



**PROVINCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

First Session
Fifty-First General Assembly

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

May 4, 2026 - Issue 2

Department of Social Supports and Well-Being
NL Housing Corporation

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Assembly
Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Social Supports and Well-Being
NL Housing Corporation

Chair: Joseph Power, MHA

Members: Paul Pike, MHA
Jim McKenna, MHA
Jeff Dwyer, MHA
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA
Hal Cormier, MHA
James Dinn, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Bobbi Russell

Appearing:

Department of Social Supports and Well-Being

Hon. Joedy Wall, Minister
Tracy King, Deputy Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being
Sara Dow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Performance Improvement
Mark Griffin, Assistant Deputy Minister, Child and Youth Services
Lori Rose, Assistant Deputy Minister, Prevention and Early Intervention
Robert Hodder, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Programs
Tanya Noseworthy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Healthy Communities
Barb Hudson, Executive Assistant to the Minister
Gayle St. Croix, Communications Director

NL Housing Corporation

Hon. Joedy Wall, Minister
Mike Tizzard, Chief Executive Officer, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation
Krista Connolly, Executive Director, Financial and Corporate Services
Melissa Penney, Director of Finance
Joe Mercer, Executive Director, Regional Operations and Engineering
Melanie Thomas, Executive Director, Programs, Community Partnerships and Homelessness
Mark Budgell, Director of Communications
Barb Hudson, Executive Assistant to the Minister
Tina Neary, Ministerial Liaison

Also Present

Keith White, MHA
Angelica Hill, Official Opposition Caucus
Emma Kannenberg, Official Opposition Caucus
Scott Fleming, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Keith White, MHA for St. John's West, substituted for Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

The Committee met at 6 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Power): Good evening, we'll call the meeting to order.

Substitutes – we have MHA White, St. John's West, substituting for MHA for Burin - Grand Bank, Paul Pike. Every hour and a half, we'll take a 10-minute break, if that's good with everybody.

Just some reminders for Members and department officials, each time you speak, just put up your hand, wait for the tally light to come on, on your desk, say your name and position each time you speak for transcription purposes. Water coolers are located in each corner, if anybody wants any water.

I now ask the Committee Members, substitutions and caucus employees to introduce themselves, starting in the front row.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Member of the House of Assembly for the District of Placentia - St. Mary's.

A. HILL: Angelica Hill, Director of Research, Official Opposition office.

K. WHITE: Keith White, MHA for St. John's West.

E. KANNENBERG: Emma Kannenberg, Research Assistant, Official Opposition.

J. DINN: James Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

S. FLEMING: Scott Fleming, Policy Analyst, Third Party caucus office.

CHAIR: I now ask that the department officials introduce themselves, starting with the minister.

J. WALL: Minister Joedy Wall, Social Supports and Well-Being, MHA for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

T. KING: Tracy King, Deputy Minister, Department of Social Supports and Well-Being.

S. DOW: Sara Dow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Performance Improvement with Social Supports and Well-Being.

T. NOSEWORTHY: Tanya Noseworthy, ADM, Healthy Communities, Social Supports and Well-Being.

R. HODDER: Hello, Robert Hodder, Assistant Deputy Minister for Policy and Programs.

L. ROSE: Lori Rose, Assistant Deputy Minister of Prevention and Early Intervention with the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being.

M. GRIFFIN: Mark Griffin, Assistant Deputy Minister of Child and Youth Services for the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being.

B. HUDSON: Barb Hudson, Executive Assistant to the minister.

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

CHAIR: Thank you.

Before we start with the Estimate review process, the Committee now will consider the minutes of a previous meeting of April 29.

If there are no errors or omissions, I ask for a mover for those minutes.

H. CORMIER: So moved.

CHAIR: The minutes are moved by the Member for St. George's - Humber.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: We will now proceed with the Estimate review process.

CLERK (Russell): We need to introduce the three Members in the back row as well. I don't think they got caught up in the introduction.

CHAIR: Okay.

H. CORMIER: Hal Cormier, MHA for the scenic District of St. George's - Humber.

J. MCKENNA: Jim McKenna, MHA for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

J. DWYER: Jeff Dwyer, MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue.

CHAIR: We will now proceed with the Estimate review process.

Once I ask the Clerk to call the first subgrouping for this head of expenditure, I will proceed to recognize the minister, who will get 15 minutes for opening remarks. Then I will proceed to introduce the first responder/questioner from the Committee who will get 15 minutes in the first round.

After the first round of questions, we will proceed in rounds of 10 minutes each, alternating between Members of the Committee.

I'll now ask the Clerk to call the first 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?

I now recognize the minister for opening remarks.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair, and good evening, everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here tonight and to answer your questions about the Estimates of the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being. I'm pleased to be here to talk about the work of the department and how we're using our resources to support the people across Newfoundland and Labrador.

My department has a broad mandate. There are over 1,000 employees delivering essential services, including income support, child and youth services, disability policy, poverty reduction and community well-being. At the heart of all of this work is a simple goal: supporting people when they need it most and helping to build healthier, more inclusive communities.

Since stepping into this role, I've met with more than 60 community organizations and individuals with lived experience, and those conversations have reinforced that we do our best when we work with them, when we listen and when we learn.

I'll start with the disability policy, which is a key focus for our government and delivered through strong partnerships with the disability community and our provincial and federal partners. I was proud with the Premier's leadership to second the bill to create the Office of the Disability Advocate as a statutory office of this House of Assembly.

The disability community was clear about the need for an independent advocate, and working alongside them, we delivered on that commitment. I thank the community for their continued advocacy and partnership.

Alongside policy work, the department continues to support people with disabilities through targeted programs and grants. We continue to back this work with targeted investments including \$150,000 to expand the Summer Camp Inclusion Grant and increased annual funding of \$50,000 for the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities.

Turning now to poverty reduction and Income Support. Many individuals and families continue to feel the strain of high costs and economic uncertainty. Through Income Support, we helped more than 21,000 households last year while supporting pathways to employment and self-reliance for those who are able to work.

We invest \$3.5 million annually in youth and community organizations that provide prevention and early supports right across our province. Work is also underway toward a new 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy with a focus on long-term solutions and improving affordability for low-income families.

We intend to bring Newfoundland and Labrador's poverty rates to the lowest in the country. We do see preventing poverty as a shared priority across government, supported by a Ministerial Committee and a dedicated Healthy Communities Branch within Social Supports and Well-Being.

In Child and Youth Services, our focus is on improving outcomes for children and youth through permanency, family-based care, prevention and a strong supported workforce. In 2026-2027, we will double the number of children adopted so that they can grow up with permanent families in stable and loving homes. Whenever possible, our goal is to keep children safely in their own homes, but when that is not possible, they

live with extended family or kin with permanency and stability as the priority.

Foster parents and kinship carers provide extraordinary care to children and youth during very difficult times in their lives. As part of *Budget 2026*, we are investing \$8 million to enhance financial support to foster families and kinship care providers, supporting the people who open their homes and their hearts to children and youth. This is the first increase in these rates since 2012.

The department continues to work in partnership with Indigenous governments and organizations, alongside the federal government to improve outcomes for Indigenous children and youth. We continue to work with Indigenous governments and organizations, recognizing progress while remaining committed to reconciliation through listening and through partnership.

We recognize the critical role that social workers play in supporting families and protecting vulnerable children. Our government is committed to ensuring that our social workers are supported and that children, youth and families receive high-quality services.

In closing, the Estimates before you reflect the broad and important work of the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being. Whether it's supporting people with the disabilities, assisting families facing financial hardship or caring for vulnerable children and youth, our focus remains on improving well-being and supporting communities right across our province.

I thank you for your attention and I look forward to the discussion ahead.

Thank you.

CHAIR: I now call on the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, 1.1.01, Salaries: Can you provide a breakdown for us of which positions would fall under this salary line?

J. WALL: The positions under 1.1.01 would include myself, as minister; the executive assistant; and the secretary to the minister.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

I note that there is no increase in the budgeted amount under Salaries; however, I do know that the salary of one of the staff is higher than in previous years. The executive assistant's salary is higher than it was from the previous executive assistant but there is no increase in the salary lines.

J. WALL: I'm unaware of the former EA's salary.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

J. WALL: I'm just not aware of that. I didn't even ask that when I came into the department, so I wouldn't know what that would be.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: All right.

1.2.01, Executive Support: Are you able to provide a breakdown of the number of employees in the department, as well as the number of vacancies?

J. WALL: Yes, certainly.

Staffing for the entire department as of April 1, 2026, was 1,076 positions. There were 17 new hires in the year and those are new hires not from government already. We have 33 new staff hired from within government departments. We have 12 retirements; 40 staff have resigned as of April 1, 2026. We had two layoffs. These staff were hired in temporary positions but were offered jobs elsewhere in the department after they were laid off from those positions. There are 42 staff currently eligible for retirement. There are currently 23 contractual positions. Those are mostly

permanent staff that are taking on temporary contracts for various projects and, currently, we have 107 vacancies.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you.

Can you advise whether there has been any without cause terminations in the department this year?

J. WALL: No, no terminations without cause.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you.

Can you explain why you spent \$129,300 over budget on Salaries last year?

J. WALL: So \$129,300 was an increase in the '25-'26 budget due to unused leave payouts related to staff turnover, as well as a new assistant deputy minister that was added for the Healthy Communities Branch.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you.

There is \$60,200 increase in this year's budget compared with last year's but that is still less than the actual spent from last year. What is the reason for that?

J. WALL: \$60,200?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

J. WALL: That increase in the '26-'27 budget is for the new assistant deputy minister position that I just spoke of in the Healthy Communities Branch that's been added.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you.

All right, we'll move on, to 1.2.02. You underspent in the Salaries line by just over a million dollars compared with the budgeted amount. Can you explain the reason for that?

J. WALL: Certainly. So it's \$1,070,700, that was savings in the '25-'26 budget, as a

result of the information management positions, eight of those not moved to this activity as planned due to HR delay in finalizing the reorganization of the positions, as well as multiple vacancies throughout the year. That accounted for 25 vacancies. Those two made up the \$1,070,700.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: What were the eight positions you said?

J. WALL: Information management positions.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Why is there an increase in the Salaries budget of \$458,300 over last year?

J. WALL: We do have an increase of \$458,300 in the '26-'27 budget as a result of those eight regional information management positions.

They were located in the Child and Youth Services Branch to report to the provincial manager responsible for court disclosure. The reporting structure has just changed. They're still working in the regional offices.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

In the description in 1.2.02, it says training, and in the Budget Speech it was mentioned that there was a new foster parent training policy developed. Is that funded through this section?

J. WALL: Yes, those are salaries for the trainers.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: That is where this is funded?

J. WALL: Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Can you explain why you spent over double on Employee Benefits?

J. WALL: Employee Benefits, there was a \$170,000 increase in '25-'26 budget as a result of increased workers' compensation costs.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, okay.

J. WALL: The workers' compensation costs for the department are administered through this division, and that amount is the cost for 33 employees.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Purchased Services had a revised increase and the budget for this year has increased by \$26,000. Can you explain the revision and the increase?

J. WALL: Purchased Services, an increase of \$16,000.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: No, \$26,000.

J. WALL: Oh, I'm sorry. Purchased Services, my apologies.

Yes, \$26,000. The increase of that amount for the '25-'26 budget as a result of planned purchases of the Adobe redact software and an increase in storage fees for historical child protective files.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: That's it for that section.

Okay, that's it for me.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Some general questions: Would it possible to have an update on the work between the department and unions regarding recruitment and retention of social workers? What special incentives are being offered to students currently in the school of social work at Memorial?

J. WALL: I can speak to that, and then I'll hand it off.

With respect to the recruitment and retention, it's very important for us in the department. We have a lot of focus on it. We've increased the numbers of our front-line staff through recruitment and retention. We're optimizing existing resources and, of course, creating a better place to work.

We are providing incentives. One of the staff can certainly speak to the dollar figure, but with respect to the students, you said graduating student social workers?

J. DINN: Yeah, what special incentives are being offered to students currently in the School of Social Work at MUN?

J. WALL: So the graduating students from the School of Social Work – if I'm not mistaken, I can be corrected – we had approximately half the class apply for positions within the department. It is our intention to hire as many as we possibly can from this year's graduating class, not only to provide the work experience for those graduates, but also to have considerable input in the contribution to the department.

I'll turn it over to my deputy minister to speak to the particular announcement for recruitment and retention.

T. KING: For folks graduating or starting with us, we offer geographic-based signing and retention bonuses. They range between \$10,000 and \$50,000, depending on where they are located, where they are moving. Then, as well, enhanced Labrador benefits to attract and support social workers in Labrador with a travel bonus to cover flights to St. John's twice a year and department provided accommodations or housing allowance for staff that have their own, and that's up to \$12,000 annually.

J. DINN: Thank you.

What has been then the take-up? I have a few questions just to follow up, Minister, to your answer. But I'm just looking and it sounds pretty impressive. So what's been the take-up?

J. WALL: What's been the take-up from the graduates?

J. DINN: Yes, in dealing with any of these incentives?

J. WALL: Those incentives are offered over a two-year time frame. Of course, we have higher incentives in more remote areas. The uptake for recruitment and retention is very good. There might have been a couple over the last year who defaulted on the recruitment program with respect to the funds that were offered. But it's very, very positive and it's working well.

With respect to the graduates again, you mentioned?

J. DINN: That's right. I'm looking at and I would be interested in the default. Did the person default or the people default because they realized it wasn't for them? Sorry, Chair.

J. WALL: Yeah, no, understood. It's certainly a mix of things that they're taking into account when an individual defaults on that offer. I can't speak to each one, of course, individually. However, there are a number of reasons. When you're looking at remote work in, for example, Labrador, the work, no doubt, is difficult and even with what was offered, we had a couple of people did default on them.

Generally, overall, the program is running very good with respect to recruitment and retention and that's a two-year time frame.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Would it be possible just to have some numbers as to the number that were

recruited and stayed beyond the two years, if those are available?

J. WALL: No, I appreciate that. The offer is not made to two-year mark yet, so we're still within that time frame. Data is being collected, as we move forward, to ensure that we have the numbers going forward but we're still in the two-year time frame.

J. DINN: So far then, there are only a few who have defaulted, I guess the number –

J. WALL: I can turn to my deputy minister for that with respect to specific numbers because I don't want to speak out of line.

T. KING: So far, we have fewer than 5 per cent that have defaulted on the commitments. We're really pleased with that. We're seeing over 90 per cent of new employees are taking us up on the bonuses as they start. It's certainly been positive for us.

J. DINN: Thank you.

If I may then, you said fewer than 5 per cent or fewer than five?

T. KING: Fewer than 5 per cent.

J. DINN: Has there been any, like, an exit interview or anything to determine why they defaulted? Because I would assume that information would help you.

T. KING: So we haven't done – I shouldn't say we haven't done. Not everyone is agreeable to an exit interview but we, generally, certainly have heard there really is a mix of things. Sometimes it's a family circumstance. Sometimes it's not what they anticipated or what they want when they move into a new role, very similar to everybody else, but it's really been very personal reasons in the main.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I think the minister said that with regard to the recruitment and retention, you've increased front-line workers and optimized resources. What does that mean? If I hear optimize resources, from a teaching point of view, it means I've just taken on more work, with fewer resources.

I'm naturally suspicious when I hear that optimize resources and increase front line.

J. WALL: Thank you for the question.

When we're optimizing our resources, we're expanding the use of social work assistants and those social work assistants take on additional duties to better support the social workers and the clients whom we serve.

So that's what we refer to when we're optimizing the existing resources. We have social work assistants in place to support the social workers and, of course, our clients. That does, certainly, make a difference when we're optimizing our resources.

J. DINN: How many social work assistants are there?

J. WALL: Sixty-five.

J. DINN: How many social workers are there in the department right now?

J. WALL: So in Child Protection, we have 293 social workers.

J. DINN: And that's the total number, 293, just in Child Protection?

J. WALL: Just in Child Protection. In addition to the 293 in Child Protection, we have 19 in Income Support.

J. DINN: How many vacancies are there?

J. WALL: Currently, we're down to about a 20 per cent vacancy rate. The exact number of vacancies?

J. DINN: I have heard 92 but I'm just trying – from a social worker.

J. WALL: Vacancies? No, I think it's on the 50 range – 15, sorry, my apologies – 15 vacancies. My apologies for that.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: My apologies, I'll correct that, 84.

J. DINN: Closer to 92.

J. WALL: Closer, yes.

J. DINN: Okay. Where are these? They're in Child Protection, I take it, but where are they in the province?

J. WALL: Where are they in the province? Mostly in Labrador, in remote areas. Even though, we do have the Labrador benefits that I spoke about earlier, we try to attract social workers to live and work in Labrador. Even with what's covered, the travel bonus to cover flights to and from St. John's twice a year, the department provided accommodations or housing allowance, there are still vacancies there in hard-to-fill areas.

J. DINN: What is the current ratio of social workers to cases by region?

J. WALL: I don't know if I have it by region.

OFFICIAL: I do.

J. WALL: We do? Okay. Thank you.

So in metro, it's 1-18; in Central West, it's 1-22; and in Labrador, it's 1-25.

J. DINN: I'll pick up my questions in the next round.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Minister, under subhead 1.2.01, you noted 40 resignations. Could you

please provide more details such as what divisions the resignations came from?

J. WALL: Yeah, so I don't have it here with me, but I'll certainly get that for you and forward it to you as soon as possible.

K. WHITE: Perfect.

A follow-up question: Of the 42 eligible retirements, how many do you anticipate will in fact retire and do you plan to fill all vacancies?

J. WALL: That's a good question.

K. WHITE: Thank you.

J. WALL: It's hard to answer that with respect to those who are eligible because the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being is a great place to work and they want to stick around.

K. WHITE: Perfect.

Can we please get a copy of the foster parent training policy that was developed?

J. WALL: Yes, absolutely.

K. WHITE: Thank you.

Last question from me: In the total employee breakdown, you didn't breakdown the number of permanent versus temporary positions. Can you provide that?

J. WALL: Yes. Do we have that? There we are. No, that's not the one. I just saw that shortly ago. Just bear with me. That's not in here.

Thank you, Sara.

MHA White, we have 710 permanent staff and we have 95 temporary.

K. WHITE: Thank you very much.

No further questions.

J. WALL: Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you.

Minister, can we get a copy of your binder?

J. WALL: Absolutely.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Also, do we have any vacancies in Child Protection in St. John's?

J. WALL: To the best of my knowledge, it's just regular, the turnover of staff in the metro area, either applying for positions in the area, just regular turnover.

My team shares with me, we have 13 in active competition.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Thank you very much. That's it for me for this section.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Yes, thank you.

I want to make sure I'm understanding the numbers. The number of social workers in Child Protection is 293, but you said there are 84 vacancies. I'm assuming that's Child Protection. So am I to assume then, either it's 293 plus the 84 more you need or is it 293 minus those 84? I'm just trying to –

J. WALL: No, plus.

J. DINN: Is Child Protection included –

J. WALL: Plus the 84.

J. DINN: So there really should be 377 social workers?

J. WALL: Correct.

J. DINN: Would it be possible to have a breakdown of the social workers by years of service, like between zero to five, five to 10? I'm just trying to get an idea. Would it be also possible to maybe look at the number of who has left the position vacant? I'm just curious.

J. WALL: No, that's a good question, MHA Dinn. We can certainly get that information for you. I don't have it with me but we certainly can get that on a breakdown in increments of five years.

J. DINN: Perfect.

That's the ratio that should be there in full complement or is it the actual ratio with the –?

J. WALL: Those are actual ratios, currently.

J. DINN: In Labrador 1-25, so how many social workers are there up in Labrador?

J. WALL: How many do we have in Labrador?

We're just searching that for you now, MHA Dinn. If you have another question, we can just follow up with that then.

J. DINN: I guess where I'm going with this, at least the social workers I've been talking to, it's not easy work. There are no easy situations. If it's in Child Protection, you're going in sometimes to work in difficult situations. You may very well be removing children from a family for their own protection, but you talk about compassion fatigue and so on and so forth, it's exhausting.

I would argue that 1-25, 1-18, they're all pretty high for that, and that could be a factor in driving people out of the profession. Add to that in Labrador, the isolation that sometimes comes with it and the inability even just to kick off and put the day behind you or your colleagues, it may

not be there. So that's why I'm asking that question.

The second part of it is who's getting the more difficult cases too? It's one thing if you're a seasoned veteran, you've got a few years, you've been through it and you know how. But to a brand-new person who's fresh out of social work school, it's going to be – as my colleague would say – drinking from a fire hose. That's the first part.

Secondly, recognizing that, what supports are put in place for social workers in dealing with that so that they don't burn out, which is what's going to happen?

J. WALL: So to go back to your earlier question, MHA Dinn, there are currently 40 social workers in Labrador.

J. DINN: Four?

J. WALL: Forty.

J. DINN: Forty, wow.

J. WALL: With respect to adding to our team, as I said earlier, we place a focus and emphasis on the graduating class to hire as many as we can. Again, you have a very valid point with respect to the tenured social worker or those with more experience in these particular areas that we're finding difficult. But I can certainly tell you that our team is certainly supported.

Sara, I don't know if you want to jump in here on that one as well, with respect to –

J. DINN: Before, if I may, I wouldn't mind a breakdown of the number in metro and Central West. While we're talking about it, is it possible to talk a little bit about the geography they have to cover? It's one thing if you're in the metro, but if you're in Newfoundland, I think as the former minister said, it's very much like a territory beyond the metro region. So it's vast distances that they have to cover.

Anyway, that's what I'm looking for.

J. WALL: MHA, didn't you say the numbers for Central West?

J. DINN: Yeah, and metro.

J. WALL: Okay.

J. DINN: Thank you.

J. WALL: We'll certainly get that.

Sara, I don't know if you want to jump in about the support for, especially our new social workers?

S. DOW: Yeah, so it's important for our new social workers, when they start with us, they're offered training. They get two weeks of training that's orientation support. So after they're done training, we also have members of our training unit who will support them, kind of as a mentorship role, like orientation. They'll work with their clinical program supervisor to review how their progress is going, how they're settling into the role. We also have clinical practice mentors in certain offices throughout the province. They would assist in terms of busy teams that need help with complex cases. They are also there as a support to younger social workers or to newer social workers, rather, who have less experience in the field.

We also have ongoing training that we offer throughout the year. A new social worker would start with their basic training with us but then we also do have area-specific training, like adoptions, that they can undertake. Then they would have the support of their full team.

Each social worker is in a team of six, when we're fully staffed, and they have a clinical program supervisor, who is practised, who will give them the clinical support they need and help with those clinical decisions. Then we also have zone managers who oversee multiple offices in a geographic area.

Those teams would generally have one social work assistant and one clerical. We're also increasing the number of social work assistants, where possible, so there may be two on a team.

J. DINN: And the geography piece of it – I guess, what's the largest area for people to cover? Let's say somewhere in Labrador.

S. DOW: The largest area would be in Labrador but we do have maps that, perhaps, we could share with you after so you can see the breakdown by zone.

J. DINN: Okay.

J. WALL: There we go. Thank you.

MHA Dinn, back to your earlier question. The numbers, as I said we had 40 in Labrador. We have 90 in Central-West.

J. DINN: Ninety?

J. WALL: Ninety – 9-0. In metro, we have 146.

J. DINN: Thank you.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

J. DINN: So you mentioned clinical, I think, support supervisors. Did I get that right? Zone managers – do they have cases?

S. DOW: Minister, do you want to answer?

J. WALL: No, go right ahead.

S. DOW: The clinical program supervisors do not hold the case; it's the front-line social workers that do but they would manage their team of six. If we were at a model ratio, they would manage all of their 20 cases, so there would be 120 cases for each clinical program supervisor.

J. DINN: So are the clinical support – they're social workers, as well, correct?

S. DOW: Yes.

J. DINN: So are they factored in to the ratio?

S. DOW: No.

J. DINN: No. Okay because in schools we would often get every person, whether they were classroom teacher or not, factored into the ratio.

S. DOW: No, they don't carry cases so we don't put them in the ratio.

J. DINN: Okay, good to know.

What work is currently being done to resurrect the Child and Youth Advocacy Centre?

J. WALL: The Child and Youth Advocacy Centre?

J. DINN: Yeah.

J. WALL: We've had some initial conversations about that. We still have more work to do on it with respect to working with the Advocate, but nothing further. That's also with Health and Community Services and NLHS.

J. DINN: Would it be possible to have an update on the development of the Health, Housing, Treatment and Supportive Services Hub in Happy Valley-Goose Bay?

J. WALL: I'm happy to chat about that. We did visit Labrador and had that conversation with my colleagues, Minister Evans and MHA Russell, and met with community groups there. We have had much discussion since we've come back from there as to the need for Happy Valley-Goose Bay; it is great.

I have to say it was very beneficial to have boots on the ground there for that learning experience, we'll say. But that work is

currently ongoing, and we'll develop as we move forward.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it, Chair.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

Seeing no further questions, I'll 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.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.02 carried.

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

CLERK: 2.1.01, Child and Youth Services.

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

I now call on the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, in this Salaries line, there was a revised spending of \$50,395,000. That's \$313,400 more than what was budgeted. Yet, there is a decrease of \$293,300, despite overspending last year. Can you provide the reason for this salary difference?

J. WALL: Certainly. Thank you for the question.

Chair, \$313,400 was an increase in the '25-'26 budget that reflects the success of our recruitment and retention supports. We offered the enhanced Labrador benefits to attract and retain staff in our hard-to-fill Labrador offices which we just spoke about. We have signing retention bonuses to attract front-line social workers across the province. So, as more positions are filled, salary and operating costs increase accordingly and the bonuses range from \$10,000 to \$50,000 for a two-year return service.

With respect to the \$293,300, we have a savings in this area as eight regional information management positions moved under Corporate Services in the provincial office that I spoke about in the last sitting. These staff work on disclosures for court and this is now centralized under our provincial manager for disclosure, so the reporting structure simply changed.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

In last year's data there were 369 in three regions with 92 vacancies. That's a 32 per cent vacancy in Labrador, a 39 per cent vacancy in Central and a 12 per cent vacancy in metro. That's what we were talking about.

Last year, the department overspent on Purchased Services by \$135,500 but there's no change in this year's budget. What is the reason for that?

J. WALL: The \$135,500 in Purchased Services was an increase in the '25-'26 budget as a result of the hydro costs and maintenance requirements in Labrador locations for the staffed accommodations and offices in the Innu communities. That was the reason for that increase.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: We see an increase of almost \$41 million in Allowances and Assistance here. Is the \$8 million for foster families and kinship care providers included in this increase?

J. WALL: Happy to answer that one for Allowances and Assistance, \$40,918,100, the increase in '25-'26 budget, reflects additional funding to support the opening of new residential care facilities with the Innu communities. These placements provide culturally appropriate and community-based care closer to home.

The increase also reflects adjustments to the foster and kinship care rates to better support caregivers who play, of course, a critical role in providing care for our children and youth and \$8 million is invested into raising these rates to better support and attract families for children that are in need.

Broadly, the budget has been rightsized to manage continued cost pressures that have been seen for the last number of years, which have previously been funded using savings elsewhere in the department or from a contingency fund.

In '25-'26, an addition \$30 million was provided to Income Support to support further program improvements; however, only \$9 million in initiatives were approved in the last fiscal year. So the implementation delays meant not all funding was spent within that year, and \$25 million was moved this year to fund Child and Youth Services. So those three reasons make up the \$40,918,100.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Minister, specifically the foster families and the kinship care providers that was just recently announced, that increase, I note that sometimes you'll say foster families, kinship and providers. So does this include the organizations such as Amal, Key Assets and CareGivers? Are they receiving funding from this particular line item?

J. WALL: Yes, they are in this line, but those providers are not getting the increase. The increase is going to the families.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Minister, can you provide for us the amount of that that is going for foster families and kinship care providers? Is that determined, the exact amount of this budget line?

J. WALL: Are you referring to the \$8-million increase?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yeah, within that, is it a total of \$8 million? So the \$8 million, is that specifically going to foster families?

J. WALL: Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The whole \$8 million?

J. WALL: Yes, foster families and kinship, yeah.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The whole \$8 million?

J. WALL: The whole \$8 million.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Not going to the organizations in any way, shape or form?

J. WALL: That is correct.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

J. WALL: This was why it's such an important step after 12 years of not having increase, that we value the work that they're doing. We are hoping with this increase it's going to attract new families to help serve more children in care.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, I understand.

Do we know how the additional \$8 million for the foster families and the kinship care providers is going to be distributed because I note that there are different payment amounts depending on the location and the age of the child? So can you provide what

the new rates will be? I know that the current rates are anywhere between \$715 and \$1,190 a month.

J. WALL: So we are planning an announcement on all of that in the next coming days with the Foster Families Association. As you can imagine, they are very pleased and anticipated this. So I will save that for that announcement, if you understand what I'm saying.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Totally.

J. WALL: I appreciate that, MHA.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: All right.

Do we have any idea how many individuals and/or families will be receiving this money? I know it's probably fluid.

J. WALL: Every single foster family and kinship provider are going to receive an increase. The number of that – I don't have that in front of me, or do I?

Just bear with me, MHA Gambin-Walsh.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, sure.

J. WALL: MHA Gambin-Walsh, there are approximately 515 foster families supporting children and youth up to December 31, 2025, and we have approximately 580 in the kinship program.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Is that increase or a decrease in the number of foster families from previous years? I know there has been a lot of work gone into trying to maintain foster families throughout the province.

J. WALL: Regular foster homes have declined over the last number of years and have declined by 34 per cent.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Wow.

J. WALL: Yes, that was my reaction as well, wow.

This is why we saw the need right from the onset of coming into the department with respect to providing the support for foster families and kinship families because we realize the importance of the care that the children require.

In a foster family or a kinship family, they would get that appropriate level of care. The care, welfare, safety and security of the children is first and foremost.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I say wow because I remember being told the exact same thing about 10 years ago. I remember having this conversation and trying to figure out how we were going to increase foster families when I went into the department.

J. WALL: That's interesting.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, it's like a cycle.

J. WALL: It certainly is. Right now, in addition to these raised rates, we do have other initiatives with respect to a new campaign going out with respect to families, updating the website, training. We are certainly –

T. KING: The assessment team.

J. WALL: Yes, sorry. Thank you, Tracy – the assessment team as well, dedicated staff within the department to work on this solely.

Like I said, we saw the need. The need is great. I'm very happy that the team are certainly supporting me with this. It is certainly going to make a difference – we feel it's going to make a difference – to getting that 34 per cent number down and getting more families on this program to care for the children that we have.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Can I ask you about the kinship program? Have the number of children receiving kinship services increased or has it stayed the same?

J. WALL: Yes, kinship is growing. With respect to the numbers, I can certainly get the numbers for you.

Do you have them, Sara?

S. DOW: Yeah, we'll get the change over time.

J. WALL: Yeah, so we'll get those numbers for you, MHA Gambin-Walsh.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

J. WALL: But the numbers are increasing in the kinship program.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

I see my time is almost over right now, so –

J. WALL: Do you have it? Is it there?

S. DOW: A 30 per cent increase since December 2016.

J. WALL: MHA Gambin-Walsh, just quickly, 730 currently in youth and kinship services, and that is a 30 per cent increase since December of 2016. So 730 in kinship services with a 30 per cent increase since December of 2016.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you very much.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's West.

J. WALL: No, MHA Dinn.

CHAIR: Sorry, the MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

2.1.01, Child and Youth Services, ATIPPs have shown that government expenditures on private group homes have skyrocketed in the past years. Does your department have

a strategy to bring down those costs while improving service delivery?

J. WALL: Yes, great question.

That comes back to what we have just been discussing with respect to building our numbers for the foster care for kinship and for adoptions to make sure that we have children in these areas rather than in group homes or independent living arrangements. We look at the care, welfare, safety and security of the child first and foremost.

But, MHA Dinn, you can appreciate the increased costs when it comes to a group home or an independent living arrangement. So we are certainly doing our part to get our numbers up so children can get into homes, into adoptive, kinship or foster, and work on getting the numbers of ILAs in group homes down, it's two-fold – better for the child and better on the fiscal pocketbook for the province.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Since I've got a bit of time, I do have one question I just want to go back to, my general question with the ratios. What should the ratios be for a social worker?

J. WALL: MHA Dinn, the standard ratio is 1-20, one social worker to 20. Of course, the ratios that we currently have are one below and two higher. So we are certainly making a concerted effort to fill those vacancies with social workers in those positions, and to bring the numbers down to where they should be.

J. DINN: Okay.

So I'm assuming then that if there's some way the department could fill the 84 vacancies, that would bring that ratio down closer to 120.

J. WALL: Absolutely.

J. DINN: What I was getting at, is there a calculation in the ratio for it based on geography, as well? Like we used to have with EAL teachers, having a speech language pathologist 1-20 in two schools next to each other is one thing. Having 1-20 when you've got a school out in Bay Roberts, up in Trepassey and there is quite another because now there's travel and everything else. I'm just wondering if that factors into it.

J. WALL: Great point but no, that is not taken into consideration with the 1-20.

J. DINN: That's it for me then for now.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Minister, in the Purchased Services section, you mentioned \$29 million to increase the children in care funding, \$8 million for foster families and kinship families. So am I correct in assuming there will be \$4 million for the residential care homes you mentioned?

J. WALL: That is correct.

K. WHITE: That's correct?

J. WALL: Yes.

K. WHITE: Is there any federal money going towards that initiative?

J. WALL: Yes, it is federal funding.

K. WHITE: Okay.

My second question – the federal revenue amount has been increased by just a little more than \$11,800,000. What's this revenue for and can we get a breakdown of how the funding is projected to be used?

J. WALL: Yes, the related revenue for federal is \$11,839,500; the increased revenue for '26-'27 reflects the increased revenue from the federal government, including funding related to the new Innu

residential care facilities, increased federal Youth Justice Funding, increased revenues to address the rising costs from federal government related to reimbursement to services provided in the Innu communities.

So that's the breakdown for the \$11,839,500 and your other question, MHA White, was, or was that everything?

K. WHITE: That was it.

J. WALL: Okay, apologies.

Thank you.

K. WHITE: No further questions.

CHAIR: No further questions?

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

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.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subhead 2.1.01 carried.

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

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.1.02 inclusive, Policy and Programs.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.1.02 inclusive, Policy and Programs, carry?

I now call on the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, I know the Disability Advocate will be an Officer of the House; the position came out of your department. I'm just wondering if I could just ask a few questions? You may or may not be able to answer.

J. WALL: I'll do my best.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

So, Minister, will the new Disability Advocate position interact in any way with the Disability Policy Office?

J. WALL: To the best of my knowledge – and one of my team can jump in after I'm finished – they can certainly reach out to the Disability Policy Office if they have need, looking for any guidance or ask any questions, but as a statutory office of the House of Assembly, they will operate independently.

I don't know if Tracy wanted to add a little more to that.

T. KING: Thanks, MHA Gambin-Walsh.

I think, ideally, we were going to hope that that will be a very collaborative working relationship and afford opportunities for the office to partner with the Disability Advocate on particular initiatives. It will really depend on how the new advocate wants to set up the office and interact, but we would certainly hope for a good, collaborative working relationship.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: When can we expect the position to be advertised? Do you have any information on that?

J. WALL: I don't have any specific information on when it's going to be advertised.

Again, that's done through the House of Assembly, so I'd have no knowledge of that, MHA Gambin-Walsh.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Do you have any information on what work has begun to establish the office since the legislation was passed here in the House?

J. WALL: To the best of my knowledge, that is, again, aligned with the House of Assembly.

I haven't had any update on anything that has been established. Of course, it has to be advertised through the IAC. I'm not quite sure if that has even been done yet or not. I don't think it has.

So still in the early stages, MHA Gambin-Walsh.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Do you know if the rate of pay of this Advocate will be comparable with the other Advocates? No idea?

J. WALL: I would imagine so.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

J. WALL: Again, I'm not part of that process, but I would expect it to be relative to the other statutory Officers.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Has there been any discussion with the disability community about the anticipated location of the office, where they would anticipate would be the best location? Has there been any discussion like that?

J. WALL: No, it's a good question.

I've had many conversations with members from the disability community since it has been passed here in the House. Nothing definite or concrete, but I would imagine – the conversation said it's going to be based here in St. John's. So other than that, no particular location, no.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I know prior to the legislation being passed here in the House,

there was some discussion regarding shared services, like, with the Office of the Seniors' Advocate, the office of this new department. Has there been any more conversations or do you know has the community themselves expressed any concern about sharing services?

J. WALL: Thank you for the question.

Not really about expressing concern, but having a conversation of it being a stand-alone office. To my knowledge, and one of my team can certainly jump in, there won't be any shared services between statutory offices of the House. That's to my knowledge.

T. KING: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Oh yes, thank you, Tracy.

The House of Assembly does provide service to all statutory offices. So that would be, if you're looking at a shared service from here in the House, but, otherwise, not within particular offices.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Thank you very much for that.

J. WALL: You're kindly welcome.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

So we overspent in the Grants and Subsidies line last year by \$59,000. What was the reason for that?

J. WALL: So that increase in the '25-'26 budget is a result of increased funding provided to the Summer Camp Inclusion Grant program. This funding was moved from the Community Transportation Program in the Seniors and Aging Division when it was still with the department. The Community Transportation Program experienced a decline in eligible applications. That makes up the \$59,000.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. So we moved over that funding. Okay, yeah.

Minister, you just said you moved over the funding. So is there an increase in the actual funding because in the Grants and Subsidies line it's the same amount from the previous budget to this budget? There's no change in line 10.

T. KING: So while the budget looks the same after the projected revised was done, some of the final grant and budget decisions were taken for this year. In fact, the minister announced this year, while the original budget had been \$50,000 from now on, we had unallocated grant funding within the department and the minister took the decision that we should allocate that permanently to the Summer Camp Inclusion Grants. That was, kind of, post – so final decisions on unallocated funding were after this.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Next year we could probably see an increase in that line.

T. KING: You'll see it next year.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes. Okay. Understood.

Can you provide a list of the programs that will be funded from the Grants and Subsidies line for '26-'27?

J. WALL: Certainly. The Disability Policy Office grants –

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: (Inaudible.)

Sorry, go ahead.

J. WALL: Is that what you asked for, Disability Policy Office grants?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

J. WALL: The Accessible Vehicle grants of \$350,000 and the Accessible Taxi and Busing grant. MHA Gambin-Walsh, I'll get

these for you. I'll certainly give you the sheet but if you want me to read them out, I certainly will.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

J. WALL: The Accessible Taxi and Busing grants of \$50,000; Accessibility Grants, \$325,000; Coalition of Persons with Disabilities Core funding is now at \$50,000; the Para-Transit Grant is at \$94,500; the Summer Camp Inclusion Grants are \$150,000. That gives us the total.

I'll certainly provide you with and, of course, MHA Dinn as well, copies of both.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. So the only two that changed would be the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities NL went up –

J. WALL: Correct.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: – and the Summer Camp Inclusion.

J. WALL: Correct.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: And that was money that was not spent.

J. WALL: Not spent.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Can you give us a list of where the money was not spent, like, what specific grants were they underutilized?

T. KING: So there were some funds that were in the department that were just unallocated so that if any issues arose, for instance, last year when the St. Anthony – was it the Boys and Girls Club – had the fire last year, we had unallocated grant funding in the department we could use for that. We had some of that kind of funding to be able to be flexible as issues arise. Certainly, the minister has taken the decision to allocate some of it and keep a smaller amount for issues as they arise through the year.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. Understood.

Will any organization receive operational funding through this line item in '26-'27? You said COD NL is getting an increase. Is there any other organization that receives funding?

J. WALL: No.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: No other? Okay.

J. WALL: Not through this line item, no.

T. KING: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: MHA Gambin-Walsh, my apologies, I did miss something I think.

My apologies. The Para-Transit Grant is there of \$94,500 for the Metrobus and GoBus. That's there as well. My apologies, I missed that one.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The Coalition of Persons with Disabilities is the only non-profit organization?

J. WALL: Correct.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

So increases to organizations that were mentioned in the budget, like the Autism Society, and there was a couple more mentioned, where is that funding coming from? Is it coming from your department?

J. WALL: Under Health and Community Services.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Under Health and Community Services, okay.

J. WALL: People do think it comes from this department. I've had several conversations after Budget Day, but it's from Health and Community Services.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

So the ones that were mentioned – well, you probably wouldn't know if it's from Health and Community Services.

J. WALL: Thank you.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, so the only one from your department is the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities.

J. WALL: Correct.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: All right. Thank you very much.

Yeah, my time is running out.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

A question on amendments to the *Buildings Accessibility Act* – rather appropriate considering that all three elevators are out in the building here now.

J. WALL: That is very timely, MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Yes.

Amendments to the *Buildings Accessibility Act* were assented to two years ago but have not been proclaimed yet. So what's behind the long delay in drafting the accompanying regulations?

J. WALL: MHA Dinn, that's under Government Services with Minister Goosney. It's not under my department.

J. DINN: Thank you.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

J. DINN: Have all departments and public bodies, like NLHS, completed their accessibility standards?

J. WALL: To the best of my knowledge, yes, that's all been completed.

J. DINN: How many people receive the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit?

We've heard from people who have had difficulty accessing the federal tax credit due to paperwork. What feedback has your department received about the difficulty in being accepted?

J. WALL: With respect to the disability tax credit?

J. DINN: Yes, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Disability Benefit.

J. WALL: Yes, and the NLDB.

The numbers for those who get the disability tax credit as of July 2025 – that was effective July 2025. There was 9,660 individuals receiving the NLDB as of February 2026 – 9,660.

J. DINN: If I may follow with the other part of that, have you been hearing any feedback from people about difficulty in accessing it or being accepted for it?

J. WALL: The disability tax credit?

J. DINN: Yeah.

J. WALL: I've had a couple of conversations with individuals to my office with respect to difficulty in that. The conversations that I've had, MHA Dinn, it comes back to their family doctor or their specialist with respect to where the hang up or where it's having difficulty. It's not with the program itself; it's getting to that.

So the two conversations I had, one from a constituent and one from outside my district, both had to do with timely access to their physician and the paperwork being filled out by the physician incorrectly. So that was the two of the conversations that I had.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That opens up a whole other area now that I want to talk about.

J. WALL: No doubt.

J. DINN: I'll use the example because against the bureaucracy and the paperwork gatekeeping, I'll call it. I'll give you the example of what I mean.

It's not about this in particular, but it pertains to it. We had a gentleman on income support who had his leg broken in a car accident. He went to the emergency. The doctor there, either the emergency physician or the orthopedic surgeon, whoever saw him, more or less, he needs a boot cast, a boot to walk. Now he was hauling in, I think, a total of \$300 a month, somewhere around there.

So when he went, social services denied him because they wanted more details from the doctor. My comment to the person, I said this won't look good if I go to the media. You want me as the MHA, or him to go back to an orthopedic surgeon, if he can find them in the hospital, and ask for more details other than his leg is broken.

Now, I can understand if you come to me and say, MHA Dinn, could you give some details? But if a doctor says, a physician in his judgment says that this is needed, that should be where it ends. It's not the first one encountered. I think of Krista Stephens with the drug injections and everything else. There is a bureaucracy there that just prevents it.

So I guess what I'm looking at, when I hear the fact that doctors didn't fill it in properly, to me it seems like a way of slowing down the process and preventing people from getting the work they need. I don't know, maybe that needs to be reviewed, but that's been a source of frustration for me. I don't know who, whether it was with the dental care program, it didn't make any difference. It was always along those lines, it needed

more details. To the point where the person would say forget it, I'm giving up on it.

So that's not so much of a question as a concern. I don't think it should be put off on the doctor or physician who's already overburdened. But I really think when it comes down to it here, this is my professional capacity.

J. WALL: I don't disagree with you. It's common right across the country, unfortunately. It puts the individual, as you said, in that position where they want to throw their hands up in the air. I realize the importance of the paperwork that's needed, to make sure everything is filled out correctly and done that the government needs.

But you are right, trying to track down a doctor a second time to refill out the paperwork, it's a source of frustration, no doubt. But other than that, MHA Dinn, we haven't had a lot of calls to the department with respect to the disability tax credit.

J. DINN: If I may, is it possible to at least review those requirements and streamline them, especially when it comes to accessing the medical expertise or advice of a physician or health care? I say that because I can think of plenty of foolish examples of where people were denied support or care because of this.

J. WALL: No doubt. We can certainly do that for this department, for the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being. It does not happen with Health and Community Services or NLHS or the pharmacare program or what have you. But certainly with this department, we'll do our part to make sure that we better serve the clients where we can.

J. DINN: I appreciate that.

As part of the Disability Benefit, the previous government was supposed to start making contributions to an RDSP for benefit

recipients last year. So when can we expect this to happen, or maybe it's already started? What happens to the federal matching contributions that allegedly people were supposed to have received?

Actually, I'm just going to break that down one by one. So when can we expect that to happen or has that happened, the contributions to the RDSP?

J. WALL: Good questions, MHA Dinn. Thank you for that.

It has not happened. The whole plan was announced in June of '24 for implementation in June of '25. In June of '24, it was announced, it didn't have a budget, it didn't have a delivery model and there wasn't an implementation plan in place. So when I came into the department, I was very surprised by that because that was under the former administration.

But implementing the provincial RDSP contribution, from the time that I have been in the department, is very complex. It's going to require coordination with the federal government. It's going to require coordination with the financial institutions. There has to be a system change. Then we look at the sustainable funding going forward. None of that was in place.

So my team and I are currently working on that. We are having the discussions with the federal government. We are having the discussions with the banking institutions. We have discussed some preliminary numbers. However, we are nowhere near bringing it into effect. Of course, not in this budget. But we are certainly working towards the next budget to make sure this is in place for the people of the province.

This was one that I struggle with because it was my understanding when I came into the department that it was more advanced than what it was and it was not, with respect to the three things I said, the budget, the delivery model and the implementation plan.

I know that other colleagues of the House have emailed me and we've had correspondence back and forth on it. I can certainly tell you that we've had conversations with the Premier and with my colleagues. We realize how important that is. We have had regular correspondence from people around the province about it and we are certainly doing our part right now to make sure that we do our work, we do our homework and make sure that we have the plan in place.

As I've said, this is a complex issue. It's not just straightforward as one would think, and every time I have the opportunity to discuss it with constituents or with the people around the province, I do. I've had numerous correspondence over the last number of months about it. But I can certainly tell you and the people that are here tonight, we are doing the work with the federal government, the financial institutions, and we're evaluating basically all our options to make sure they have the right path going forward.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I'll come back.

J. WALL: Okay.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Minister, the department underspent on the Salaries budget last year approximately \$450,000, and decreased this year's budget by \$313,400. What was the reason for that?

J. WALL: We're on 3.1.01?

K. WHITE: Sorry, my apologies. Yes.

OFFICIAL:02.

K. WHITE: Yes, 3.1.02.

J. WALL: Oh, sorry. We're in 02.

The salaries of ...?

K. WHITE: My understanding is we –

J. WALL: \$445,500.

K. WHITE: Yes.

J. WALL: Thank you.

This budget was increased in '25-'26 to support the establishment of a foster home intake and assessment team. Savings in the '25-'26 budget were due to vacancies within the branch.

Staff are now hired. Nine new foster homes have been approved and 21 more are in processing. We are very happy and I'm very proud of this with respect to the new team within the branch. As I said, nine new foster homes have been approved, 20 more are in the hopper and ready to be processed.

K. WHITE: Can you say once again how many staff?

J. WALL: We have 23 staff within this area and that includes three directors.

K. WHITE: Okay.

Can you advise why we underspent in Grants and Subsidies last year?

J. WALL: In Grants and Subsidies, there was a savings in the '25-'26 budget due to the reduction in grant funding for operations for the John Howard Society for the total of \$468,197.

So the John Howard Society operates two open custody group homes for community youth correction clients and they were showing a surplus in their financial statements. The department is the only funder of these homes, so the John Howard Society used those savings from the prior year, which reduced the operating grant in '25-'26.

K. WHITE: Okay.

J. WALL: Just to add to that, MHA White, in this fiscal year, the amount will be reinstated. The remaining amount, approximately, of \$32,000 has been reprofiled from the Child and Youth Services Branch to grants in the event that additional funding was required related to general salary increases throughout the year.

K. WHITE: Okay. Thank you.

Can you please provide a list of organizations who receive funding from the Grants and Subsidies line?

J. WALL: Certainly.

Again, I will provide this copy of the following to both, but, for the benefit of *Hansard*, on the Child Welfare Program and Policy grants: Nunatsiavut Government Caring for our Children program, Waypoints foster family support, the Foster Families Association, John Howard Society youth homes, Choices for Youth; Daybreak Family Home Visitation Program, Waypoints Family Support, Extrajudicial Sanctions committees, Waypoints Springwood camp, Nunatsiavut Government foster care homes. That would be all within the Child Welfare Programs and Policy grants.

K. WHITE: Thank you.

Can you please tell us how these groups are selected to receive funding?

T. KING: So most of these are service providers to the department. So, obviously, we have a partnership with the Nunatsiavut Government, I think that one is fairly straightforward. We partner with them both on the Caring for our Children program, as well, this year we supported the improvement of foster care homes in the area.

But, like I said, the Foster Families Association is our major partner. These

folks all provide services to the department. Last year, Waypoints started a new Springwood Camp for children and youth involved with the department, so that's obviously something that we supported. But they're our main service provider partners that are not-for-profits.

K. WHITE: Okay, thank you very much, Deputy Minister.

Can you just clarify organizations such as Amal, Key Assets and CareGivers are they –

T. KING: Yeah, so those –

K. WHITE: Go ahead.

T. KING: No, I'm sorry. You didn't finish your question.

K. WHITE: No, I'm done.

T. KING: So those organizations, those are funded through our Allowances and Assistance. Those are funded on beds per child versus some of these that are more, you know, Waypoints services to foster families as a whole and training and support.

K. WHITE: Okay.

My last question is, there doesn't appear to be an increase in this budget line, so does that mean there are no increases in funding for any of the groups you mentioned?

J. WALL: Under Grants and Subsidies?

K. WHITE: Yes.

J. WALL: So, MHA White, there are two: the Foster Families Association has an increase, which I spoke to earlier, we're going to have an announcement on that in the next few days; and the Daybreak Family Home Visitation Program has a slight increase of \$41,000. So those are two that did have increases.

Again, you will have this copy when it's presented, but I think that's everything for now.

K. WHITE: That's it for me.

CHAIR: The MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, I just want to go back to something MHA Dinn said about the disability tax credit.

I do have to confirm what MHA Dinn said in that there are a significant number of persons out there with disabilities who do have difficulty getting this form filled out or going back again when it's required by CRA. There is a group of individuals, of course, that CRA has approved for a lifetime, but we do have groups that have to go back after X number of years and have it done again.

I'm just wondering, nurse practitioners, are they not approved to also complete these forms now, do we know, for persons with disabilities?

J. WALL: Thank you to my team. They confirm, yes, they are.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

The RDSP, I do know it's very complex. I also recall having a conversation with the Department of Finance regarding the individuals who have stopped contributing to the RDSP now. They're on their 10-year wait, who are less than 59 years, some are in their 30s, but that's a tool within the RDSP. They're waiting for 10 years now.

After that 10 years, they can start withdrawing from the RDSP without penalties. One of the issues and the concerns was, if this contribution went in automatically, would it cause issues and concerns for that group of persons because, of course, the RDSP is not brand new anymore. You don't have to wait until your

59 and start withdrawing; you just have to wait the 10 years.

I do hope that gets worked out. I do hope we do see an announcement in 2027 of some sort, because it is a poverty reduction tool, a very important one.

J. WALL: Absolutely.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I know the disability community has worked overtime to try to inform people of how this tool works and the value of an RDSP. I do hope the department continues to support the communities and organizations who are trying to inform the public of the RDSP and the tool itself.

J. WALL: Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So I just wanted to add that to MHA Dinn's –

J. WALL: No, thank you for sharing that MHA Gambin-Walsh.

It is a priority for us and the team is working on it. We certainly hope to be able to roll it out by next year.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

J. WALL: That's our intention.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I have one last question.

Under 3.1.02, Grants and Subsidies, you did mention that there were a couple of groups that had funding increases but the line item is the same as last year. Can you clarify that please?

J. WALL: Happy to expand on that.

So, for example, there was one-time funding that was included in this amount for Nunatsiavut Government foster care homes. That was, like, \$300,000. That was a one-time funding only, which relates to the

difference of why in the total. There was one-time funding for Waypoints Springwood camp as well. So that was a one-time funding only, which is not there. So that would account for the difference.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: That's it for me.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to go back to the RDSP. So if there was no funding or implementation model, what does this mean for the people who are expecting to have contributions made?

J. WALL: Those who have reached out to our department have certainly been made aware. There are no payments there currently. There's no plan. We are currently working on that. No doubt, it has caused some confusion and some frustration. But being open and honest with the people is all I can do.

As I said earlier, it's a priority for our department to ensure that this is brought forward for a solution. Conversations are being had, and we're currently working on that to make sure it's there for the following year. It's very frustrating for the people who expect it and thought that it was going to be forthcoming.

J. DINN: I would say.

So was there a federal matching contribution?

J. WALL: No.

J. DINN: No. That's it. Okay.

J. WALL: We are working with the federal government, of course.

J. DINN: There are some people who are eligible to receive contributions that have since retired as well, I guess. Would they get a payment if they've retired or they're drawing on their – I'm just trying, like –

J. WALL: Without a plan currently in place to guide us where we're going, I can't answer that one.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

J. WALL: But just for the benefit of everyone here, I did send out a letter to the Disability Network, to the members, to let them know that this was not forthcoming, that this was not currently in place. I wouldn't want anyone to be caught off guard with it. So, in addition to those who have reached out directly to me, we did put out a letter to the network.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 3.1.02, Child Welfare Programs and Policy, what progress has been made with Indigenous governments and organizations?

J. WALL: 3.1 –

J. DINN: It's 3.1.02.

What progress has been made with Indigenous governments and organizations in setting up and training child welfare services of their own?

J. WALL: Sara, do you want to take that one, please, if you would?

S. DOW: In terms of our work ongoing with Indigenous governments, we collaborate with them. We have different policy working groups.

In terms of training their social workers – is that what you were asking?

J. DINN: That's right, yes.

S. DOW: We do have the Innu Round Table Secretariat. They have a prevention agency that services Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. They do have social workers there that work hand in hand; they provide prevention services, but they assist with our social workers in actioning referrals in child protection cases, just in terms of meeting with the families.

As part of the federal legislation, the Innu Round Table Secretariat does have Indigenous representatives who we share information with, as required by the federal legislation.

Does that answer your question?

J. DINN: Okay.

Is it possible to have an update on the Basic Income Program for youth receiving residential services leaving care?

J. WALL: The Basic Income for youth service clients, that does support youth involved in the residential stream of the Youth Services Program, age 16 to 21 who are living independently.

The current benefit rates: a \$500 monthly personal allowance to cover the cost of personal hygiene items, entertainment and transportation for youth; a \$560 monthly grocery allowance, if the youth's accommodation does not include daily meals; and all other financial benefits are provided to youth on a case-by-case basis based on their unique needs.

The current active enrolment in this Basic Income is 310 youth. An evaluation was conducted in May of '23, included a social worker and youth surveys. The findings indicated positive changes in the youth's life goals, quality of life, education and employment.

Does that answer your question, MHA Dinn?

J. DINN: I think it does.

Would it be fair to say that the youth who were involved with or part of the program actually – I guess they went on, for lack of a better way, and are leading productive lives? They got work and so on and so forth, and got on their feet with that?

J. WALL: Progressed from the program, yes.

J. DINN: Yes. Okay.

So there are 310 youth. They eventually left the program at some point, at 21.

J. WALL: They aged out at 21, yeah.

J. DINN: So was there any follow up with them since that time?

J. WALL: Starting this summer, we will certainly be looking at those numbers, when they've aged out at age 21. We will certainly have that data to follow up with.

J. DINN: That would be interesting to have shared, please.

This is the last question of this section. I don't know if this one you can answer or if it's better for another department, but I'll try it.

Would it be possible to have more details on the additional funding or money going into the NL Child Benefit, and what will be the new income cut-off line if 3,000 more children will get it? I don't know if that's for you or –

J. WALL: It's a great question, but that's for Minister Parry in Finance.

J. DINN: That's what I wanted to make sure. I'll blame you when I talk to him.

J. WALL: My shoulders are big, MHA Dinn. I get the blame for a lot of stuff.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it for that for me.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions for this subhead, I'll now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.1.02 inclusive, Policy and Programs.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.1.02 inclusive, Policy and Programs, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.1.02 carried.

CHAIR: So we'll take a little break for 10 minutes.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

Is everyone ready?

J. WALL: Yes.

CHAIR: Okay.

I now ask the Clerk to read the next subhead.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive, Prevention and Early Intervention.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive, Prevention and Early Intervention, carry?

I call on the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Should the clock reset now?

CLERK: Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Salaries were revised last year and increased by \$541,900, but this year's Salaries, the budget was increased by \$295,900. Can you provide a rationale for that difference?

J. WALL: Certainly.

The \$541,900 was an increase in the '25-'26 budget due to leave payouts for retiring employees and success in filling vacant client service officer positions. The budget was reduced and funds reprofiled for the '25-'26 budget due to vacancies and savings in prior years, but these positions were able to be filled in '25-'26. That's for the \$541,900.

With respect to the \$295,900, there is an increase in the '26-'27 budget as a result of rightsizing the salary budget in the line with projected position needs for the division with vacancies having been filled in '25 and '26. Those positions are filled going forward and we need that for the next fiscal.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you very much for that.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So 4.1.02, there is a decrease in the Salaries budget this year, even though we overspent by \$28,500 last year. Can you provide a reason for that?

J. WALL: Certainly.

The \$44,600 in savings for the '26-'27 budget is a result of one temporary position not expected to be required during the year, as it was a temporary position created to shadow an employee before they retired, which was a computer systems analyst.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you very much.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: We are seeing a decrease of \$25 million in the Allowances and Assistance line. Why is that?

J. WALL: The funding initially allocated for Income Support program improvements are being redirected to fund the deficit in the Child and Youth Services Branch. The new Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy will take into consideration the needs of people made vulnerable by poverty and respond with the development of new initiatives. That is the reason for that difference.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

The Targeted Basic Income pilot for ages 60 to 64 who qualified, that was fully implemented by June of 2025. It was phased in during 2024. Was that funded through the Allowances and Assistance line?

J. WALL: Yes, that is correct.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Can you provide an update on that pilot, please?

J. WALL: Certainly.

The Targeted Basic Income pilot for seniors aged 60 to 64 supports individuals during that age who are currently in receipt of income support, and receiving supportive services and/or financial assistance through NL Health Services Community Supports Program.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, so do you have any further information on the pilot? Like, how many individuals are still in the pilot?

J. WALL: Participants receive a monthly income equivalent to the combined federal and provincial benefits at age 65. Currently, we have active enrolment of 169 participants. The total enrolment since the inception is 218. It is a three-year pilot, which started in April of 2024, and the current benefit rates from July 1, '25 to June 30, '26 is \$1,962 per month for a single and \$2,887 per month for a couple on the benefit rates.

So as I said, it's a three-year pilot and evaluation is under way on that pilot program.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So there are 169 participants at present and so far there's been a total of 218. Do we anticipate adding anymore participants to the pilot this fiscal year?

J. WALL: Yes, we certainly do anticipate more being added.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Can I get a breakdown of what is funded under Allowances and Assistance for 2026-27?

J. WALL: Allowances for 2026-27 for \$29,500,000?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

J. WALL: Income Support typically had savings of about \$6 million. In '25-'26, an additional \$30 million was provided under the Poverty Reduction Strategy to support further program improvements. However, only \$9 million in initiatives were approved this fiscal year and implementation delays meant not all funding was spent within the year. That brings you to \$29,500,000.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, did you just say that Income Support had savings of \$6 million?

J. WALL: Correct.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Can you elaborate on that?

J. WALL: Yeah.

T. KING: Thanks.

Yes, typically, over the last five-plus years we've seen savings in Income Support of over \$6 million per year, just in not having the uptake in the program that would have been anticipated and a lower use of Emergency Social Services.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Well, I guess not having an uptake is probably in collaboration with a decreasing population or age or who knows.

J. WALL: Several factors.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: But \$6 million seems like a large amount, though.

Okay, thank you very much. I think that's all I have right now.

CHAIR: MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Just to go back to the question on the Targeted Basic Income. There are 169 participants and there have been 218 since the beginning of it. There's a bit of a discrepancy; is that because people aged out when they get to be 65?

J. WALL: Yes, aged out or unfortunately passed.

J. DINN: Okay.

While the evaluation is under way and ongoing, has there been any preliminary results as to what people think about the amounts they're receiving?

J. WALL: Not at this time.

J. DINN: Okay.

So one of the questions I had, then, at the beginning of this, like when you look at the guaranteed basic income Committee that we sat on and there's a new 10-year Poverty Reduction plan in the works, I'm just wondering if the work of the guaranteed basic income Committee is factoring into that?

J. WALL: Yes, the work of the Committee is factored in to the Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy. The dedicated ADM – I'm glad that she's aboard – is working with her team on that. I'm looking forward to more to be said about that this coming fall.

J. DINN: The savings for the \$6 million for Income Support, I'm just trying to get my head around that. So those are savings annually? Is that what I'm hearing, or is that just the total?

J. WALL: That was average savings over the last number of years for less uptake or less need in that particular area.

J. DINN: Again, is it because people are aging out or – I'm just trying to – that seems to be a remarkable number. I guess I'm just thinking about the people who would get it, in terms of whether they're sleeping in tents or whatever else. I'm just trying to understand that when there's so much need out there.

J. WALL: MHA Dinn, the income support percentage related to the population has certainly declined since '96-'97 to '25-'26. If this is correct, this one here?

OFFICIAL: Yeah.

J. WALL: From 2015 to early 2020, the income support caseload remained relatively stable with some minor variations – seasonal variations. When COVID-19 began, the caseload declined sharply as individuals with the labour force attached

transitioned to the federal benefits, resulting in a reduction of more than 3,000 cases.

So following the end of the federal benefits in late '21, the caseload rebounded modestly by approximately 500 cases. Since that time, growth has been gradual, but the caseload remains roughly 2,000 cases below pre-COVID levels. So that gives us the average of \$6 million, annually, roughly 2,000 cases below pre-COVID levels in 2020-2021.

J. DINN: What happens then to that \$6 million savings each year?

J. WALL: So this past year, we used the \$6 million towards the deficit in Child and Youth Services to make sure that we had that much covered off at least.

J. DINN: I would assume you're anticipating this trend to continue?

J. WALL: To some degree, yes. As I said, gradual uptake with respect to the cases coming back. But the caseload does remain 2,000 cases less.

J. DINN: If I may, right now, what's the income support rate for an individual, one person?

J. WALL: Again, bear with me, MHA Dinn. I got it here somewhere.

I'm going to pass it off to Lori, if she doesn't mind, to answer that one so that we're accurate.

L. ROSE: For a single person on income support, on average, it's about \$1,154 per month.

J. DINN: They get \$1,100. That's not a Comfort Allowance or anything like that?

L. ROSE: No, that would be basic maintaining own household benefit, basic amount of rent and an amount for utilities.

J. DINN: Okay, so just to make sure, that \$1,100, that's what they get for everything, like for housing, for rent, for –

L. ROSE: That's correct.

J. DINN: – for everything. That's not in addition to, correct?

L. ROSE: That's correct.

J. DINN: So roughly –

L. ROSE: About \$1,200.

J. DINN: – it's about \$11,000 or \$12,000, let's say, a year, correct? So that's well below poverty line.

I'm just wondering then if it's an opportunity to increase the benefit. I just chose the single, I knew it was around there and it was low. I think, if I understand it, people with Comfort Allowances, it's much smaller again, if they're in shelters and things like that. Am I correct in that?

L. ROSE: If someone is in a shelter, they would receive a Comfort Allowance of \$175 a month, yes.

J. DINN: A month, that's right.

The gentleman I told you about with the boot, that's what he was making. He was expected to pay everything at that time. Now he has to pay \$150. Okay.

I'm wondering, when is the last time the income support amounts were reviewed or increased?

L. ROSE: When they were last reviewed or when they were last –?

J. DINN: Reviewed and increased.

L. ROSE: Just one moment. I'll get those for you.

The last time they were increased was in 2022; there was a 5 per cent increase in rates at that time.

J. DINN: Okay, so we haven't kept up with inflation. I'm just wondering, maybe it's time to review it annually or increase it annually, especially since there seems to be an awful lot of savings. Because, I would say, you might actually make communities a lot safer, too, for that matter, when people are able to look after themselves, but \$1,100 bucks a month, I think we can do better, especially if the number of cases are down.

J. WALL: That's a good point MHA Dinn.

Through our Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, the team that we have working on that now, we are evaluating that, as we go forward, to ensure that we do the best work we can with the budget we have and the best use of spending our dollars. So that will all be evaluated going forward, now that we have our new dedicated ADM in place, and the Poverty Reduction and Prevention Team will evaluate all of that so we can make better decisions and better serve the people that we care for in the department.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I think I got the answer; I was going to ask, too, how many are currently recipients of income support? I think we've asked how many it's down, but roughly how many are receiving income support? You may have said that.

J. WALL: No, but I'm happy to share it. The total number of cases for those on income support are 21,396. Out of that 21,396; 16,771 are single, 78.3 per cent; single parents, 3,410, or 16 per cent; couples, 745 or 3.5 per cent; and couples with children, 470 or 2.2 per cent. So the total number of cases is 21,396.

J. DINN: If I might ask, what would a couple with children, let's say a couple with two children, be making on income support?

J. WALL: I will defer that one back to Lori again, please.

L. ROSE: The amount that you would get for having children doesn't change. So you don't get extra on income support for the number of children that you have. It's done by adult.

J. DINN: Okay, so they would get then, if I understand it, if they're just getting for couples – what would they be making then?

L. ROSE: It would be about \$1,800.

J. DINN: A month?

L. ROSE: Yes.

J. DINN: So really –

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's West.

No questions?

The MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

The MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I was just going to say, it's almost worth your while to live apart with your children and you'd probably take in a little bit more money. That's what this comes down to. I find that problematic, and maybe it's the teacher in me as well. I don't know.

Okay, 4.1.02, how does the six-year limitation on collections affect income support overpayments? Can you collect anything six years after the overpayment was made?

J. WALL: MHA Dinn, I'll speak to the income support overpayments. When I finish, I'll pass it off to Lori for some specific numbers.

The benefits are paid in advance so people with no other income can meet their basic needs. So when circumstances change after payment, such as employment starting or living arrangements changing or overlaps of federal benefits, an overpayment can occur. Many of these are administrative in nature and not always fraud. Fraud is seen as a deliberate misrepresentation in non-disclosure of income and living situations.

The overpayment recoveries are limited at 5 per cent; about \$28 a month is what we are entitled to recover when someone is still on income support. It doesn't seem like a whole lot, but it is a lot when you're looking at the amount they receive monthly. The current overpayments are in place now at about \$144 million.

I'll certainly turn it over to Lori for some additional information, but I just want to share that with you.

L. ROSE: MHA Dinn, I understand your question was around the six-year limitation?

J. DINN: Yes.

L. ROSE: Under the income support regulations, we can go back six years to collect on overpayments that we find. We would then start the repayment right away, if they're an active income support client, but we can go back six years to set up overpayments.

J. DINN: Okay.

Has there been any progress on increasing the uptake for the Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement?

J. WALL: The Prenatal-Early Childhood Nutrition Supplement is a monthly financial benefit for low-income pregnant individuals

and families with children under the age of five. It's intended to help with the cost of extra food during pregnancy and early childhood. It is the amount of \$150 per month.

The benefit has two components. The prenatal portion is administered and paid by the income support Program of Social Supports and Well-Being, and the early childhood portion is administered by the CRA and is included with the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit and the Canada child benefit.

So currently 300 families are receiving the prenatal portion of the supplement in '25-'26 at a cost of \$278,670. We would certainly work with the Department of Health and Community Services to promote the program. From all accounts, it's a good program and working well.

I hope I answered your question there, MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Yeah.

How much of that money was actually given out last year?

J. WALL: \$278,670.

J. DINN: Has there been any effort to address cases where income support recipients lose their drug coverage as a result of pursuing post-secondary education or other training opportunities? Now, I seem to remember at one time that's what happened, but I thought that had been rectified. I can think of two cases where that was going to happen, the drug coverage.

J. WALL: They lost their drug coverage with respect to post-secondary education?

J. DINN: Someone who is on income support went back, and again, I can go back to – I don't mind using her name, she was in the news – Krista Stephens. That was the prospect she was facing. I know another

couple in my district who that's the reason they decided not to pursue. They went through Adult Basic Education and they went into post-secondary.

J. WALL: Okay, I can't speak to that one, MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Okay.

J. WALL: Yeah, we'll take that one away because that's one that's –

J. DINN: I would like to know if that's changed then.

J. WALL: Yeah, we'll certainly take that away. That's one for the team to discuss, and I'll certainly get back to you on that.

J. DINN: I appreciate it.

J. WALL: You're kindly welcome.

J. DINN: How many hearings did the income support appeal board hear in 2025-2026?

J. WALL: That's a good question. I don't have that one in front of me, MHA Dinn. I'll certainly get that for you.

J. DINN: Perfect. Maybe, then, to include, if it's possible, the average time it takes a case to be processed in its entirety.

J. WALL: Okay, yeah.

So I know that the appeal board meets monthly. But the average time, we'll get that for you as well.

J. DINN: Okay.

Who sits on that board?

J. WALL: The appeals board, that's currently under review for new positions. So that's in a bit of a limbo state right now. But the current members –

S. DOW: The current members include Jeannette Lundrigan, Gail Hickey, Sam Synard and I'm forgetting a couple of names.

OFFICIAL: We'll get it.

J. DINN: Does anyone with lived experience sit on the board?

J. WALL: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay, good. That's the main thing.

S. DOW: There are two members.

J. DINN: Excellent. (Inaudible.)

What's the budget for funeral benefits? How does this compare to last year's budget?

J. WALL: MHA Dinn, I don't have that breakdown in front of me. We'll certainly get that from the system and, again, we'll get back to you on that.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

J. DINN: In doing so, would you be able to also just let me know what the feedback has been from funeral directors regarding the new funding benefits?

J. WALL: Absolutely.

J. DINN: Finally, we've been hearing confusion regarding the Hearing Aid Program for low-income residents. We were told that it was moved to NLHS, but we've run into a dead end there. I guess the question we're asking is who now processes these applications? Who do we have to contact?

J. WALL: To the best of my knowledge, it is NLH Services. Health Services does administer that. I don't know why you would run into a dead end on that one, but I can certainly speak with my colleague, Minister

Evans, on that and get you the proper person, if you wish to speak to someone.

J. DINN: Yes.

Thank you. That's it.

J. WALL: So, MHA Dinn, back to your previous question about the members, just further to what Sara said: Gail Hickey, Brittany Keating, Jeannette Lundrigan, Vickie Morgan, Bonnie Pritchett and Sam Synard. Those are the current members of the committee, and two of those members do have lived experience on that board.

J. DINN: I appreciate it. Thank you.

Oh, that's it.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

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

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive, Prevention and Early Intervention.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive, Prevention and Early Intervention, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.1.02 carried.

CHAIR: I'll now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 5.1.01, Healthy Communities.

CHAIR: Shall 5.1.01, Healthy Communities, carry?

The Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: We are eliminating the budget for Professional Services here. Why is that?

J. WALL: Professional Services, a savings of \$25,000 in the '25-'26 budget as the branch did not undertake the work that would have required consulting services.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

J. WALL: Then in '26-'27, savings compared to the '25-'26 budget as the funding has been moved to Purchased Services to support the development of the new 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Can you provide an update on which programs or organizations receive funding through the Grants and Subsidies line here?

J. WALL: Certainly.

Under Healthy Communities, Grants: the Community Youth Networks, the Community Sector Council, grants to youth organizations and there's additional unallocated grant funding. That's everything under the Healthy Communities, Grants.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Has there been any changes to the funding provided to the Community Youth Networks?

J. WALL: None to either.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

The Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, I believe I heard that there was an internal committee formed.

J. WALL: Yeah.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Are there any plans for consultation with the community or engaging community and persons with lived experiences, externally?

J. WALL: Yes, the Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, the team has been formed and we are going to be engaging in public and stakeholder engagement. It's a very important part of the strategy development, so over the next coming months, we will certainly work with community groups, Indigenous governments, organizations, service providers and residents through focus groups, surveys, lived and living experience, regional symposiums. We will certainly do our part for engagement with the community.

The team has met informally with groups already, outside of the ministerial committee.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Will you be using engageNL?

J. WALL: Certainly.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, okay.

Thank you very much.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: That's it for me, right now.

CHAIR: MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Again, how much of the money here goes towards core funding for community groups and not-for-profits?

J. WALL: The core funding goes to the CYN, the Community Youth Networks, and that's \$2,862,200; and the Community Sector Council, \$206,200. That's the core funding.

J. DINN: Is the department looking at expanding core funding?

I guess I'm asking that because I know many groups that are just barely getting by. They haven't had an increase. Now while they haven't had a cut – if you haven't had an increase, it's a cut, because it's not keeping pace with the inflation. Groups are then spending funding trying to find more ways to raise money instead of really providing services.

J. WALL: A very valid point. As I said from my opening remarks, we've met with over 60 groups and organizations, many of them have spoke about the need for core funding. We realize how important it is, if you're planning from year to year, without core funding. It's something that we are certainly aware of and, of course, discussing to see who else requires that support.

I understand the predicament they're in. If you don't have an increase, as you said, it's a cut. The cost of everything is certainly going up to try to make ends meet, but we're certainly having those conversations.

J. DINN: It may not be appropriate here, but I have to ask. Will Centreville Place be getting some good core funding?

I'm just saying, it's a brand new community centre so, you know, now is your chance to put it on record.

J. WALL: Yes, we are certainly having those discussions. I can't commit to anything now, MHA Dinn, at this point.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

J. WALL: But I understand and value the importance of the Centreville community centre, no doubt.

J. DINN: Perfect.

That's it for this section.

J. WALL: Thank you.

CHAIR: No further questions?

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

CLERK: 5.1.01, Healthy Communities.

CHAIR: Shall 5.1.01, Healthy Communities, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBER: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subhead 5.1.01 carried.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Department of Social Supports and Well-Being, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being carried without amendment.

CHAIR: We're just going to take a little short recess for you to changeover.

J. WALL: Before we go, Chair, I would just like to say thank you to my colleagues for the questions tonight. It certainly gives us something to think about, and we do have take aways from this that we will certainly get to you.

I'd just like to say thank you to the incredible team I have behind me. They are certainly some of the best, and I'm blessed to be in this department to work with them. This was only a small number; everyone over on the second floor are certainly pulling on the one oar and have the same goal to serve the people of our province the best way we can.

I thank them for being here, not only tonight, but for all that they do to support me in this role, and, of course, for everyone here tonight, thank you very much.

CHAIR: Okay, we'll take a short recess.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

I'll now ask the department officials to introduce themselves, starting here.

J. WALL: Yeah, starting from here.

M. TIZZARD: Mike Tizzard, CEO acting, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

K. CONNOLLY: Krista Connolly, Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services, acting.

M. PENNEY: Melissa Penney, Director of Finance.

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

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

M. BUDGELL: Mark Budgell, Director of Communications.

B. HUDSON: Barb Hudson, still the Executive Assistant to the minister.

T. NEARY: Tina Neary, Ministerial Liaison to the minister and NLHC.

CHAIR: Just some reminders for the department officials. Each time you're asked to speak, just put your hand up and wait for your light to come on. Say your name and position each time you speak. There are water coolers on both sides of the room.

We'll now proceed with the Estimates review process. Once I ask the Clerk to call the first subhead grouping for this head of expenditure, I will proceed to recognize the minister who gets 15 minutes for opening remarks. Then I will proceed to introduce the first responder/questioner for the Committee, who will get 15 minutes. After the first round of questions, we will proceed in rounds of 10 minutes, each alternating between Members of the Committee.

I now ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive, Housing.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive, Housing, carry?

I now recognize the minister for opening remarks.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair. Good evening, again, to everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words at the outset of this year's Estimates for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

I have been Minister of Housing for just over six months, as of budget day, and I've

learned quite a lot in that period of time. As I said earlier, with my team from Social Supports and Well-Being, I'm only as good as the team around me. The executives of that team are here with me this evening, and I certainly thank them for being here and for their support.

Obviously, this has been a high-profile period for the Housing Corporation. The Auditor General delivered a stark report last month highlighting issues with the NLHC meeting its mandate. A lot of what she highlighted are things that we highlighted while in Opposition, and the Leader of the Third Party also had highlighted over the period of time.

Today, our focus is this budget and it is to set the corporation on the right track. Our investments this year focus not only on new housing construction, but also on aggressively repairing existing NLHC homes; improving programs that support low-income homeowners; supporting vulnerable populations, like women and children fleeing violence and those experiencing homelessness.

As has been widely publicized, we have set the ambitious goal of 10,000 homes over the next five years, and 10,000 is the number of total housing starts and completions that we want to see in the province by 2031. That is important for us, that we made that promise, and that commitment has not been taken lightly.

We will certainly include affordable housing, and *Budget 2026* has another \$31.1 million for that, but it will also include market housing, private development, social sector housing – it is all housing, not just housing that we undertake directly. This is ambitious because it requires us to reach record housing starts over this period. If we achieve this goal, several of these years will have to fall within the top 10 years for housing construction in the province's history.

MHA Dinn has been very clear on the need for affordable housing, and I've expressed publicly and privately that I agree with him, but we need all types of housing, not just social housing.

We will certainly stretch the \$31.1 million for new social housing as far as possible. We are looking to build more micro-homes, more multi-unit homes and more one- and two-bedroom homes and apartments with this funding. We will pursue these builds in areas of high priority, and we will be looking outside the Overpass, as there is definite demonstrated housing need in communities like Clarendville and Stephenville, just to give to examples.

We said during the election that we would prioritize the aggressive repair of NLHC homes, and the Auditor General's report showed us plainly that we certainly need more staff. We are investing \$12.7 million over two years for this, which includes funding to hire more than 20 maintenance staff throughout our province.

Another way that this budget will make affordable housing available is by increasing the number of Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Benefits that are available. I know that both of my hon. colleagues and I have spoken about the need for this, and this is certainly an investment that we are pleased to make.

Over 60 per cent of our current wait-list are people who are housed but are struggling to afford to maintain their housing. With these additional CHBs, we are able to reduce the current wait-list by approximately 20 per cent. We know that more people will join the wait-list but taking 20 per cent off what is there right now is certainly a notable portion of the wait-list.

We also know that lower income families who are housed often cannot afford necessary renovations to their home. Sometimes changing life circumstances like

aging and accessibility needs add financial vulnerabilities.

As an MHA, I have heard many concerns that government's homeowner programs, the Home Energy Savings Program, the Provincial Home Repair Program and the Home Modification Program simply have not kept up with changing realities.

We are investing \$4.3 million in this fiscal year and \$7.3 million annually thereafter to improve these particular programs. We will be combining the Provincial Home Repair Program and the Home Energy Savings Program as we have seen significant overlap for these programs. We are removing the requirement to complete pre- and post-inspections on all home repairs. We are doubling the forgivable loan from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and for Labrador, \$6,500 to \$13,000.

We are reducing the wait time to reapply from seven years to five years. We are also increasing the lifetime maximum that someone can get from the program from \$12,500 to \$30,000. This was necessary to keep up with the current costs that people are facing.

We are also making changes to the Home Modification Program, including doubling the forgivable loan from \$7,500 to \$15,000, removing the requirement to get a recommendation from an occupational therapist for minor modifications like handrails and grab bars. We are also removing the requirement for an inspection by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation for routine work. Inspections are still required for major works, for example, a ramp.

Beyond these major investments, we are also providing a major increase to the emergency shelter budget to reflect unfortunate current realities. We are increasing the budget for transition houses to reflect budget shortfalls that they have experienced.

We have funding in this budget earmarked to support Labrador West in their application for a seniors' housing project. This is a partnership with Labrador City, the mining company, our provincial government and the federal government. They have an application into the federal government and we are now providing funding certainty to help boost their application. That is great news for Lab West. We are hopeful that the federal government will see the value and the need for this project.

Finally, I just want to note that, beyond our provincial budget, the corporation also receives the majority of its budget from the federal government, which isn't reflected in these provincial Estimates.

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of meeting the CEO of Build Canada Homes to discuss shared priorities. It was certainly a positive meeting. We have a lot of good discussion to come from that and, of course, we are certainly optimistic of a lot of good work here in our province working with Build Canada Homes.

With our provincial budget now out, we are starting negotiations on a bilateral agreement, similar to what other provinces have released. This will have significant impact on, not only our goal of 10,000 homes over five years, but also expanding transitional and supportive housing.

With all of these points made, I'm certainly happy to field your questions and, again, happy to have the opportunity to be here this evening.

CHAIR: I now call on the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you.

Minister, first, I just want to ask for a copy of the binder.

J. WALL: Absolutely.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Second, I need to say, you had a lot to say in the introduction, so if I ask a question about something you said, forgive me.

J. WALL: No problem.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: We see a decrease of over \$8.6 million in the funds going to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corp despite spending the full budget last year. What is this change?

J. WALL: This decrease is primarily the result of the planned reduction of the Affordable Rental Housing Program of \$32 million. This reduction is partially offset by increased funding to the emergency shelter program of \$20 million; changes to improve the Home Repair Program, \$4.2 million in the first year; and increased funding for transitional houses of \$1.2 million.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

The rental subsidy program has been a regular inquiry for myself and my colleagues over the last number of months. You noted in Question Period that the entire budget was spent by October 2025. That's seven months into the fiscal year. So why didn't we see an increase in that program? Clearly, there's a huge demand for it.

J. WALL: That's a good point, MHA Gambin-Walsh. Starting in '26-'27, an additional \$4 million per year will be dedicated to increasing the number of low-income households eligible for the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Benefit by approximately 500.

This was something that we faced when I came into the department. Again, I didn't sugar-coat it. We could not give out money that we did not have. So this was certainly a positive move for the people that we support, and with another 500 benefits going out, it will certainly make a difference.

So by the end of the agreement in March of 2028 with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, we forecast to have over 3,700 households to be served by this particular program.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. Yes, I agree, 500 more benefits are going to be good, but I almost think that the 500 benefits are already gone before we even start, just based on the demand.

The recent Auditor General's report on the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation had recommendations particularly around wait-list processes, forecasting and managing unit supply. Is the department planning on supporting Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation through dedicated staff that will address the AG's recommendations?

J. WALL: Yes, so we have, in this budget, funding for 23 additional staff to be hired. We saw the need for the units to come back into our housing stock that needed to be repaired. Those 23 will certainly do that work and make that difference of getting those units back into the fold that we can certainly then use. In addition, that will certainly help the wait-list, when we have those units back in stock.

So the 23 staff that we have budgeted for, as far as I know, the hiring process has started. That certainly has been posted already and I'm looking forward to getting those people hired and getting this work done.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So just for clarity, Minister, is that 20 staff for maintenance and three other staff?

J. WALL: No, 23 staff total.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: For maintenance?

J. WALL: For maintenance and repair.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Maintenance and repair. Okay, thank you very much.

J. WALL: You're welcome.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: There were several initiatives framed as new or expanding in the budget documents, but it does not seem to align with the values we are seeing here in the Estimates book. I have some specific lines, they're directly from the budget and I'm just looking for some clarification on where this funding is included in these Estimates and if there are any programs being eliminated or changed? I do know that you did note some changes here earlier and then changes to the wait times to reapply.

I'm just asking, you mentioned that the Home Energy Savings Program and the Provincial Home Repair Program were combining, does that mean that the financial amounts allocated to those are just going together? Are there any changes in the amount?

M. TIZZARD: The amounts for the two programs will be combined. The \$2 million for the Home Energy Savings Program will transfer into the Provincial Home Repair Program, but what we'll do is expand the eligible repairs under the Home Energy Savings Program to be eligible under the Home Repair Program.

Some feedback we get from clients and from MHAs who help clients is that the two programs are difficult to navigated. So instead of two, we're going to make one and, hopefully, that solves some of those problems, but the funding allocation for both, the budget is still the same.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Staying the same.

M. TIZZARD: Combining, I should say.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

M. TIZZARD: It's obviously increasing with all the other pieces of doubling the grant. Our budget is increasing for those things.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. The same for the Home Modification Program, is there going to be any changes to the funding that was allocated, or any decreases?

M. TIZZARD: The funding has increased for the Home Modification Program again. As the minister talked about, the changes in that program are the maximum grant is growing to \$15,000; there's a five-year time period to reapply; we're removing the requirement for an occupational therapist report to support minor modifications like grab bars, raised toilets, increased space for wheelchairs and handrails; and we're going to take away the requirement for NLHC to inspect the unit, but it's still available if the homeowner has difficulty, obviously.

Sometimes it's difficult; not everybody can navigate a home repair and we'll make our services available. We're hoping that speeds up things as well.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: What about the inspection requirements for the programs, like if you're getting – let's see, there are so many different changes – new windows in, a new patio for accessibility.

M. TIZZARD: It's the same thing. Our Home Repair Program, we'll be removing the requirement for inspection by NLHC.

The expectation is that we'll build accountability through quotes from contractors, those things, and do that. People can give us pictures to prove the work is done.

We're really trying to speed up the process for the homeowner, but, again, like I said, we're available to help if someone needs some help to navigate the home repair. Then, our engineering technicians that would be involved in that are going to shift

their focus to NLHC units to develop scopes of work so we can shift into that vacancy repair.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I don't disagree with it. It's just that I know why it came about because we had situations where people were not spending the money appropriately, you know, the funding as it was allocated. So that's how we arrived at it. But I certainly understand the amount of time that it actually takes up from staff.

What about the First-Time Homebuyers Program? Is there any changes to that? Is that staying the same?

J. WALL: There are currently no changes with that one.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, and the Secondary and Basement Suite Incentive program?

J. WALL: That program is now cancelled from a low uptake on that. So that one won't be moving forward.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Do we have any new, innovative programs to look forward to?

J. WALL: New innovative programs? What we have here is as what was described. It's certainly going to make a difference to the people who need that help. As the CEO said, it's going to streamline the process and make it a bit easier.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you very much.

Let's see, \$4 million for approximately 500 additional Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Benefits. It's going to be helping more low-income families afford rent and reducing Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation wait-lists by approximately 20 per cent. Is that exactly what the funding is allocated for, yes?

J. WALL: Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

The \$1.3 million annually for operations of the recently opened Mercy House at The Gathering Place that provides transitional and supportive housing to help lift people out of the cycle of homelessness. That particular funding, where did that originally come from? Where was it allocated out of? Was it just Grants and Subsidies?

J. WALL: Yeah, that was through Grants and Subsidies initially.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

That was a one-off or – no, it was annually. So they would be receiving \$1.3 million annually?

J. WALL: Correct, moving forward.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

So I just want to confirm, an increase of \$1.2 million to help women and children fleeing violence. Will there be any changes to how people access that funding, or is it going to be pretty much the same as is done right now, like, victims of violence, and they reach out to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation?

J. WALL: No, there's no change in that moving forward.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

The \$23 million for the emergency shelter system. Are there any changes in how the emergency shelter system funding is going to be allocated?

J. WALL: Did you want to take that one?

M. TIZZARD: I can, yes.

J. WALL: I don't think there is any change, but you can take that one.

M. TIZZARD: No changes to how the Emergency Shelter Program operates. It's a budget line for us that has been underfunded since we took responsibility for the program in 2018. This is rightsized to our actuals.

Our hope is that, with \$23 million now in our budget, we can plan appropriately and try to move some people out of shelter into a supportive housing model with that funding.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you.

In the budget it said, "We are investing \$31.1 million over three years in the construction of new social housing." How many new units are expected out of that particular money?

J. WALL: Thank you for the question.

That all depends on the type of build that we are going to be starting, where it is and what's going to be needed to support that.

For example, in Corner Brook, we have a build right now, a 20-unit apartment building, for \$9.1 million. When we look at the whole picture of that, that includes in-ground infrastructure as well: water, sewer, sidewalks, pavement, all in that one build.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes.

J. WALL: So it all depends on what we're building. We're going to be focusing on micro-units and one- and two-bedroom units. That is primarily the need that we have currently.

For example, a micro-unit – we have 10 going up on Army Street currently – they are at a price tag of \$161,000 per unit. One- and two-bedroom, we're looking at \$195,000. It all depends on what we choose to build, given the area that we're in, given the demand of the wait-list and given the piece of property that we're working with.

On Hoyles Avenue, there is a unit going up with three units in one building. It's a new type of build that the city has approved. It's maximizing the space that we're on.

Empire Avenue, there's a quadplex going up – four units – to maximize the space. That particular piece of property is ours. The Housing Corporation had a fire there years ago.

It all depends on where we're going to build and what we're going to build, so I can't give you a specific number out of \$31.1 million over three years.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, I know there have been significant plans to, I should say, rightsize the houses so they meet the need of the individuals, because the old stock is like the three-bedroom stock, but we do find, specifically in rural Newfoundland, that we do have a lot of houses where is one adult now living in a three-bedroom home, because the children have grown up and moved on.

Do we have any plans in rural? I know it's difficult to find housing, then, to meet the needs for that individual, but we have families who need these homes that have three bedrooms. So are there any plans or discussion to try to address that?

J. WALL: There are lots of discussions on it and it's very difficult. When you're looking at one person being over housed, I'd sooner have them over housed than not housed at all, for starters. However, we do have many families that could avail of that two- and three-bedroom unit.

Our staff are also looking at if we could renovate that unit to become two units. However, it's not always financially or fiscally prudent to do so. Again, that all depends on the build and what we're working with. It's a discussion that we're having continuously. Moreover, as you said in rural, you're 100 per cent right when it comes to the units. Like, some units are 40,

50 or 60 years old and it does make it difficult when we have people who reared a family there and now maybe one person is left.

So it's a discussion we're always having, MHA Gambin-Walsh. It's no easy solution, but even with respect to the wait-lists we have in the area and the units we have there, we're always looking at that.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. Just one question.

So the ministerial liaison position, is that funded from the Department of Social Supports or from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation?

J. WALL: To the best of my knowledge, that's funded through the Housing Corporation. The individual is located in the department but funded through the Housing Corporation.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

All right, that's it for me for that section.

CHAIR: The MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I do thank the staff for coming. I'm sure you've had your share of grief from me and my office over the years. I can't say that – it will continue, that's the best way I can say it. But it's for a good cause and you've been very helpful.

With regard to the \$8.6-million reduction, would you go through, Minister, the reasons for what – I think it says primary reduction, but you said the money has been shifted. Because it looks like there's an overall reduction in the budget. First of all, that is a reduction in the budget to Housing, or it's simply repurposed?

M. TIZZARD: The \$82-million Affordable Rental Housing Program that was

announced previously was a one-time program funded to the Housing Corporation over three years. The '25-'26 budget included the last funding for that of \$32 million. So that one-time funding of \$32 million comes out of our budget this year.

Actually, overall, the Housing Corporation from a base budget perspective has an increase this year. You take off the \$32 million of one-time funding, you'd be at \$81 million last year.

Now we've seen a \$20-million increase for emergency shelters, \$4 million transferred in for the Canada Housing Benefits, \$1.3 million for the Mercy House and \$1.2 million for transition houses. It's one-time funding leaving, but some base-budget adjustments coming back in.

J. DINN: Thank you.

First of all, with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, it's a Crown corporation, correct? So am I correct in saying that, as a Crown corporation, you can go out and borrow to fund your projects, or is it strictly related to government funding?

M. TIZZARD: Our legislation indicates we can borrow money, but it is subject to approval of the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. We'd need Cabinet approval to do it.

J. DINN: Would that be carried on the province's books?

M. TIZZARD: Yes, our financial statements are consolidated with the statements with the Public Accounts.

J. DINN: I would assume that NL Hydro is a Crown corporation as well?

M. TIZZARD: That would be a question for them.

J. DINN: Where I'm going with it is, they can borrow, they can finance and it's not necessarily in the province's books. I'm just wondering what it would take for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to be that independent and to set its own course, in conjunction with the department, but not necessarily being part of it, being independent and being able to raise its own funds, as well as any government funding, to address the housing situation.

We had proposed something similar in our platform, only it was not with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, it was NL homes. I often wonder why that couldn't be done with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation so it is but it isn't part of that department, if that makes sense.

J. WALL: MHA Dinn, that's a very interesting question.

You'll have to forgive me, I'm starting to lose my voice.

The Housing Corporation, yes, they can do exactly that; however, we are responsible for government dollars when it comes back to being responsible.

You mentioned about NL Hydro, again another Crown corporation, but I'll let them speak to that. With respect to the Housing Corporation, for example, we had a great meeting with Ana Bailão from Build Canada Homes and we can certainly come into an agreement, the Housing Corporation with Build Canada Homes, for units here in the province with respect to funding from the federal government.

If that's what you're referring to with respect to a Crown corporation outside of or at arm's length from government. Is that what you're referring to?

J. DINN: I guess what I'm looking at, if it was cut loose or allowed to be independent and said, okay, there's a priority but it's

more or less independent, it can set its goals. You would have government funding, obviously. There would be a set of responsibilities with that, but if it could go out and borrow, let's say, raise its own capital and collect that money through rents and so on and so forth, but be responsible for affordable homes.

Where I'm going with it, since it's not just tied to a government budget then and limitations that come with it, would it be able to sort of build more homes and get to that 10,000 homeless much faster and these would be non-market, community-based homes? That's where I'm going with it.

J. WALL: I see where you're going.

J. DINN: As an original way, well, not my original way, but an original way to do it.

M. TIZZARD: So in order to achieve that, that's a direction we'd have to get from government right now. Our legislation doesn't allow us to do that. Is it possible? Potentially, it would have to be set up in a way but we need to take – there are a lot of financial factors you'd have to look at. I would imagine we would never be able to borrow at a rate that's as low as governments to borrow. That's a factor. It would be cheaper for government to borrow than us, but is that something that could be mediated? Anything is possible but we'd need legislation changes in order for something like that to be explored.

J. DINN: Well, there you go; we have a plan already.

Okay, another question, I was just curious, when it comes to funding not-for-profits and organizations like building homes, I'm looking at the two models, the difference between a fee-for-service model and a budget-line model in terms of funding. Here's where I'm going with it. If I understand it correctly, and you can correct me if I'm wrong, under a budget-line model, each budget line has to be accounted for.

So if an organization has so much money for, I don't know, food or whatever, then it can't be used for anything else. It's very clear, very rigid and requires an awful lot of bookkeeping and bookwork on the part of the organization, as opposed to a fee. Here's your lumpsum, here's what we need you to do, your service that we want you to provide, show us the bills at the end of it so that you didn't spend it on a Maserati or something like that, that it could be accounted for and give the organizations the flexibility to find savings within that budget to do it.

I bring to your attention to it, that model is used in Finland and that's how big organizations are investing and building more housing and programs as they can save from the service they provide. They're repurposing the money but not misusing money. They're finding savings within and it's probably cheaper on the organization in terms of accounting and probably cheaper and more efficient when it comes to the bureaucracy and making sure that all lines matched up.

I'm assuming that the model that is being used, when it comes to distributing funds, is more or less the budget-line approach, show us the account and how each line was spent, which is tedious and not very efficient on both. I would propose, then, that the fee-for-service model is probably a better way to allow organizations here, that are already into housing, to build faster, to build better and to build cheaper.

Just a thought. I'm just curious as to considerations on that. It's a lot of paperwork with one and a lot more flexibility with the other.

M. TIZZARD: I think you were at the conference last week or the week before, we were there, too, and listened to some of the proposals around the Finland model.

Right now, we do look at – I don't want to say we're extremely rigid but our affordable-

renting housing program gives an amount of money per door. Our emergency shelter program has a block-funded model. It also has a per diem model. I'll say we do still use mostly the traditional accounting piece. I mean, it is public money. We look for how much someone spent on salaries, travel, those things. We are open to flexibility, if it does look that way but, right now, we're still on the traditional model.

I don't know if Joe or Melanie wanted to add something.

J. DINN: If there's money in the budget for travel and they don't use that money for travel, can they then repurpose it towards – we're going to give –

M. TIZZARD: Yeah, we work with our community partners, constantly. If they have savings in a travel line or food line and they want to use it for something else, we're totally supportive of that, if it stays within, obviously, the budget that we have for them, too.

J. DINN: That's not the impression I'm getting – not that you're not supportive but the flexibility is not there.

Okay, I'll have more questions in a bit.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Minister, I just have a few policy-related questions related to the drug houses issue I raised in the House of Assembly last week. My question, at the time, wasn't related to an NLHC unit; although I do face those challenges elsewhere in my district. So I'm just looking for clarification or confirmation. Would your department or NLHC only be responsible for addressing drug houses within NLHC units?

J. WALL: Yes.

K. WHITE: What's the current process within NLHC when a unit is suspected of being used as a drug house?

J. WALL: I'll lead off on that one and Mike can jump in. We certainly appreciate when members of the public step forward and share that information with us. There is a process that we take part in with respect to our staff visiting the unit.

Mike, you can jump in and describe with respect to the process.

M. TIZZARD: I'd like to add to the minister previous – and some people will get it confused. We're still bound by the Residential Tenancies Act as NLHC. We can't just evict someone without following the Residential Tenancies Act.

So when we do have those suspicions, as the minister said, it could be identified through our own inspection or a member from the public or neighbourhood calls us to raise an issue and then we'll go inspect it. Sometimes these issues happen overnight. We had an example of a unit we were in 24 days before, inspected perfect, and then it was a mess 24 days later. Some happen overnight.

There is an eviction prevention process. Like I said, we have to follow the Residential Tenancies Act. It does come with some challenges. We post notices on doors. You don't get answers. You don't get co-operation. Eventually that would escalate to help from a sheriff's officer or police, if we have very serious suspected drug activity.

We do have a very detailed and, I think, well-thought-out eviction prevention process at NLHC. So if someone is an at-risk tenant upon move in, like if someone's exiting homelessness from community-based supports like FACT, ACT teams or NAVNET with the NLHS, we follow them from the start or we identify them as an at-risk tenant, if we do get those complaints, and we'll start the eviction prevention intervention process.

So that's where our housing officers get involved, completing home visits,

inspections. We post notices and letters, per the Residential Tenancies Act and NLHC policy. We'll also get our social workers involved, giving services to tenants and, again, the services are voluntary. But if they agree, we'll work to develop tenant actions plans, referrals.

We also do management. Our management and eviction prevention coordinator, a consultant for guidance, and then, you know, sometimes the tenants just don't engage and we need to proceed to eviction. Obviously, for criminal activity, we would move quicker because it leads to further problems in the neighbourhood or for neighbours.

K. WHITE: Okay, thank you.

Do you have any units currently suspected of these activities that are being investigated?

M. TIZZARD: Yes, we do.

K. WHITE: How does your department or NLHC in this case going about confirming that illegal activity would be taking place inside?

M. TIZZARD: Again, it's confirmation usually from neighbours. We do work closely with the RNC – I can actually hand it over to Joe. Joe talks to the RNC on a regular basis around suspected, I'll just say, addresses. I'm trying to be confidential here as well for the process, respectful of that process, and they will confirm if there are cases or things in that. We'll work together to try to solve the problem.

Joe, do you want to add anything to that?

J. MERCER: As Mike said, in addition to working closely with the RNC and other entities that might be available, even community partners, we do our own home inspections. Again, you're not allowed just to knock on the door and walk in. You do

have to give notice that you're coming and things like that, but we're not the law.

We don't decide if it is criminal activity or not, but if we see anything that concerns us, it moves the process around the eviction prevention process down quicker and potentially having to work with RTA then to see what we can do to get moving on this, to get the neighbourhood back to an enjoyable neighbourhood.

K. WHITE: Okay, thank you.

Can you tell us what supports are in place for other tenants who may be impacted, while this process is ongoing?

J. WALL: Other supports?

K. WHITE: Yeah, how do you, I guess, support the neighbours?

J. WALL: Well, they certainly have an opportunity to reach out to the Housing Corporation and speak with our officers. They can provide them guidance as to what to do and what not to do.

Again, it's a very difficult situation at times, when we're dealing with instances like this. As Mike said, we try to respect the privacy of those individuals, but they always have the option to reaching out. Our officers will work with them, give them best practices. Unfortunately, the illegal activity that we're faced with, at times, we rely on our Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the RCMP.

K. WHITE: Is there a complaints line available for members of the public or other tenants in the neighbourhood who have issues with drug houses?

M. TIZZARD: We don't have a complaints line but each NLHC office has a toll-free number that someone can call to do that, to file a complaint. We get emails all the time as well with that. That's something that Joe and I have discussed in the last number of

weeks, is setting up some kind of anonymous reporting mechanism where someone can report anonymously of an issue.

K. WHITE: Last question – has your department or NLHC had any discussions with Government Services or residential tenancies about how any of the processes used within NLHC could potentially be replicated for private landlords dealing with these similar issues?

J. WALL: Good question.

I have had conversations with the Minister of Government Services. We are looking at the legislation on possible changes to it to better serve the people of the province, including those in NLHC units. We're working through that now. It is very early in the discussion. However, we recognize the need that's there to make those changes.

As far as I know, I could be wrong, but the last update that was on the Residential Tenancies Act was 2019 or 2020 – so five, six or seven years. So it is time to have a good look at that and see if we can update it.

CHAIR: The Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, Horizons, can you tell me, approximately, how many individuals were admitted and successfully discharged?

J. WALL: To the best of my knowledge, there was 41 or 42 people who have successfully went through Horizons and are now living elsewhere. There are currently 75 left at 106 Horizons and funding will be in place for that facility up until December 31 of this year.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So what is the plan to move the clients, the 75 that are presently there? I mean, we're eight months out now to December 31. I know this was supposed

to be, like you said, a temporary measure and plans were supposed to be put in place then to meet the needs of this particular type of client. Eight months will go by pretty fast. Are you continuing to admit people to Horizons now or have you stopped admissions?

J. WALL: To the best of my knowledge, there are no further admissions at Horizons and individuals that are there will remain there or transition out between now and December. We are currently working on a plan as we move forward to support those individuals. There won't be anyone left behind or left homeless.

We will certainly have a plan with respect to our housing units and, of course, the maintenance staff we're hiring to update our units to make sure that everyone has a place to live. That plan is currently evolving now and we'll have it in place before the end of the year.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So one thing that Horizons has taught us is that there's a population of vulnerable individuals getting wraparound services. The roof over their head will never totally and always meet their need.

J. WALL: Agreed.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Also, one of the things that has come to light was that our shelters, while they're supposed to be an emergency-type model, we do have a population of individuals who the shelters are not meeting their need when they need the shelter because they need to live in a sober living type environment.

So are there any plans to provide a sober living type environment. That's question one. Question two is what are the plans for wraparound services for the continued clientele that we don't even know of yet?

J. WALL: Great points and great question.

We've had discussions with respect to sober living units here in the province. I'll let Mike expand on that one a little bit.

With respect to the individuals in shelters and those needing those wraparound supports, we're going to be working with our community partners to ensure that it's not just a roof over their head because we realize that people do need that support on a daily basis. It would vary, a daily basis, weekly basis.

But, Mike, did you want to jump in and just expand on that because it's important.

M. TIZZARD: So on sober living, we are about to enter into a partnership with a local community group where we are going to provide two NLHC units, so six rooms, where they will identify people from shelter who left recovery, who would normally end up in a shelter, I guess, coming out of recovery. They will go into the units and be supported from a sober living perspective.

It's two vacant units on New Pennywell Road in St. John's. They were vacated about three weeks ago. They're probably ready to go within another week. So we'll hopefully have people moved in there soon.

That's a pilot project. Obviously, I know it's small with six people. But, if it works, we could see it expand then in other areas, or even more in the metro area.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

One more thing. So I've heard the language blended-housing model used. What exactly do you mean by blended-housing model? Do you know?

M. TIZZARD: Do you mean, like, a mixed market, like if you build an apartment building, some market rents, some affordable rents or —?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: That's what I'm wondering. Is that the context that you

would use the language blended-housing model. Would it be –

M. TIZZARD: Blended-housing model is not really something we're using at NLHC. But it could be that or it could be looking at, like, there will be different people living in the unit. I just talked about the sober living, different ages and things.

J. WALL: Melanie is going to speak to that.

M. TIZZARD: Okay, Melanie will. Go ahead, Mel.

M. THOMAS: Just to elaborate a little bit further on blended housing. I think the comment was made in reference to transitions from Horizons at 106, really looking at, I guess, a wide range of housing solutions that may be reflective of the needs of the existing residents.

So as I think the minister mentioned in his remarks, NLHC housing units, we've had great success at Horizons with identifying Canada Housing Benefits, so looking at the wide range of housing options that may be available for folks exiting Horizons.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, perfect.

Thank you very much. That is all the questions for me.

CHAIR: MHA for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I have a feeling that I'll be sending the rest of my questions to you, but we'll start and see what we got here.

Back to the question that the Member for St. John's West had, to do with trap houses, and also with regard to the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's about the need for supports. I'm looking at this in terms of Horizons at 106 and also the minister's comments about part of the \$23 million is

moving people from shelters to supportive housing, I think it was.

The word supportive – because I would argue that a lot of trap houses, such as they are, basically housing takeovers, in many cases, or in England I think they call them cocooning, I will say this, times that I've called Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, I can think of a few, you've been very helpful and do I need to be concerned or not. You have got to move slowly, I guess, deliberately and fairly.

But, again, I'll use this example, the name because it was in the paper, of a teacher Susan Evoy who lived down on Carter's Hill and the person next to her was receiving supports from, I think, I'm not sure about Housing – well, CSSD and Housing at the time. Anyway, there were three agencies, the landlord was receiving about \$4,000 in rent a month for the person.

We did meet. This person threatened her, threatened her partner and kicked out the window. One social worker would come to check in on him every now and again, knock on the door. I don't know if it was weekly or monthly, and he wouldn't answer; Susan would know that he was there, she could hear him.

Anyway, we were always told by the departments, if you see any suspicious activity, call the police. Guess where he ended up? Back in jail again, which is unfortunately where he is. I would argue that he wasn't receiving wraparound services and that models I'm looking at when I think of wraparound services, which is take away the fact that, yes, whatever that lucrative lease was for the Horizons, the fact is, it had staff there 24-7. There's always staff to intervene, to offer support.

I think of Stella's Circle, the same thing. I think of the Ches Penney Centre of Hope. I think of Dunn House in Toronto or Indwell, the models there, where there's always staff

to intercede before something even gets out of control.

I guess, when I hear supportive, moving people, there might be people down there at Horizons who might be there for a lot longer. I would argue that transitioning them with the supports, that means we're going to check on them once a week or once a month, we'll offer them opportunities, I would say is not going to be enough. They will end up back in the shelter system somewhere along the line.

I guess, what I'm looking at, when I hear you talk about supportive housing and supports, what do you mean? I'm trying to get a handle. I've been trying to get a handle on this for six years. What does it mean? When I think of supportive housing, I think of Dunn House, Stella's Circle, Ches Penney Centre of Hope, 106 Horizons, Indwell, these places where you have staff there and people who have the independence and freedom to come and go as they wish, but they have supports.

J. WALL: That's a great point, MHA Dinn, that all depends on the assessment of the individual. You mentioned about once a week or once a month, it could be once a day that they do need that assistance. That would all come after the assessment.

As Mike had said earlier, we do have community partners that we're going to be engaging with, for example, Stella's Circle that are doing that work now, that are good at what they do and we support them in what they do. We'll be certainly working with our community partners to ensure that those supports, whatever deemed necessary for the individual, is provided.

I understand the point that you're trying to make with respect to making sure that they do have proper supports. We don't want to have these situations arise where there are windows being kicked out and what have you. That will all have to unfold, of course, when we move with our plan and have each

individual assessed as to what they would require.

Mike, I don't know if there's anything else that you want to add to that or if that's sufficient, but that's my thought with respect to the types of supports. You know, we would have to probably work with our colleagues in Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, NLHS.

Anyway, Mike, you can jump in now.

M. TIZZARD: Just to add small to the minister's comments, I agree. Stella's Circle is a great partner. We've got over a hundred rent supplements that we use with Stella's Circle and the Canadian Mental Health Association, where they provide a supportive model to people renting in the private market.

I agree on the Centre of Hope, we need more of that, but we also have infrastructure that I'd like to look at even a supportive housing model where people move into an NLHC unit, where we have so many units, I'll say, densely populated in areas, where they become a supportive housing model. Even that kind of thing we want to start exploring with our community partners.

That's part of the strategy for Horizons. That's part of the strategy when dealing with our wait-list so people can have successful tenancy. That's what we would like to see more of.

On the Horizons front, there are some people who can move to housing. There are some people who need health response that is at Horizons, whether it's personal care homes, laundry. It's a vast array of need that people need up there from a supportive perspective, whether it's housing supports or health supports.

We'll be looking at each case individually. Someone may need to be checked on every day, 24 hours a day, and some people may be able to live with some independence

where they're checked on two or three days, but we'll have to make a case study and look at what everybody needs individually so that they have successful tenancy for wherever they move to next.

J. WALL: If I could just jump back in there for a moment, not operating in silos, my colleague from Health and Community Services, with the addition of long-term care beds, all of that makes a difference when it comes to supporting those in community that need our support. As Mike mentioned, moving out of 106 Horizons, there could be individuals there that would fit nicely and deem appropriate to have a long-term care unit.

All of these things we're going to be looking at as we move forward. It's important to us. It's important to the people who reside there that need the care. We'll certainly put the effort into making sure it's done properly.

J. DINN: I could spend another hour on this, but I do have a few questions with regard to Mercy House.

I think you said \$1.3 million in core funding. Is that in addition to the core funding for The Gathering Place or is that –?

J. WALL: Yes.

J. DINN: Because I know The Gathering Place has core funding.

J. WALL: Yeah.

J. DINN: So it would be roughly – if the Gathering Place is getting \$1.3 million, then I would assume the total amount is \$2.6 million, if they are the same. Would that be correct?

M. TIZZARD: I can take this one.

J. WALL: Yes.

M. TIZZARD: The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, with that

\$1.3-million increase, will provide The Gathering Place with \$3.5 million annually, and that's for the 51 supportive and transitional housing units that were just renovated, and also for their 40-bed emergency shelter. So that's \$3.5 million annually from us.

Health and Community Services also provides funding to The Gathering Place. I'm not sure the amount, but it's \$3.5 million from us.

J. DINN: Okay.

Is there any intention or any plans maybe, at some point, let's say, to buy Horizons? I don't know what the cost would be right now. It would've been cheaper to buy it at the time. Or even to look at building a model, something similar to Dunn House, which is built, I think, on the University Health Network's hospital grounds.

So they have that supportive living, but it's sort of, like, medical housing. Again, it's a way of making sure people stay housed, healthy. It's like a home but they've got freedom to go, but they've got supports right there on site.

Any consideration given to something like that, rather than transitioning people out into new settings where they may or may not be ready?

J. WALL: So with respect to the purchase of 106 Horizons, no, that has not been discussed. With respect to supportive housing, we've had discussions with Build Canada Homes that they do have funding for such builds, so we're exploring that.

Those discussions, as we said, we had a good meeting two weeks ago and we have further discussions lined up to ensure that we can have agreement for funding to come to the province.

CHAIR: The Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you very much.

As the MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue, I've had a lot of dealings with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing over the last seven years. First of all, I would like to start and commend them on the tremendous work that they do as dealing with the boots on the ground and the people that need these services the most.

While my colleagues were asking questions, I did notice, big time, that the Home Support Programs like, in particular, the Home Repair Program, the Home Modification Program, there are some really good initiatives in there on raising thresholds and all of that kind of stuff which I think will actually capture a lot more people that are kind of disenfranchised from getting those repairs done on their own.

I am curious. What drove those changes? Is it from the boots on the ground as well?

J. WALL: Thank you for the question.

That came from many opportunities to speak from different MHAs bringing forward the concerns from the residents to make those changes. When Mike spoke earlier about combining those programs, it was an attempt and an effort to streamline it and make it a lot more easier for the individuals to apply.

I know I touched on it in my opening remarks, but we're combining those programs, as we've seen significant overlap, and the programs are going to include – I might have touched on this before but this is more in depth. We're going to remove the requirement to complete the premium post inspections on all home repairs. We are doubling the forgivable loan from \$5,000 to \$10,000; \$6,500 to \$13,000 in Labrador; reducing the wait time to five years from seven; and increasing the lifetime maximum from \$12,500 to \$30,000.

This was certainly heard many times, even since I've come into the department and I just wanted to make sure that it better reflects what the people are looking for and streamline the process. We do have overlap and I just want to make it a bit easier. I hope that answers your question.

J. DWYER: Thank you very much and, like I said, I think for the people that would utilize those services it is really a great step in the right direction. I thank you and your department.

That's it for me, Chair.

J. WALL: It's good because staff are constantly evaluating and making sure that we do things right and best serve the people of the province.

J. DWYER: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: So one thing that I will share that didn't come up in any of the notes here this evening or any of the conversation, we had a great conversation with the Seniors' Advocate and from the conversation she recommended removing the recommendation for the assessments, because she heard from the people reaching out to her, to her office, with respect to how cumbersome that can be. So we met with the Seniors' Advocate, maybe in the first month I was here, and that came from that discussion as well. So we're taking whatever advice to work with to better serve the clients.

I hope that answers your question.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: While, I guess, your government is working towards 10,000 homes, the fact is people are still facing evictions. I'll give an example, excessive rent increases that are forcing people into finding homes which they can't afford or into homelessness, in some cases. We're just chasing after a

problem that doesn't seem to be going away.

Any consideration then for rent and vacancy control to prevent that kind of gouging and even an end to the three-month, no-fault evictions, especially in this case, where large landlords, such as NLHC or St. John's Housing or large financial landlords, not as a way of solving it, but for stabilizing it so people do not find themselves out on the street.

J. WALL: That's a great point, MHA Dinn. We've had that conversation with Minister Goosney, which the legislation falls under his department. In the meantime, the 500 CHBs are certainly going to make a difference, initially.

But having that conversation with respect to rent and vacancies and no-fault evictions, as a landlord, as the biggest landlord in the province, we are bound by the *Residential Tenancies Act*. As I said earlier, we do have to have a look at that legislation to see if we can make improvements and amendments to it to better serve the people of the province. We're having that conversation.

J. DINN: Thank you.

You committed to create more positions at NLHC. I'm just wondering is that enough? I mean, I can look at the work that's to be done on Livingstone Street in my district, just that one street, it would be more than enough to keep off – I think, it's over two years, if I understood it correctly, the extra maintenance staff that you're hiring. So I'm just wondering is that enough?

J. WALL: That's a great point. It's certainly a great start, hiring 23 additional staff. Those staff are going to be prepared to be travelling as well to different parts of the province. We want to make sure that we do serve the people and make sure that we have the units restored timely.

Again, this is year one of a four-year mandate. In the first year, in the first budget, 23 staff hired is a great step. We can certainly look at expanding on that, but, right now, we're very happy and very eager to get those people hired, get them to work and to get these units back up and running.

J. DINN: I guess you're feeling confident you will be able to hire them, even though –

J. WALL: Yes.

J. DINN: – the union has said that the salaries aren't competitive?

J. WALL: No, we are confident that we'll get them hired. We've had 10 people apply in the last two days just on those positions. So, yes, we're confident that we'll get them hired and get the work done.

J. DINN: Okay.

I think OrgCode did a report on shelter standards. Are they fully implemented?

J. WALL: Melanie, do you want to take that one?

M. THOMAS: Sure.

As an update with respect to the shelter standards framework that has been adopted –

J. DINN: I can't hear you.

M. THOMAS: Okay, leaning in.

With respect to the shelter standards framework, last January, 2025, we hired a shelter standards supervisor. They've been working actively with emergency shelter operators around the province. Through that work, we have bolstered our quarterly and on-demand inspections.

With respect to some of the training and professional development needs within the housing and homelessness sector, we've

been working really closely with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Homelessness Network, as well as End Homelessness St. John's, to deliver a number of training sessions to really empower and ensure that staff working in these shelter environments have the skills and the expertise to support this client population.

So a series of training sessions in the last year have been conducted on assist harm reduction, de-escalation. These were training offerings that were not previously available in this consolidated fashion, so overall strengthening the individuals who are working within the sector.

J. DINN: Do these standards apply only to 24-hour shelters? Do they also apply to people who are put into the bed-sit rooms and that kind of thing? Is it just the emergency shelters themselves?

M. THOMAS: This would really just be those spaces that are designated emergency shelters. That may be spaces that are 24 hours or they may overnight shelters or they may be, as Mike had indicated before, block-funded per diem shelters. Anything that's designated an emergency shelter.

J. DINN: Perfect. Thank you.

So, right now, how many NLHC units are currently unavailable for rent due to the need for repairs?

J. WALL: Currently, we have 5,500 NLHC units province wide. Right now, 340 are vacant as of April 3, 2026. So 267 units are in areas of demand, which require minor to moderate repairs; all of these units have been readied for occupancy within a range of less than six months; 37 units in areas of demand which required major repairs. So 15 of these repairs are scheduled to be completed within the range of three to 12 months, 16 are having scopes of work completed to repair for tender and six are

long-term vacancies. Eighteen units have been offered to wait-list applicants or are in the process of being offered to applicants. So that's the number of units.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Is it your intention then, on Livingstone Street, the units that burned down, that land was levelled, at the time, even though there was no report for a lot of this to justify some of the decisions, but at the time I remember, well, it was going to maintain the sightlines for a while.

So is there any intention to sell that land or to rebuild? I look on Empire Avenue as well. If you drive along Empire Avenue you see a lot of where the houses were, but they were never rebuilt after being torn down. So I'm just wondering is your intention to rebuild the NLHC stock on these properties?

M. TIZZARD: There hasn't been a decision made yet on Livingstone Street. We're still doing some assessment with our engineering department.

As for Empire Avenue being torn down, if you recently drove by, we've done two environmental assessment surveys so you can see red pipes right now in the ground that capped off the holes. That land is contaminated. We were hoping to do a build there, but, right now, we need to move to a further environmental assessment because there's hydrocarbon – oil – spilled on the property.

J. DINN: I would assume, then, that for the people living there, that's the same for just about the whole area, really?

M. TIZZARD: Oh, it's only affected in that area, people who are living next door or around there. It's completely safe. It's just there is hydrocarbons in the ground.

J. DINN: From oil tanks, I take it?

M. TIZZARD: Oil tanks from the past, yeah.

J. DINN: Okay.

Right now then, the land is not going to be sold? There's no decision on selling the land and rebuilding, certainly down on Livingstone Street and other areas as well?

M. TIZZARD: No decision yet.

J. DINN: Perfect, okay.

I'll ask one last question. Out of those NLHC units in need of repair that won't get work done on them this year, what are the plans for these units? I'm assuming this is over several years. What's the timeline for the repairs?

M. TIZZARD: With 340 vacant units, our goal for this year is 175 to 200 of those to be repaired and back online. Then the following year, the rest will be done, and then to maintain the vacancy rate to be lower. We're going to go on a goal here; our goal would be to maintain the lowest vacancy rate ever in NLHC's history with these staff.

What our plan is for the 23 staff, they're going to be vacancy crews. We hear from areas like Placentia, the Burin Peninsula. Staff from the Avalon region may travel to Burin and the idea is they fix the 10 or 12 units that are vacant down there and then come back. So it's like a travelling vacancy crew.

We've been having trouble over the last few years, that's why we wanted to focus on more staff. Even getting private contractors to fix units – the availability is not there in the rural areas. We're starting to see our rural units not being able to get fixed as quickly as we'd like.

There is still a mix of some contracting out in this, but heavily it will be more focused internally so we can control it more as well. We start to see costs creep up in the private industry to a point where we could actually do it probably cheaper internally.

Most of these units aren't in a state of disrepair, I'll say. A lot of them need paint, some flooring repairs – minor repairs – to get back online. Some are to a point that they need a lot, but most are a quick turnaround and we get someone back in them, it's just that we need more people to get at them.

J. DINN: Perfect, that's it.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

Seeing no further questions, I'm going to 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.

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 carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

CHAIR: I'd just like to take this time to thank the minister, your department officials and the Committee for your attendance this evening.

J. WALL: I'd like to have one minute.

CHAIR: Yes. Go ahead, Sir.

J. WALL: Thank you all for this this evening.

MHA Dinn, there was one question that you didn't ask me, that I was hoping you would ask me. You asked me in SSWB but you didn't ask me here. So it's the Centreville Community Centre. They will receive core funding of \$119,000 annually. I thought you'd be pleased with that.

For the benefit of everyone, the great staff at TI have the elevator back up and running. It's all been tested and everything is fine. So you have to work tomorrow.

Anyway, Chair, to my team, thank you very much for supporting me tonight and for everyone for the questions and I appreciate your time as well and, of course, the Table Officer.

CHAIR: The next meeting will be Tuesday, May 5, at 9 a.m. to consider the Estimates of the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs.

I ask for a mover for adjournment.

H. CORMIER: Adjournment.

CHAIR: Are you sure?

H. CORMIER: I can't go without you.

CHAIR: All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.