that was the same as what it was last year.

P. PIKE: Approximately.

C. PARDY: Generally; so we're hovering around 300.

P. PIKE: Well if you want I could go totals. I could go Central, West –

C. PARDY: No, I think that's fine, Minister. Thank you for that.

P. PIKE: Okay.

C. PARDY: For the last number of years, the department had to go to the government for the contingency fund, and you know that the CBC did an article on that with the \$20 million. They're working with you as a department. It comes down to those Level 4 children that we have in the group homes in our province as the expenditure.

I would almost contend this, and you can correct me if I'm wrong: As the school population in Newfoundland and Labrador declines, we're at the same time probably seeing an increase in the children with complex needs in our province. I would say that that challenges us, I know, and I'd be interested in a little point later as to what initiatives we're doing to address that issue and we'll engage in that.

On that, what measures would the department have taken or are taking or pursuing to look at reducing the amount of that contingency fund but, ultimately, providing the care that's needed?

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: Thanks for the question.

It really is a complex space when we talk about children coming into care. We are certainly seeing a spike in the number of complexities that those children have been exposed to, I think, from a trauma perspective. You think, there's trauma in the home at which starts the process for removal and the removal itself is also traumatic for children.

There are bunch of initiatives that are ongoing. We're in the process of reviewing our foster family program because, if we had more foster homes, we could place children in foster homes which gives them a more stable environment – so about growing that. First and foremost, we try to place with family through the Kinship program. When we can't find suitable placements, that's when they end up in the group home system. It is an ongoing

assessment of children and children's needs and how we move them. The cost of those programs, the group home programs, are pretty set. It's the individualized living arrangements, where we put all the wraparound supports in certain homes for certain children, that actually drives the cost up.

I mean, ultimately it is a very complex from a continuum perspective. There's no one thing that we can do to solve that; it is a whole bunch of items.

One of the other activities of the department as well is doing prevention. When CSSD becomes aware of a family that's in distress, we're actually working with families to try to rectify the issues within the home to keep the child in the home or only have them out for a short period of time. There are also those programs as well.

It is complex across the continuum and, of course, the cost overall is being impacted by just even the changes in cost of living. The service providers are feeling the cost-of-living changes as well and that gets reflected back in the budget.

There are several initiatives across the department. It's the one thing, I would say, we discuss on a daily basis. As keepers of the public purse, we need to be responsible for the money but what we're really focused on is outcomes. So how do we need to change the system to get the best outcomes for children? That's what drives the work.

C. PARDY: Good.

Back in my schooling time, we had community policing come in and they came in and they spent time in the school, creating relationships with the children. We talked very highly of that in the education system, a thought that, boy, that was an investment into the future in that relationship bonding with these young children and with the police force.

I wonder about the social worker program. We had one-third of our social workers that were out, that were absent. If we had one-third that was out, the two-thirds that were remaining had an increased caseload. I would assume, probably with a great degree of certainty, that the most complex case got the bulk of the time from the social worker, which would be the obvious. No different in our school system.

Can we look at the system in saying that we did not really do a good job on the preventative initiatives in some of these not-so-complex cases that you can't intervene because we never had time to do so, but if we had done so, we might have curbed that path to the level four complex case?

Would you agree with that scenario? I can't think what else it could be why the numbers would be, and I know there's a myriad of things that would be in our society now that might contribute as well, but nevertheless early intervention.

P. PIKE: Yes, as you were speaking, I certainly realize that we need more cross-departmental work on this issue. We are now in the process of working with Health and Education to look at this situation. It's something that we recognize in schools, we pick it up very early and we realize that, but we also have to bring in the support as well, and you and I know first-hand about that. I keep referring to you and I because we were both educators.

But we are doing that. You've got to realize that we've got to involve other departments and we do that a lot anyways on other issues. But that's something that we're certainly working on that now. You're ahead of your time.

C. PARDY: I think *Seen But Not Heard*, the 2019 report by the Child and Youth Advocate, had mentioned to make sure that those people that are working directly with children have a minimum qualification. That makes good sense. We'll know from our

schooling days that if we had a child with some exceptionality in the school, then we wanted our IRT teacher to be on the front lines working, which is the most skilled that would be to present.

Then, in 2021, when we had the Youth Advocate as well, a special kind of care, she profiled this young child, which had global developmental delay. When she was in this group home, I think the report stated that she had 75 different staff members and was very critical of the interactions of the staff members with the child because the staff members, to some proportion, never had the training to deal with the youth.

Now I would say in reading that, that meant that that wasn't right in trying to curb what we wanted to facilitate in these youth. The happy part of the story was I think she continues on, the Advocate, to say, well, moved out and got specific care by trained people outside the group home. I would hope that from that point in time until now, in 2025, she's still progressing well.

I had a social worker in my district ask me one time and talked about parent coaching. This is in the same vein as what I just mentioned to you. So she talked about parent coaching, and I asked her, who does the parent coaching? She said we never had a lot of time because of the demand to do the parent coaching.

What they do is they would farm it out – and I say farm it out in a respectful way. But they would farm it out to the home care agency, and those workers at the home care agency would go into do parent coaching. So, of course, my next question was, what qualifications do they have? The social worker was upfront and said, it's usually hit or miss. You've got some that do it quite well, others don't.

I think that practice is still going on. I know sometimes they have trouble making and finding people to go in for the parent coaching but you can see the commonality

if we don't have the people with the expertise – the social worker assistants, I would assume, would. They can go right into those parent coaching, I would think, with the skill set that we provided for them. But I fail to see on the home care workers' scale how they would be going in to do the parent coaching in some of the cases. I found that to be a little startling.

I throw that out when we're looking at curbing and reaching children and parents in their own home when they're young and making sure that we've got the most qualified personnel that are going in because we have to make sure that we curb this path, that we find that we would be into now.

Minister, I'll just leave that, if you have any comment on that.

P. PIKE: Yes, I do. I'd like to make a couple of comments.

First of all, we have training standards in place and that's required as part of the licensing processes for group homes and so on. We provide coaching through behaviour management specialists. We don't use our home care workers. Our home care workers, if they're in with a family, are only there to help prepare meals and that sort of thing. They don't do any coaching. I hope that answers part that comment or explains some of it.

You mentioned the Office of Child and Youth Advocate. The Office of Child and Youth Advocate has issued – and you talked about recommendations and what they've said and so on – a total of 179 recommendations specific to CSSD. Of these 179, 79 are implemented, 20 per cent are partially implemented and 1 per cent are not considered as already implemented.

The four recommendations outlined by the *A Long Wait for Change* are included in these statistics. CSSD is responsible for leading these recommendations in

collaboration with the Office of Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation. There are 10 investigative reports released with recommendations for the department, which have outstanding recommendations in the most recent status update.

C. PARDY: Okay. Thank you.

When was the last legislative review of the legislation in your department. I say the Adult Protection Act, I know we had that one but it was prior to 2019, unless I missed it.

CHAIR: Tracy English.

T. ENGLISH: The Adult Protection Act was last reviewed in 2022, the Adoption Act was last reviewed in 2022 and the *Children, Youth and Families Act* is actually under statutory review right now.

C. PARDY: Okay. When was the last time that one was amended?

T. ENGLISH: It's a five-year review period, so it would have been five years prior to this.

C. PARDY: Okay. We're on the cycle now?

T. ENGLISH: Yes.

C. PARDY: Good. Thank you very much.

Minister, would you agree if someone made the comment that in today's society we're seeing a spike in drug usage, drug traffic and domestic violence? From your position in your department, would you agree with that narrative?

P. PIKE: I don't have the stats here. I can get them for you.

C. PARDY: No, you don't need the stats. I'm just wondering if you would think that that was the case, because that would be part of a problem that we would have with the complexity of the children that we serve

and where we find ourselves and the hardships that the department may face.

P. PIKE: I'd like to answer your question but I don't have the data to support, if that's okay.

C. PARDY: No, that's fine.

P. PIKE: If we have data that you want, we'll certainly get it for you.

C. PARDY: The CBC article stated that the cost for one of the children that would be in these homes would be \$400,000 each. Would that be correct?

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: It varies.

The cost, depending on the complexity of needs and what's required – I don't know specifically what they were quoting – an individualized living arrangement would certainly be in that type of ballpark of cost.

C. PARDY: Most of those group homes would be via private companies? We do not have ownership of a group home do we, as a province?

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: There are not-for-profits and also private operating those facilities.

C. PARDY: Is it possible to know how many of these particular youths are involved with the justice system, as a rough percentage?

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: Are you referring to the children that are in care or just in the corrections program.

C. PARDY: I was just thinking now in the corrections, the group home.

CHAIR: Tracy English.

T. ENGLISH: As of September 2024, there were 99 youth involved in the Community Youth Corrections program and 40 involved in extrajudicial sanctions.

They wouldn't necessarily be in group homes or in – like, that's the number of kids who are involved in youth corrections.

C. PARDY: Would you mind repeating those numbers? I apologize on that.

T. ENGLISH: Sure. No, that's okay.

It's 99 involved in Community Youth Corrections and 40 in extrajudicial sanctions, for a total of 139.

C. PARDY: Okay. Thank you.

You had mentioned about the recommendations that were accepted, things that we've moved on or we checked it off that we have got it, and you had mentioned one of the recommendations that were in the Auditor General's report of May 2024 that was listed as achieved. "The department should consider reassessing kinship homes that were approved under a previous Child Welfare Allowance Program."

That is what you're doing now, isn't it?

P. PIKE: Correct.

C. PARDY: That's what we're looking at.

This one here, and just a couple of them, "The department's social workers should visit with children In-Care and placement resources once a month in accordance with the Protection and In-Care Policy and Procedure Manual. The results of these visits should be documented in a timely manner."

P. PIKE: That's a requirement.

C. PARDY: That's a requirement.

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: Even with the shortage of social workers we're still achieving that within a month?

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: And the Protection and In Care Policy and Procedure Manual, that's constantly being reviewed?

P. PIKE: Yes, for sure.

C. PARDY: How many families receive the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit? You can get that to me if you haven't got it now.

P. PIKE: That's a Finance question because they administer that, but we can get it.

C. PARDY: Okay.

I'd also like, Minister, if possible, the Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement.

P. PIKE: There are 500 families receiving that now.

C. PARDY: The 500 families, is that the Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement?

P. PIKE: Correct.

C. PARDY: Okay, 500.

One last one in this section. I've heard from a lot of school officials that sometimes under the confidentiality, they're not quite familiar with the children that would be in care or come to their schools that are under the care of a social worker or working with a social worker. I understand you've got limitations in doing that. But I got to believe sometimes when I walk away that it is not the best care for the child if there's not collaboration between the guidance counsellor at the school of which the child is attending and the social worker.

I know that might be a fine line in between, but from reports I've heard is that lots of times they come in and they know that something was up with the child, but they're not informed what is up. Why they, on a need's basis, would be someone is making a determination that sometimes they can intervene as a guidance counsellor, as a school, to bring support to the child or to the issue that would be at hand. I don't know where the policy is on that. Maybe someone can speak to what that policy would be.

P. PIKE: I know where you're coming from, but this is part of our ongoing work. We've had a lot of discussions about this and it's part of our ongoing work between Education, CSSD, Health and Community Services and so on. It's important, and we're starting to see more information sharing and that's what we're working towards.

So that would hopefully take care of what you're talking about, because I know, I've been there in my previous life. I know what it needs, and information sharing is certainly something that's very important. Like I say, it's something that we've initiated, we've started and it's working quite well, or it's beginning to work quite well, I should say.

C. PARDY: Thank you.

Have you made representation to anybody to look at the thresholds for the Child Benefit? It's been the same for years and we know where it is. I'm fully respectful of everything costs money and there are only so many resources, I know that. I'm just wondering, I know some people are being missed with such a low threshold as what we have.

P. PIKE: In my current role as Minister of CSSD and responsible for other areas as well, we get a lot of questions about thresholds. It's something that I'm seeing more and more, especially when I go to a lot of seniors' events, but again all our thresholds are now under review, with a

hope to making some changes. As you know they're required, they're needed and it's not a week goes by that I don't get a question on thresholds. It's something that we are taking very seriously and working on.

C. PARDY: I think that will conclude this section, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: I will now ask the Clerk to recall the subheading.

CLERK: 2.1.01, Child and Youth Services.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01, Child and Youth Services, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 2.1.01 carried.

CHAIR: Being 4:22, we probably should take a few minutes break. We are halfway through.

Recess

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): Okay, we shall resume.

I will ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.1.03 inclusive, Policy and Programs.

CHAIR: 3.1.01 to 3.1.03 inclusive, Policy and Programs.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I'd like to just ask some general questions. This would be under the Disability Policy Office, 3.1.02, but these are some general questions. First of all, with respect to the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board, I just want to ask a few questions about that, if I may.

Right now, could you just please describe the composition of the board?

CHAIR: Tracy English.

T. ENGLISH: I don't have the numbers in front of me right now as to how we've composed the board. We have done some active recruitment for additional members, but the board did meet four times in 2024-25, as required by the legislation. I think when we were here last year, we talked about how we were down a chair and a vice-chair and our meetings had kind of stalled a bit as a result of that.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Yes.

T. ENGLISH: We're now back up to the point where we've had our full complement at meetings. We've also constituted our accessibility standards committees and they've met six times so far.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay, thank you.

If I recall from questions I asked last year, the board had met four times. I believe it was twice in person and twice virtually. You're saying that this past year, they've met four times as well, pursuant to what is required under the act. Is that right?

T. ENGLISH: Yes, that's correct.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay, thank you.

You also mentioned with respect to the chair and the vice-chair last year, you were down a chair and vice-chair and that you

were recruiting. Is there now a chair and a vice-chair of the board?

T. ENGLISH: I can answer that, Minister.

P. PIKE: Yes.

T. ENGLISH: There is currently a vice-chair of the board and we're in the process of appointing our chair. The vice-chair can act on the chair's behalf.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay.

Could you just explain again how many are on the board?

T. ENGLISH: I don't have a number in front of me, but I can get it –

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay, if you could just provide it.

T. ENGLISH: It's on the Independent Appointments Commission's website. I don't have the numbers right in front of me.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Perfect.

Just with respect to the board, as the minister in his opening comments had indicated, the *Accessibility Act* had come into force or became law December of 2021. As well, the board was established then, I believe you stated it was in December of 2022. I want to ask about the standards because I know that currently the board was basically mandated to create standards. From what I heard in Estimates last year, there were two standards that were established, but are there any draft standards?

I am just questioning what has actually been produced as a result in terms of the standards. What can we actually see? You're saying that there have been a number of meetings in the past year, four meetings, so what has been produced, in concrete terms, in terms of the standards that were mentioned last year? I believe

those standards were in regard to customer service and communications.

P. PIKE: I remember being at the last meeting and I usually drop in prior to the meetings to have a chat with the board. They don't have their draft standards ready, but they're working on them. We will have more, I think, at the next meeting or the following meeting, we should be able to provide information on those. The two that we were working on, I'm very pleased with the progress made there, but again, the draft standards will be available soon.

I can't remember all of the discussion on that, but I do know that the committee is quite motivated and enthusiastic about getting moving on the other standards. I'm anticipating at the next meeting we might be able to have something then.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

The reason I'm asking is because, as the minister, you have certain expectations of the board. Although they set their own agenda and they are an independent board of government, you have asked them to establish priority standards, which they haven't actually drafted them yet. I want to just find out if this is a correct assumption to make, that there cannot be any recommendations to the minister until that first step of establishing the standards has been done? Is that correct?

P. PIKE: Yes.

According to the *Accessibility Act*, the public bodies are required to prepare an accessibility plan that will address the identification and removal barriers in all policies, programs and services. Children, Seniors and Social Development is currently finalizing the first annual report for the 2024 indicators which will be released in the coming weeks and we'll have some things included in that.

The Disability Policy Office, in my department, we offer education and guidance to public bodies in the development and implementation of these plans. That's important that I mentioned that now because a lot of the accessibility plans have to comply with the *Accessibility Act* and our Policy Office does a good job in making sure that they are following all of the recommendations that we have.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Minister.

I just want to make one comment, though, about what I referenced with respect to the fact that there are no draft standards yet, therefore, we're not seeing any recommendations. I, as critic for Persons with Disabilities, am hearing from people in the disability community who are concerned that we have an act which came into force years ago, several years ago, yet we don't have draft standards. I'm being questioned and asked about whether the act right now is meaningless in a sense in that it's a paper tiger.

I just wonder what your comments would be about that description or that characterization.

P. PIKE: The board are doing research and developing the standards. We have our first five-year review coming up on that in 2026. We're hoping to be much further along by then. As you know, we have had some difficulties with the attendance and with the board make-up itself but right now, I think, we're on track and it will be something that we'll be looking to make sure that we move this along, especially in the coming months.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Minister.

Now, the other area I would like to ask you a question on is with respect to the disabilities advocate. Has any work been done on the creation of a disabilities advocate?

P. PIKE: Yes.

In 2023, as you know, Justice Robert Fowler completed his review of the statutory offices and, in that review, he recommended the focus of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate include persons with disabilities. We haven't made any decision, but we're taking this recommendation under consideration prior to any decisions being made with respect to the advocate positions.

I believe it's important here to know that community organizations and groups also play an important role in the advocacy in the province. Staff have an ongoing engagement with these disability organizations and we welcome the opportunities to discuss any issues that are important.

The Accessibility Standards Advisory Board provides advice and recommendations to my department regarding accessibility standards and practices. We think that there are a number of things that we need to do to support the community of and for persons with disabilities.

So I guess the best I can say now is that it is under review. We don't have any decision made on how we're going there, but we are talking to people in the community of and for persons with disabilities.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Minister.

Now, when I look at the history, ever since I've been the persons with disabilities critic, or shadow minister, I've asked the question with respect to the disability advocate. For example, back in April of 2023, when I asked about the disability advocate, I was told that things were on hold at that time. Then last year in April 2024, I asked about the disability advocate and the progress of that and, again, I was told that the government is currently reviewing the report – that was last year – and it was that review

that you were waiting, prior to any decisions that are going to be made with respect to the disability advocate, depended upon your review of the review of the statutory offices of the House of Assembly by Justice Fowler.

Now that was completed, Minister, in October of 2023. That was 21 months ago. The review has been going on since then. So I think it's reasonable to ask the question on behalf of the disability community. You know, this report, you've had it in your hands for 21 months and the people would like to know when they can expect a decision with respect to the disability advocate.

P. PIKE: I guess to answer your question, I've been part of many discussions, especially in the last few months. It's something that we've highlighted as something we need to give priority to, and we are. Again, we have some work left to do with that, but we hope to have something moving soon.

And I get it. I get what you're saying, too, because I get it, too. We've had discussions with staff. Alan and I have had numerous discussions on it. The recommendations that were put forward by Justice Fowler on that can be problematic in a number of ways and it can work in a number of ways. We're just trying to do the right thing here and make the right decision.

Again, I will say to you that we will get on this, we will stay on this until we get something done and we'll try to do that soon because, like you, I'm hearing it all the time.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Minister.

With respect to the disability community, there's another issue with respect to the disability advocate that I'm hearing and it's clear that they are not content with having the Seniors' Advocate office combined or merged with persons with disabilities, a

disability advocate. That was what is proposed by the Structural Review of the Statutory Offices of the House of Assembly. That has been proposed and there is concern about that, combining the disability advocate with the Seniors' Advocate office will detrimentally affect persons with disabilities and the important unique issues that persons with disabilities face. So I would like to know, Minister, what is your response to that?

P. PIKE: I guess the best response I can make at this point in time is that we are listening and we're listening to all view points around this, we're also talking to various groups and so on. I can tell you that, personally, as minister, I've been trying to move this file along as quick as I can. We're hoping to be able to get something out as soon as possible.

I understand the frustration. I talked to persons with disabilities on this. I've talked to seniors about this as well, on that recommendation, and I think it's time that we looked at it very seriously. I'll do my utmost to move this along as quickly as possible and get this done, one way or the other.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Minister.

So the time issue and the necessity of dealing with this soon is good to hear that you recognize that and, as well, you recognize and acknowledge the fears and concerns of persons with disabilities with respect –

P. PIKE: We're taking all that into account.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – with the merging of these two important, very important, advocates, thank you.

I'll move now to Salaries, can you, Minister, outline what positions were vacant to give us salary savings?

P. PIKE: Which line was that?

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: That was under 3.1.02, Disability Policy Office, 01 Salaries.

P. PIKE: Okay.

Savings from the '24-'25 budget is as a result of vacancies during the year in the department program coordinator position.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay, thank you.

This is the final area that I'd like to explore and that's with respect to Grants and Subsidies. I wonder if you could give a list of where this funding went and last year more than budgeted was given out. Why hasn't the number for this year been increased to reflect that? That's under Grants and Subsidies.

If you could give a list of where this funding went, first of all, and then explain last year there had been more than budgeted was given out and why hasn't the number for this year been increased to reflect that? Those are my questions.

P. PIKE: I'll answer both.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

P. PIKE: I'll keep them separate.

First of all, grants programs, accessible vehicle grants for '24-'25 was the \$520,000. In the budget, it was \$350,000 and we spent \$520,000, which is a good thing. Accessible taxi grants, we budgeted \$50,000 and we spent \$50,000. Inclusion grants, \$75,000; we spent \$75,000. Capacity grants, \$250,000; we spent \$250,000. Coalition of Persons with Disabilities core funds, we budgeted \$34,000 and we spent \$34,000. Paratransit grant, \$94,500; we spent \$94,500. Summer Camp Inclusion Grants, \$50,000; we spent \$50,000.

The \$170,000 increase in '24-'25 was a result of increased need in Accessible Vehicle Funding grants, with savings reallocated from Seniors and Aging Division to cover that.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay. Thank you, Minister. That's very helpful. I do have one final question. When I look at the handout in the communications package in *Budget 2025*, there's a listing under accessible and inclusive communities of the funding investments that were made. There's a reference to, for this year *Budget 2025*, \$300,000 for the Community Transportation Program, which has funded more than 20 projects. Now when I look at last year, I see that there's \$325,000 for inclusion grants, which were \$75,000 inclusion grants, and capacity grants, \$250,000. That's \$325,000.

I just want to make sure I understand this. Is that what we're talking about when we look at the Community Transportation Program that was referenced in your handout, is that the same thing as the \$325,000 last year in the budget for inclusion grants of \$75,000 and capacity grants, \$250,000, that comes to a total of \$325,000?

Are you following me? I want that clarified because it's not clear to me.

P. PIKE: Yes, I know where it comes from on that. The Newfoundland and Labrador community transportation grants, we budgeted \$300,000, but we only spent \$130,000. That was application-based. So that's the number of applications we had.

We've been pushing this a lot. We're trying to get more information out, because we believe in the Newfoundland and Labrador Community Transportation Program and the fact that we can offer grants to communities, to build transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities in the communities. It was through this grant as well we provided monies for studies –

OFFICIAL: That's accessibility.

P. PIKE: Yes, the accessibility grant. So we also gave out monies – not under this one, but under accessibility grants for communities to get together, to see if they could probably support busing in their community, or –

OFFICIAL: That's the right grant.

P. PIKE: I'm sorry, that is the right grant. So we gave out to a number of communities last year, \$10,000 to study that. It's something that we're promoting when we go out and speak. I always end with this particular program because it's so important that – what we're trying to do is we provide a grant for them to do the study, to hire someone to do the study or whatever they want, and they come back with whatever is needed to carry this out. If they town bought in, if the Lions Club bought in, and things like that, and see if we could support transportation in that community.

So it's gaining momentum, as we go, we're getting more inquiries now and I expect a bigger uptake this year. Is that okay?

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Yes, that was going to be my final question, are you seeing an uptake in applications?

P. PIKE: We're hoping. I think we will because the 50-plus clubs that I speak to, and seniors' groups, we're getting a fair number of inquiries about that. The thing is, if you're talking to, say, a local group, it's important that the town councils – probably one of the councils in those towns are one of the biggest supporters that they can get. Because even though the community will have a brand new bus and it will be run by volunteers and so on, and it will be an accessible bus with ramps attached and so on, for tire changes and oil changes and things like that, if the towns are buying in, a lot of towns have their own garages, their own maintenance people and so on, and that's what we're finding works the best.

As a matter of fact, Holyrood is in the process of doing an assessment.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Excellent; thank you.

That completes my questions.

Thank you very much, Minister, and the staff.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions –

C. PARDY: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you have a question?

C. PARDY: Yes.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Bonavista

C. PARDY: We're looking at now 3.1.01, Seniors and Aging. The Health Accord stated that Newfoundland and Labrador is one of the few provinces without legislation specific to long-term care or care of the elderly. A modern legislative framework, act and regulations are also needed for home care, supportive housing for seniors, personal care homes and long-term care facilities. Can I have an update on the status of that legislation?

P. PIKE: I'd love to be able to provide it, but that's covered under the Department of Health. But I hear you. It's the Department of Health.

C. PARDY: Even though we're dealing with the clientele that you've got a vested interest in, but that would come under Health?

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: Okay.

Looking at the child welfare, you mentioned that you're going to be looking at the independent living or the group homes, the foster care, and I think you might have

mentioned the kinship a little closer with the foster care. I'm not sure if you're looking at the family justice system or not, and I know that's the Department of Justice, but the Department of Justice are dealing with the children in care.

The question would be is that I've had two lawyers in the area speak out, reference out on what they looked at to be concerning elements about the children and the family justice system. In fact, I'll just give you a little quote from one of these lawyers who got over 10 years in the family court system. They said: The entire family law system needs to be torn down and rebuilt because it works for nobody.

I have constituents who come to my office, I've been directly involved with some of which children have been involved with, and I tend to agree with the lawyer, that would be.

I'm just wondering if you, as a department, representing the children and youth and their welfare, has there been concerns brought to your attention about the family justice system that you may be in consultation with the Department of Justice on?

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: I just want to make sure that we're clear, first of all, that the family justice system and the youth that are involved with the justice system may not necessarily be under the purview of CSSD. It's only children that would be in care, if they're involved with the justice system, that CSSD would have involvement.

C. PARDY: Yes.

A. DOODY: We're the safety net for families and children when it comes to that perspective.

The other item is that there's already a working group that meets with Justice on a

regular basis about items dealing with the court and how to expedite things through the Family Court, but, again, that purview strictly resides within the Department of Justice and Public Safety.

C. PARDY: My point in raising that, if I harken back to before when we look at the identification and the growing list of complex cases, and I think we probably both agreed that we need to get in on the ground floor, preventative, get in early. If we know that any situations out there with children in Newfoundland and Labrador that are involved that you know there are pitfalls as a result of it, then that's probably where we should get involved before it comes in to you, to know that we're being preventative.

I know it can be another department. All I'm saying is that they're all our children and if we know that there are situations brought in this system that need to be tweaked, then I would think that even though it might not come under your bailiwick, then you've certainly got a vested interest to try to curb that it certainly doesn't come to your department.

A. DOODY: As the minister had stated earlier, there is ongoing effort between the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development; Department of Health and Community Services; and Department of Education on trying to ensure that there's a horizontal look across at how we have intervention at the earliest point in time for families and children.

C. PARDY: Good.

Thank you.

P. PIKE: Just to add to that, too.

In child protection, social workers become involved at a point when there's a need, the children can't be kept in the home and they're not safe in their own home, that's when we become involved in those situations.

When we become involved in families, as you know, our main focus is to keep the child in the home with the provision of services and supports that we can provide through our social workers. That's our main focus here.

C. PARDY: Again, just on the last point. I know that we're looking at the well-being and the mental health of those children and that, we want to make sure that their path has as linear to a healthy adulthood as possible. If we find that all of a sudden we've got separation of a parent that goes on for a year and a half, as a result of a justice system that don't enact court orders, then I would think it's quite possible that child may develop some behaviours, manifest itself, that could be problematic whether for the K-to-12 system, which I know this, even though the children attend, or for your department. That's the only point on that.

P. PIKE: Just one other thing, too.

As of September 30, 2024, we had 2,175 families receiving supports under our protective intervention program.

C. PARDY: 2,500?

P. PIKE: 2,175 families, it's quite large.

C. PARDY: On the foster care program, I just bring this to you attention now from cases that I'm familiar with that's all.

I reached out to the department and I think one of your officials reached out to the foster mom and had a conversation. The foster mom had some concerns about the regulations that would be within the care. I understand that there are a variety and there are reasons for everything, but I know that even after the conversation that she had, that she was very appreciative of, she had some concerns about the foster care program and the children. The genesis of which she states, of which the conversation was, was that the bottom line/policy is that

family connection is best regardless of what havoc it leaves in its wake. In other words, the family connections have to be maintained regardless of whether it's a court order that doesn't provide any – for one of the parents with the child, there's no custody, the courts ruled against it, but still there had to be the linkages, even when the children didn't wish it, but it had to occur. I think she looked at the turmoil within the children and just questioned as to what the regulations and the policy would be. That's beyond me, I'm no social worker. I just know this lady in particular and she's a class act. I respect what her viewpoints would be and the concern.

If I may before you address, I know that one became public recently and I won't mention any – the recent public was another foster mother, which had stated publicly that she was a working mom and the understanding was that the children who were in her care, there was going to be remuneration and support with getting the kids to and from the school and to and from various appointments that they would have because, apparently, she had stated that she had used up all of her sick leave and everything was used up.

Eventually, the children were removed from that foster care and were put into one of the homes that we referenced, that we were talking about, the group homes. Tragedy struck one of them. One remains there. You're probably familiar with the situation that I had heard when I was driving. That was concerning.

I know that you can't speak to particular cases. I know that because there are other variables that I'm not aware of and the listeners are not aware of that we hear. I respect that. The only thing, when I go back to my resident, the foster mom in my district, I can vouch for her. I know that the situation she said and what she explained, what was being impressed upon and what had to happen, I, without any background, would disagree with it as well.

If the family connection got to occur without any prohibitions or any restrictions, that is concerning. Keep in mind, we had a guidance counsellor in our school and the guidance counsellor would listen to the child and understand what their concerns were and we would try to mitigate those concerns as the school system. That's the way it worked.

According to the foster mom, that's not what works and she contends that the children don't have a voice and she doesn't know when that will occur that the children would have a voice.

That's a lot to digest. I just throw that out and I know you're doing an analysis of the foster care. I do believe that is a good positive direction having more foster homes for the children that we want to provide the ultimate care for. I do go back to the point that early intervention is sometimes the best strategy and resourcing it can be problematic. I totally understand, but early intervention, I think, is very significant.

A. DOODY: So, first of all, thank you for your comments. As you said, there's no way to speak specifics of any cases. The literature will tell you and the clinicians will tell you that connection with family is really important to the development of the child.

Every case is different, depending, but having that linkage back to family actually helps prolong people staying in foster homes until parents are able to or keeps adoptive families together, the literature all demonstrates that. This is not a Newfoundland and Labrador standard. This is a national standard, and I would say, in some cases, an international standard.

The one thing, this is what the social workers' primary role is: the assessment of where children stay. So it is a clinical decision on whether a child needs to be removed from a parent or from a foster home and replaced in a place that deems them to be safe.

What you need to unpack around all of that is that some children have lots of complexities. You put all the wraparound supports you can around them and, unfortunately, sometimes you're still going to have tragedy. The system is designed that way. I'm not a social worker either, but I've been responsible for the last three years, and they're making judgment calls based on their clinical expertise.

C. PARDY: Yeah, fair. That's good.

Just the last point on that. That lady had mentioned that she had ran up her credit to the point there where she never had anymore room, waiting for CSSD to reimburse her on, I think, the travel. Again, can't talk about particular cases, and I would think that you're not aware of any lag in legitimate claims for reimbursing foster parents or foster homes.

I almost answered the question for you. But I just wondered if you're aware of this.

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: I mean, the reality is it's still – so this is one of the items that is actually under review within the department as well, is expedition of payments. The process now requires the person in the field or staff member in the office that's responsible for the area to – it ends up in the financial systems, comes in and gets reviewed.

So there may be times when there are delays. I don't want you to think that everything flows out as quickly as possible. These are not necessarily expenses that are covered under their block or base amount. But they are things that are extraordinary, so it has to be bought to the department's attention to be paid.

There may be delays, but those are things that our staff work diligently to get those paid at a period of time. I can't speak to that specific case that I'm not aware of.

C. PARDY: Thank you for that.

P. PIKE: We are working towards making sure that our payments get out in a timely manner.

C. PARDY: Yes.

I just wanted to ask one question for curiosity. Are you aware of the number of those with disabilities out in our population that were receiving the disability tax credit federally? Like, everything is based on someone having the disability tax credit. I'm just wondering of the department's knowledge of whether people out there have that disability tax credit – do you know the numbers?

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: Those numbers can be provided through the Department of Finance. What I can tell you is that when we did the analysis on the Disability Benefit for the province, I think, at the time, there was approximately 5,000 that would've been eligible for the benefit, because they already had a DTC.

What's important to note is that those that don't have income may not have applied for a DTC because they may not necessarily see the benefit of it. So we're expecting that there'll be more people come on. There's lots of education. ADM English's team and the Disability Policy Office have been running several sessions with the disability community. There's been lots of uptake on that and there are resources in place through the federal government to help process the DTC.

C. PARDY: I am not sure if the minister – Minister Abbott was there at one where we had Inclusion Canada NL. I attended that session; you had to head out for meetings. But one of the stats that was reported there was they looked at the figure that in Newfoundland and Labrador 65,000 would – that was the number that they had stated.

A portion of that number, I think they looked at 30 per cent.

P. PIKE: You're right, 31 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians identify as having a disability.

C. PARDY: As having a disability. Whether they would meet the criteria for the Disability Tax Credit, that is the thing.

The only thing I wonder –

P. PIKE: I've got to say this, too. When I was out in my district getting questions on this, I asked about the DTC and if anybody that had a disability had, in actual fact, applied for that. And yes, they have. They already had it. But there's still a fair bit of work to do and we're doing that diligently and we have people that are constantly on the phones helping.

C. PARDY: Yeah, it's an awareness as well that we need to do.

P. PIKE: It's awareness, yeah.

C. PARDY: Out of consciousness of time I'm tempted to ask, but I'm not. I'm going to move on from that section, Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

Seeing no further questions, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.1.03 inclusive, Policy and Programs.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.1.03 inclusive, Policy and Programs, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.1.03 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive, Prevention and Early Intervention.

CHAIR: 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive, Prevention and Early Intervention.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: 4.1.01, Salaries: Can you provide information about which positions have been vacant and for how long? That's given the salary savings of \$800,000.

P. PIKE: The savings from the '24-'25 budget was as a result of vacancies in client services' officers positions during the year. What we're saying is that it's the turnover of people moving all the time and that is what is causing this.

C. PARDY: What is the current outstanding balance of overpayments due to income support?

P. PIKE: The answer to that question, from the latest stats we have, is \$124 million.

C. PARDY: In the AG's report, in 2024, they had the accounts receivable, income support overpayments were \$111.6 million in that report and that was a 64 per cent increase since 2019. What – ?

P. PIKE: I'll ask Alan to respond to that.

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Doody.

A. DOODY: Yes, I apologize.

You'll notice there's been a trend of high increase of overpayments being reflected in the income support overpayments budget, but the majority of that is a correlation to CERB overpayments – folks that received income support and CERB. Because we

received that data, we've been reconciling with the federal data and that data has all been reconciled now up to March 31, 2025. We're expecting, in the next fiscal year, you'll see us return to the increase and overpayments based on historical data which is more in the time frame of \$1 million to \$2 million a year, so not this big increase but that's what that's reflecting.

C. PARDY: Are you sure it's all reconciled up to that time?

A. DOODY: Yes, March 31, 2025, the staff just finished all the reconciliation from all the data that was provided by the federal government for CERB. So, on the next year, we should start to see that the increase is not so significant as we've seen over the last few years.

C. PARDY: Okay.

But that's not to say that we don't have income support clients out there that still owe money. Right?

A. DOODY: Absolutely. So if they are income support clients, we don't take any more than 5 per cent of their income support. They are not cut off from income support or anything like that. We're still providing. Our rule is we take 5 per cent of that back.

C. PARDY: Yes.

Needless to say, they really can't afford the 5 per cent. Not in a lot of the cases that I'm familiar with, but I know they're going to be paying it for the next several decades, some of them.

A. DOODY: Yes.

C. PARDY: How many households received income support last year?

P. PIKE: In '24-'25, the average monthly caseload was 20,942 households. The caseload was comprised of 29,213

individuals: 22,192 adults and 7,021 children under the age of 18.

C. PARDY: Twenty-seven thousand?

P. PIKE: No, 7,021.

C. PARDY: Okay.

Is that trending up from last year? Is it up slightly from last year?

P. PIKE: I think the individual caseloads may be up a smidgen, but not a whole lot.

C. PARDY: Okay.

In the Allowances and Assistance of 4.1.02, Income Support Program Policy, a breakdown of the \$219.6 million by program – would that be listed? I just wondered if there is anything here in addition to the income support.

P. PIKE: So what would be –?

C. PARDY: That's the Allowances and Assistance.

P. PIKE: Allowance and Assistance, basically what we have is savings from the '24-'25 budget is due to the timing in the rollout of new benefits during the year.

C. PARDY: The timing in the rollout of new benefits.

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: The Revenue – Provincial, the \$4.2 million?

P. PIKE: What we're recovering from individuals who owe money is \$4.4 million.

C. PARDY: Who owes the money?

P. PIKE: Who owes –?

C. PARDY: You said it was money that was owing to the province?

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: From? I'm sorry if I missed that.

P. PIKE: It's from overpayments.

C. PARDY: From overpayments, that's what was collected back in, collected through CRA – would it be a lot of that from the CERB?

A. DOODY: It's a mix. Clients themselves and other sources that may be deducting.

C. PARDY: All right, fair enough.

4.1.03, Social and Economic Well-Being: We know that many advocacy groups and NGOs have established a need for multicore funding. Has this occurred? If it hasn't, are we headed in that direction soon?

P. PIKE: The Department of Finance is now working with all government departments that have grant funding for community organizations and I think they're determining a process for applications for core funding.

So it is being looked at, and I know where that's coming from and the questions around that. They are looking, which is great.

C. PARDY: In Salaries here, I'm not sure what positions were vacant or a position was vacant to give the savings of \$126,000.

P. PIKE: Savings from the '24-'25 budget due to vacancies in program and policy developmental specialist and a supervisor of youth program positions.

C. PARDY: Are these being fulfilled now?

P. PIKE: Yes, we are in the process of recruiting now.

C. PARDY: Okay.

Finally, the Grants and Subsidies, we have \$3.6 million. Can you give an overview of where this money goes?

P. PIKE: I can, yes.

Community Youth Network, \$2,862,200; Community Sector Council, \$206,200; Grants to Youth Organizations, \$451,500; additional unallocated grant funding is \$116,000. So our total is \$3,636,700.

C. PARDY: Just wondering if your department – and maybe another department, but I know that you got invested interest in it – on the food bank usage, is it staying constant, increasing, decreasing? Will you have any data related to food bank?

P. PIKE: We don't have the data.

C. PARDY: Anyway, that will conclude my questions, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

Seeing no further questions, I'll ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive, Prevention and Early Intervention.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive, Prevention and Early Intervention, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.1.03 carried.

CLERK: The total for the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

CHAIR: Shall the total for the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development carried without amendment.

CHAIR: The next meeting will be at the call of the Chair.

The meeting is now adjourned.

Thank you.

On motion, the Committee adjourned sine die.