



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

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## STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Dan D'Autremont, Chair  
Cannington

Ms. Nicole Rancourt, Deputy Chair  
Prince Albert Northcote

Mr. David Buckingham  
Saskatoon Westview

Mr. Mark Docherty  
Regina Coronation Park

Mr. Muhammad Fiaz  
Regina Pasqua

Mr. Hugh Nerlien  
Kelvington-Wadena

Hon. Nadine Wilson  
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 19:00.]

**General Revenue Fund  
Social Services  
Vote 36**

**Subvote (SS01)**

**The Chair:** — Well, thank you very much everyone for being in attendance this evening for this sitting of the Human Services Committee.

We will continue our consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Social Services, and we will resume our consideration of vote no. 36, Social Services, central management and services, subvote (SS01).

With us this evening on the government side, we have MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Hugh Nerlien, MLA Eric Olason, who is substituting for David Buckingham. We have MLA Muhammad Fiaz, MLA Nadine Wilson, and MLA Mark Docherty. For the opposition we have MLA Nicole Rancourt. Madam Minister, you may proceed with any opening remarks that you may have or we will proceed with questions.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — When the member from Saskatoon Meewasin gets here, we will address some of the outstanding questions that he had from last night. So without further ado then, I think we'll turn it over for questions right away please.

**The Chair:** — Okay, and if you would introduce your officials, either the ones sitting with you immediately or as they come up and ask for them to state their name. Ms. Rancourt.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Well I want to thank all the officials for coming again tonight. I know you had a late night last night, but everybody looks like they're really eager and ready for this evening. And I also neglected to mention last night, I'm just amazed how prepared you guys are because I know some of the questions I ask, I wonder how you have all that information because it must be like lots of file folders in your office to gather all this information. But I really do appreciate how organized you are and ready to answer these questions. So I'm looking forward to this evening to be able to ask some more questions with regards to this budget and just the process of the ministry.

So I'm going to start with, can you explain the decrease in the child and family community-based organizations services?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So there will be a 2.4 per cent reduction this year in that area as you've pointed out. Over the coming months my officials will be meeting with their CBOs [community-based organization] that we have contracts with to discuss the services they provide to ensure they are effective, efficient, and sustainable over the long term and also aligned with our ministry's priorities. These discussions are really part of a continuing process that we have for sound management and responsible government. We're hoping also that they will result in some new ideas about how we can work better to meet the needs of vulnerable people.

So that is our plan for that reduction, is that we will have meetings with all of our CBOs to have those discussions in the coming months.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So the Minister of Health indicated that they were going to be looking at a 10 per cent decrease across the board for CBOs or possibly eliminating some funding for some of the CBOs, but they were going to decide that this summer. Is that something the Ministry of Social Services is looking at?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we will not be doing it across the board. Our approach is going to be slightly different. We are going to be meeting on an individual basis with each of our CBOs and having, I think, a thoughtful conversation about their contracts and about the services that they're providing.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And so because of the cuts in this budget, did any CBOs lose their funding right now?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — No.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. I'll let my colleague here ask some of the questions that he was wanting to ask.

**The Chair:** — You can go ahead.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Now that you're here, we have some responses to the questions that you asked last night. If you don't mind, I'll . . .

**Mr. Meili:** — I was just going to ask for that, thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Okay, great. I did neglect to introduce to my left is my deputy minister, Greg Miller, and to my right is my ADM [assistant deputy minister] of child and family programs, Natalie Huber.

**Mr. Miller:** — Greg Miller, deputy minister. So in response to your questions from last night: the first of the three, what was the historic and current tenant satisfaction ratings? So yesterday our officials, we quoted a figure of 85 per cent as the current satisfaction rate. That was incorrect. It was actually 84 per cent. Historically the tenant satisfaction rating has been in 2013-14 was at 82 per cent; in '14-15 it was 84 per cent; in '15-16, 84 per cent; and then 84 per cent again in the most recent survey.

The second question that we endeavoured to come back to tonight was, what are SHC's [Saskatchewan Housing Corporation] current vacancies? So we've done some work today and we have vacancy information from our housing authorities basically in the larger communities only. However the vacancy rates are typically higher in the rural areas. The information provided to you in estimates yesterday was based on totals for large communities.

And to answer the question, I'll now provide with a further breakdown of vacancy rates, and these will be sort of representing December of 2016. They're broken by community size. So the first bracket is communities over 100,000 here in the province, and then we have a variety of different types of accommodation. The rate for seniors was 7 per cent. The rate for a family accommodation, 9 per cent, and the rate for singles,

1, for an average of 8 per cent in those communities over 100,000.

In the communities 10,000 to 100,000, so the next tranche down, senior vacancy rate was 8 per cent; family, 9; singles, 2; for an overall average of 8 per cent in that band.

And then the last tranche would be communities broken out to 1,000 to 10,000 in size. And the senior rate there would be 10 per cent; family rate, 11 per cent; and single at 2 per cent for an average of 10 per cent.

So in villages less than three . . . Sorry, yes, in villages that range from 300 to 1,000, the average vacancy rate is about 15 per cent. So we see a difference between community size and vacancy rate.

The last question on how vacancies in affordable housing now compare, compare now to before the program began, we were . . . When we transformed affordable housing units to social housing, the transition occurred in large communities only, and we can't provide separate information on vacancy rate information. So the affordable housing projects, before and after the policy changes, are captured as part of the social housing inventory. So as you imagine the data is together; we can't separate it. However we can tell you that the overall average vacancy rate in March of 2015 was 3 per cent prior to the policy changes and that vacancy rate paralleled the provincial CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] vacancy rate for the entire province at that time of approximately 5.3 per cent. The average vacancy rate in December of 2016, so most recently, was 9 per cent in that stock and that parallels the provincial rate at about 8.5.

**Mr. Meili:** — So the rate tripled, but you're saying that's comparable to what was going on in the rest of the rental market in the province.

**Mr. Miller:** — Yes. So the pattern that we observe is that the vacancy rate in SHC mirrors or trends with the overall pattern of the province.

**Mr. Meili:** — Three to 9, 5.3 to about 8. Those are the . . . So not exactly the same, but . . .

**Mr. Miller:** — Yes.

**Mr. Meili:** — So the question would be whether the difference would at all be accounted for by the changes and, I don't know, I don't think you're in a position . . . I don't expect you to be in a position to answer that. That's a hypothetical question, a rhetorical question.

So the other thing that I had asked about yesterday, and I couldn't recall just — and apologies if I'm not remembering the answer — but we had talked about the change in poverty rates year to year and wondering had we gotten any updates on that.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So you may recall that we didn't address that issue yesterday. Constance, our ADM of our income assistance area, discussed that we have ordered a special report from StatsCan.

**Mr. Meili:** — Okay you have ordered it and it's just . . .

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — That's correct. And we did otherwise cite the 2015 numbers from the same.

**Mr. Meili:** — One would think that if you're having to increase the amount of social assistance funding and the amount of . . . If your caseload is going up, that's probably an indication that the poverty numbers aren't going down.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — I'm not going to speculate on that until I have the numbers.

**Mr. Meili:** — Okay. Yes, it would seem like a pretty reasonable surrogate until those numbers are available.

Next I wanted to ask a little bit about changes in funeral coverage. It's my understanding that a letter went out recently outlining the benefits that will be available now for funeral arrangements. Can you give me a list of what benefits are going to be available now and how that compares with what was previously available?

[19:15]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So I'm going to begin and then I'm going to ask Constance to fill in some process details. I want to say at the outset that in the budget backgrounder that was released with the budget on March the 22nd, I became aware this afternoon of an error and so I want to address that first. That error suggested that 400 people had received the benefit previously. I've become aware this afternoon that that number is more like 700. And so I'm going to ask Constance to speak to that if she would, how the error was made, and how that calculation is made.

**Ms. Hourie:** — So I know that the minister has talked previously about the complexity of income assistance. This goes to one of those complexities. We have a couple of reports that occur in the ministry. There's a regular monthly report, but also we have another report that considers the retroactive payment. So that's the payments from the time that the funeral occurs until we receive the receipt which could be up to a three-month period. So we have two reports and both are reported differently in our system. As everybody knows, we have a very outdated system, so there had to be a manual accounting of that and, as the minister said, it was just a human error.

So to take you through the current provisions and the proposed provisions. So first with regard to basic funeral expenses, the current provisions are \$3,850 flat rate. The new provisions would be \$2,100 flat rate. The current provisions include services of casket, urn, regulatory fee, transfer from place of death including transfer vehicle, embalming, dressing, cosmetics, visitation, funeral service in chapel or church, transfer to cemetery or crematorium.

The proposed provision would include basic preparation of body; standard casket for burial; urn if requested; regulatory fee; coordinating the transfer and receipt of body from place of death including use of vehicle up to 20 kilometres; making arrangements with the family, cemetery, crematorium, etc.;

transfer to cemetery or crematorium including equipment to provide these services; documentation as required by law; interment, burial or cremation, including the equipment required to provide these services.

For cremation, the current provisions, actual costs are provided. This charge was paid, addition to the basic service fees, averaged about 350 to \$850. The proposed provisions, no additional charge for cremation will be paid.

**Mr. Meili:** — So I'm thinking I understand the differences, but maybe you could just boil it down for me so that it's really clear, in terms of the services people will receive now . . . would have received previously and what they'll receive now: so no service, embalming when it's not a cremation. What else is no longer there?

**Ms. Hourie:** — Yes, other optional costs associated with viewing and visitation.

**Mr. Meili:** — So the service, the viewing, visitation, all of that. Okay. So I'm curious about a lot of things there. One is, that's a \$1,700 difference. How did you come up with that value of 1,700 for embalming and the visitation service or just the visitation and service for cases of cremation?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we did a jurisdictional scan of the things that were provided for in other jurisdictions and I'm going to have Elissa speak just a little bit further about that.

**Ms. Aitken:** — Elissa Aitken, executive director of income assistance program and service design. So when we looked at the interjurisdictional comparisons, some of the benefits provided in British Columbia, so the cost of cremation or the provision in British Columbia for cremation without a service, they provide \$2,085. Cremation with a service, they provide \$2,900 for their service. Basic burial, they provide \$1,685, and burials with a service, they provide \$2,500.

In Alberta, the benefits they provide for cremation with no service is \$2,860. Cremation with a service ranges from 4,258 to \$4,460. Burial with no service or viewing, Alberta provides \$2,302. Burials with services, not viewing, is 3,472 to 3,865. And so these are averages that they provide for those benefits.

In Manitoba, cremation without services is \$1,731. Cremation with a service ranges from \$2,748 to 3,361 and that sometimes would include visitation or viewing. Manitoba, the graveside burial is 2,843 on average, and the burial with services and viewing is 2,331.98. So those are the numbers that we looked at in looking at that comparison.

**Mr. Meili:** — It's interesting. It means that our final numbers are at 2,100 across the board. Oh, interesting one that we have an across-the-board number instead of those variations. It sounds like the other jurisdictions you are looking at have not made the same sort of change to not include coverage of services or coverage of embalming. So that's interesting that they seem to have a full range and that that range goes both below in some cases and even above what we had been paying in the past. Am I interpreting that correctly?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the flat . . . We have moved

to a flat rate system. However there are a couple of provisions where we will add on to this. Those would be in a case of an oversize or hermetically sealed casket; we would provide for that. We would also provide for grave liners, either minimal vault or wood box. And the following things are actually not changing and continue to be provided within that flat rate benefit, and that is the actual cost for opening, closing of a cemetery plot and the transportation when travel is beyond 20 kilometres for a round trip at 2.5 times the Public Service Commission rate for transportation costs.

**Mr. Meili:** — Thank you very much. It does . . . I think it's fair to say that that does make it hard to completely accept the rationale that this is in line with other provinces. It sounds to me from what your colleague has described there that there's a great range even within other provinces. There aren't flat rates, so that is different, and that that rate can be quite a lot, even more than what was double the current flat rate in the case of some of the higher prices in Alberta, I believe it was. So just to make that clear, that it's . . . That's a hard point to really accept.

I'd like to ask a question about who was getting funerals covered in the last period, year or two years. In terms of the breakdown, what percentage would be people on SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan]? What percentage would have been people on SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability]? What percentage would have been people that applied for support in other ways, for people whose estate didn't cover cost of a funeral or children in care or other folks who needed this service?

[19:30]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Before I answer the question that you just posed, I want to return to your previous assertion about the numbers. Just to reiterate, in British Columbia the cremation with no service is 2,085; in Alberta the cremation with no service is 2,860; in Manitoba the cremation with no service is 1,731. In British Columbia the basic burial is 1,685; in Alberta the burial with no service, basic burial is 2,302; in Manitoba the graveside burial is 2,843. So the ranges that we have come up with are right within that range.

**Mr. Meili:** — Yes, but those other provinces are also having services and they . . . You reported earlier, rates that included having a service. So removing that support for a service which, and you know, is a pretty difficult thing to avoid. In some cases, it's a legal requirement; for bodies that are being cremated, a viewing is required. When you talk about embalming, this is something that is necessary if somebody's going to travel to see a body, if the people can't get there in the first couple of days — things that are pretty obvious portions of this whole process.

Those other provinces that you described, yes, the rates for giving the absolute bare-bones basic might be similar, but they don't only offer the bare-bones basics.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — With respect to the percentages, you asked about the percentage who were receiving this benefit, so 45 per cent would be SAID clients and 55 per cent would be SAP clients.

**Mr. Meili:** — Okay. I notice one category of social assistance

recipients that is pretty clearly missing is TEA [transitional employment allowance]. What is it about folks that are receiving that financial support, which is less than SAP or SAID, but these are still people who have qualified for, are in need of support, why if they die, do they get no help with their funerals whereas someone on SAP and SAID does?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So they're actually not left out. TEA clients get transferred into SAP on the event of their death so that those provisions are provided for.

**Mr. Meili:** — Okay, so if someone is on TEA and they die, they suddenly are on SAP.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes.

**Mr. Meili:** — That's an interesting choice. I don't know why you just wouldn't say, oh it's available for people with TEA. What's the purpose of that change in status?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — TEA is a short-term program. People are typically only on it for six months as an average, and it is a transition to employment. So they're not typically on it for a longer term.

**Mr. Meili:** — Okay. I'm not sure that answers the question. But it is probably a bit of semantics; we don't need to spend tons of time on it. It is good to know that if somebody is on TEA and they pass away that what is being provided will be provided to them.

Now I'm looking back at the previous costs of this program and understand that in 2009, up until 2009 it was 1,575 a year with 326 for a casket, total of about \$1,900 — so a couple hundred bucks less than it is now — and that this government increased it to 3,850. Why did this government think, yes, we're not giving enough for this. We're not covering the funeral homes' costs; let's increase it. And now suddenly we're paying too much.

**Mr. Miller:** — So first of all with respect to the TEA recipients who upon passing received the SAP benefit, it's really that transition and enrolling them in the SAP benefit is what actually enables us to provide that benefit, so that's the rationale for the transition at that time.

The second point to your question I wanted to talk about is, the historical scan that the ministry undertook in the context of the development of this budget was done at a different time subsequent to the work that had been done prior. And so as we considered this budget, the decisions that were taken were to look across our entire array of benefits provided and those represent some of the difficult decisions that had to be made as we deliberated on this budget.

**Mr. Meili:** — Right, so there was less money, so you needed to find places to cut, and this is where you chose to cut, and I hear that. I have to say that this is one of the cuts that strikes me as the most out of place and even out of character for this province. I'm hearing from a lot of people that, you know, this is an undignified thing to do. And when families need this opportunity to say goodbye to their loved ones, when people are destitute and can't afford that, it really is an indignity, and that

indignity to those in poverty, it reduces the dignity of all of us as a province. It passes on those costs to those who can least afford it.

And speaking of passing on costs, there are elements of the funeral service, as I mentioned before — viewings required with cremation, earth burial legally required if a person doesn't have any family — and these costs would be passed on to the funeral homes. So as I said, I'm hearing from lots of people out in the community and thinking of some of my patients who have passed away while living in poverty and the difficulties for their families. But I'm also wondering about those people, those private businesses who offer these services, and the way in which they'll be left carrying the load here in terms of cost. At 3,850, these were already subsidized in terms of relation to what a funeral costs.

What has your response been from the Saskatchewan board of funeral homes to date? How have they reacted to this and what do they say that this will result in in terms of costs for them?

[19:45]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So our officials will be meeting with them tomorrow.

**Mr. Meili:** — Okay, excellent. It would be very interesting, I think, for the rest of us to hear how that goes. I'm sure that's going to be a big concern. Thank you very much for taking my questions. I'm going to have to head off to SaskEnergy estimates. So thanks again to everyone from the ministry for all the great work you do every day and your help in this process as well. Good night.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the member for P.A. [Prince Albert] Northcote.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Thank you. So my first question is, could you provide the numbers of indigenous Aboriginal children in care this year versus non-indigenous?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So in 2015, 67.5 per cent of children in care were identified as Aboriginal. In 2016, that number was 71.2 per cent. And I'm going to ask Natalie Huber, my assistant deputy minister for child and family programs, to provide some context for that.

**Ms. Huber:** — Good evening. Natalie Huber, child and family programs. Just in terms of the growth of the number of children in care, this is the ministry children in care. The numbers on reserve would be numbers that INAC [Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada] would need to provide. So in terms of the context around some of the percentage growth, part of that is due to an increased number of registrations. So the ministry has done some dedicated work around registering children when they come into care and ensuring that their registration of treaty status is done in a more timely fashion, as well some cleanup within our Linkin system.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Do you have that split for each year since 2012?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So apparently we do have the

2012 numbers, but the 2013 and 2014 we're going to have to get those numbers for you. And I'm told it may not be tonight, and we'll get them for you tomorrow though if that's okay with you. So the number in 2012 was 66.1 per cent.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So could I have those, that information tabled?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. It seems that indigenous children are persistently overrepresented in care, and in many ways addressing this issue was the spirit and intent of the child welfare review undertaken by the ministry in 2010. Is this correct?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — The short answer is yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And the former children's advocate had some ongoing concerns about the lack of the implementation of the child welfare review panel's recommendations. Could you speak a little bit more to that and what the ministry has done?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So I'm pleased to walk through a progress update with you. In general terms, it's mostly the legislative pieces that are outstanding in *The Child and Family Services Act* piece. Those would be those relating to the 16- and 17-year-old provision in extending the age of the child to the age of 24 as well as some housekeeping amendments. As you know, all of *The Adoption Act* amendments have been completed, but I will go through each of the panel recommendations and talk a little bit about the progress that has been made on each of those, if that's okay.

So the first recommendation of the panel was to implement fundamental changes to the child welfare system to create an easily accessible preventive family support stream for all families who need it, and a much smaller formal child welfare stream for families where the authority of the courts is required. So a number of things have happened here. Obviously there have been some amendments to the two Acts that I've already referenced.

In addition to that, the flexible response pilot that we piloted in 2013-2014, evaluated in 2015 supported a provincial expansion. That approach was developed in collaboration with First Nation, Métis, and community organizations. It provides earlier supports with increased focus on engagement with the family to safely care for their children. The anticipated outcome of that is that fewer children end up in court. And so that's, I think, a very important initiative by the ministry. The expansion in 2016 has begun in the south service area and will be implemented in the north service area.

The hub model has also provided an opportunity for greater inter-ministerial collaboration. I think you know all about that. Two First Nations child and family services agencies, the Lac La Ronge family service agency as well as Peter Ballantyne, have been delivering PPP [positive parenting program] since 2012. PPP is our positive parenting program, so again that's one of those programs that is designed to help parents with parenting skills in order to address some of the issues in families and keeping children in families. The services for that

are now offered in Humboldt, Swift Current, Regina, Sandy Bay, Meadow Lake, Fort Qu'Appelle, and Yorkton offices, who also serve the communities of Melville, Balcarres, Punnichy, Grenfell, Esterhazy, Langenburg, Kamsack, Sturgis, Preeceville, Canora, and Kelvington, Kinistino, Wynyard, Wakaw, and St. Brieux.

And then in 2012 we rolled out the structured decision-making model, which incorporates a set of evidence-based assessment tools including a risk assessment tool designed to improve decision making in the delivery of child protection services. So these are integrated practice strategies which we're also exploring to promote the enhanced use of SDM [structured decision making] for case planning.

In terms of the second recommendation of the panel, which was to make safe, culturally appropriate care for all Aboriginal children and youth a priority through a planned and deliberate transition to First Nations and Métis control of welfare and preventative family support services, we would say in terms of progress we have three First Nations child and family services agencies that have delegated agreements to deliver mandated child welfare services off reserve. More delegation agreements will be negotiated. This is something that I think is a good thing.

The Saskatchewan First Nations family and community initiative currently has two SDM consultants to provide on-site SDM training and ongoing support to agencies. Fifteen of the 16 First Nations Child and Family Services agencies have implemented some or all of the SDM tools.

We have strengthened the policies and supports for persons of sufficient interest, which is something that the advocate has raised previously. The third-party-delivered, intensive in-home supports were initiated back in 2011-12 fiscal year in Regina, Yorkton, and Saskatoon. We expanded that to Prince Albert last year.

The Ministry of Social Services has increased its support for extended family care arrangements as a preferred and less intrusive option for the placement of children in foster homes or residential care. As you know, in October of 2014 the ministry amended policy to enhance the oversight of extended family homes and children residing in these homes, and that an annual review must be completed and include criminal record checks, home safety checks, progress and planning reports, and agreement of the services which are to be provided. I believe that one is in direct response to concerns raised by the advocate previously.

The third recommendation was to include the concepts contained in the child and youth First Principles and the Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children. Now I'm losing my tongue. So the Touchstones of Hope was approved in 2013 for province-wide facilitation both on- and off-reserve, and that rollout has been integrated with the flexible response. In the spring of 2014, the ministry developed the child rights impact assessment, the CRIA tool to ensure that we really take a child's first approach to everything that we do, according to the UN [United Nations] Convention on the Rights of the Child. We continue to use that tool.

We have increasingly engaged with cultural camps for youth in care, the use of the elder councils and talking circles for case planning. Court training continues to provide exceptional cultural training pertinent to Saskatchewan First Nations history, including residential schools which provide new staff with a strong base of knowledge.

With respect to the fourth recommendation, which was to develop and implement a child and youth agenda that guarantees that children and youth become a high priority in the province, we had a cabinet committee on children and youth formed back in December of 2010. In the fall of 2015, Minister Harpauer directed the deputy minister's committee to bring forward a proposal for a shared agenda, governance structure, and scope. The focus last year has been on refreshing this shared agenda and realigning the governance structure and planning process. The planning for this year will utilize that shared goal and the primary drivers.

The child abuse and sexual exploitation committee, or acronym CASE, continues to collaborate on a number of joint initiatives including the revised child abuse protocol which was enacted in October of 2014 and a duty-to-report pamphlet. A number of community-based organizations have received training on that new protocol. A CASE subcommittee has also provided a number of trauma-informed practice learning opportunities. The ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education officials, refreshed the KidsFirst provincial and local protocols back in 2015. In 2014 in December we introduced the counsel for children office to represent children in child protection hearings. And there was the development and implementation of a joint CFS [child and family services] to CLSD [community living service delivery] transition protocol and training which was delivered in 2015.

[20:00]

Moving on to the fifth recommendation, which was to acknowledge at all levels of government that poverty-related conditions drive child neglect and other social problems, the early years strategy has been enacted and implemented. We are currently working on an income assistance redesign, which I expect will have positive impacts in our child welfare area; mental health and addictions action plan; the introduction of SAID for adults with significant enduring disabilities, which would include parents with dependent children. And we worked with the U of R [University of Regina] and the University of Saskatchewan to introduce bursaries for former youth in care. How many more, and what do I have?

The next recommendation was collaborative approaches to child welfare and preventative family support systems, and that First Nations and Métis stakeholders must be involved and that collaboration is key. So the ministry has supported a number of intensive in-home supports including Fox Valley, SIGN [Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbors] in Yorkton, 601 Outreach in Saskatoon, and in January of last year we provided funding to the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] in Prince Albert to provide some of these services. Other initiatives focused on reunification and prevention provincially are showing promising results. These include Gloria Jean's, Prairie Spirit Connections, CUMFI [Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.], and Raising Hope - Moving

Families Forward.

Flexible response was developed, as you know already, and First Nations and Métis were involved in the review of child welfare legislation and members of a legislative review committee. In addition to that, the Ministry of Social Services First Nations and Métis consultants were hired to represent and facilitate engagement meetings in 2015.

The next recommendation was about family violence, mental health, and substance abuse services. To that end, of course the mental health and addictions plan has been enacted. There's been recommendations from value stream mapping the two tragedies. We developed a provincial referral form for mental health and addiction services. There is greater interministerial and agency collaborations stemming from the hubs. The KidsFirst protocol ensures child protection families engaged in their services has prioritized access to these services. And we are collaborating on interministerial committee led by Justice regarding the domestic violence death reviews.

The eighth recommendation was that the court system works better for families. And so to that end, the counsel for children office, which I have already spoken of, was enacted to represent children in child protection hearings. There continues to be the use of elder counsels and talking and family conferencing circles in parts of the province, the flexible response approach which I've already talked about.

The ninth recommendation was to take special measures to ensure children and youth in foster care and other specialized resources are safe and well cared for; quality assurance reviews there; supported by program effectiveness, data analytics, and research including a review of all foster home investigations between 2009 and December of 2014.

We have an initiative that I'm very pleased with to see, which is research- and evidence-based excellence initiative to develop predictive analytics to support our ministry's progress.

We've recently done a lot of work, which you've heard about, with the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association to improve recruitment processes by having the PRIDE [parent resource information drug education] supervisor housed out of the SFFA [Saskatchewan Foster Families Association] office and streamline inquiries to consultants in each of the service areas, recent organizational restructuring to have PRIDE staff work specifically on training and mutual family assessments.

In December of 2014, following the Linkin v6 [version 6] rollout, any allegation of abuse or neglect in a foster home was screened by using the SDM tool. Specific attention has been paid in our ministry to reducing the number of children in homes exceeding four and an overall reduction in the number of foster homes exceeding four placements. We've worked collaboratively with the Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network to ensure youth are supported and informed of their rights to service and safety.

We've had stronger provincial oversight and restructuring of out-of-home care residential resources since April of 2015. At this time, an out-of-home care unit has been established to perform three primary functions with line-of-sight managers



supporting each of those functions which are foster care, resource matching, and non-emergency group homes and high-cost care. We've also reviewed the resource investigations of active Saskatchewan foster homes, which I spoke of earlier.

Recommendation 10 — there's 12, sorry — improved the existing system in areas where there's an urgent need for change, certainly the organizational restructuring occurring with our child and family programs, back in April of 2015, to provide for greater focus and attention in the areas of out-of-home care and adoption programming.

We did make the changes to the PSI [person of sufficient interest] program following a child death, which I've already spoken to. But I think it's important to note that those changes included the requirement of an annual review, home visit, and extended family care agreement, and placement in the home for a minimum period of six months prior to seeking an indefinite PSI order.

We responded to system pressures by increasing emergency receiving spaces. I've spoken to that in the House already. In November of 2015, the implementation of the Linkin financials module occurred. It allows for more comprehensive case planning by directly linking family needs and strengths to services provided, ensuring there is appropriate alignment. Linkin financials systems was implemented to replace an antiquated system previous to that. I've already spoken to the changes to adoption regulations that happened in January of this year. The payment system for assisted adoptions was developed, so we could decommission the previous system. Quality assurance alerts were introduced in 2015.

The 11th recommendation was to develop court-recognized custom adoption processes for First Nations and Métis children and youth, and we entered into a contract with Saskatchewan First Nations and community institute to research custom adoptions and make recommendations to CFP [child and family programs]. The board was unhappy with the research, and the matter was not pursued by them as a priority.

And then the 12th recommendation was to develop and implement a strategy to attract and retain child protection workers to deliver the new vision for child welfare and preventative family support programs. We have a robust staff recruitment and retention program, and as part of this, a pilot will be launched in the North service area which will focus on a realignment of duties so that child protection staff can focus on casework rather than administrative tasks.

Effective January 23rd, new staff are able to take their Linkin basics trainings as a set of e-learning modules from their home office location. In April changes to the current contact standards are going to be implemented. Highlights include simplification of the policy, reduced minimum contact standards, reduced number of collaterals, and elimination of the concept of delegated contacts. The focus on the new policy will be of quality rather than quantity. And finally, also on April 1st of this year, a new ACP-CADP [assessment and case plan, child assessment and development plan] format will be implemented to reduce redundancies, streamline processes, and leverage information already contained in the Linkin system. Our goal is to connect the SDM tools with the services provided and

support staff in critically analyzing case progress.

So these will allow us, hopefully, to be more prescribed and targeted about services that we provide, identify case management drift more quickly to ensure continued progression, and reduce the amount of paper and information to sift through in order to make better informed and more timely decisions.

Did you get all that?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — The one thing I really got out of that is that community-based organizations are really important for carrying through a lot of the programs that the Ministry of Social Services has available for clients and people in the community.

And so that brings me back to the beginning of the evening when I was talking about community-based organizations. I was wondering if you could maybe table a list of the community organizations that the Ministry of Social Services provides funding for and how much funding you provide for each one of those. Could you table that for me for later on?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Thank you. So I was wondering if you could speak to the order in council — it's 392/2016, dated August 23rd — that cancels the committee on the child and family agenda.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the child and family agenda OC [order in council] that you're talking about has been replaced by the ministerial human services committee which has a broader mandate. So it's an opportunity for the human services ministers to get together and talk about those issues that crossover our ministries, which has long been a critique that we've heard about the ministries, is that we operate in silos. And so we have replaced something that was strictly focused on child and family to something broader about all of those issues, which includes child and family but not just child and family, that affect all of the human services.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Because it's my understanding that this committee was brought together — one of the key issues was the increase of kids coming into care — and so to address that issue and help to reduce the number of kids coming into care. And the number of kids coming into care have been going up, year after year. And so what kind of plans does this new interdisciplinary human services ministry — I think it was called, that she's called it — what are the goals and plans with regards to reducing the number of kids in care?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So within our own ministry, obviously we are leading the conversations by really refocusing and, in a bigger way, on things like the Flexible Response pilot and PPP parenting and those sorts of initiatives. But in the human services cabinet table, we're also working on income assistance redesign which is in part a response to the poverty reduction strategy, the early years strategy we're looking at, for example what is our progress on that, and in addition to that our housing strategy and the disability strategy.

So that human services committee is looking at all of those things and how they piece together and how they, in respect to your particular question, how they serve children across the board.

[20:15]

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So who are the members of the committee?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — The ministers of the human services ministries. So that would be Justice, Advanced Ed, Ed, Health, Social Services. Who did I miss? Did I say Justice? Justice.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Did you say Health?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Rural and Remote Health as well?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes, Ministry of Health.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And how many meetings have you had?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — I've attended two.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And how long has the committee been established?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — I don't have the answer to that, so I'm going to have to circle back to you on when it . . .

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And how often do you meet? Is there a timely basis on that?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — It's at the call of the Chair.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Has there been any reports or recommendations that have been put forward by the committee?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — It's an internal committee.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And who's the Chair of the committee?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So this is an internal committee, and in my experience in the meetings that I have attended, the two meetings that I have attended, the Chair has . . . It's been quite flexible. Depending on what the issue that we were discussing was, the issue would be led by the appropriate minister.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So when you get the information of the date of the formation of this committee, could you provide, like, the order of council that was presented with that and table that information for me?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So this is an informal committee. My understanding is that when the panel was disbanded, the human services ministers were told to work together, and so that is what has occurred. So to my knowledge, there is not an OC for this because it is an informal group of the human services ministers.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So who was on the committee, the child and family agenda committee, prior to being dismantled?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So all the human services ministries that I mentioned previously plus what was then sport, Culture, Youth and Rec.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So if it's all the same ministers, why was this committee dismantled and changed into the human services?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we will undertake to see if we can pull an answer for you on that question.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. Because it does seem very interesting how when the committee on the child and family agenda was intact, they provided reports and they provided updates and information on with regards to the meetings that they had and were very accountable. And so if it's the same individuals who are members, it's really interesting that those reports, or that accountability isn't still in place.

But also my understanding is that that committee on the child and family agenda was created with some consultation with First Nations and Métis partners. And now when I look in the ministry's plans, your ministry's plans, there's no longer any mention of being partners with the First Nations and Métis organizations and leaders. Is it safe to say this collaboration approach has been scrapped?

[20:30]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Absolutely not. We have, in fact I would argue that we have . . . We work both at the operational level and at the planning level with our First Nations and Métis partners on a regular basis — did I miss anything there? — and we also engage in regular meetings with FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations], as actually have I.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So is there a reason why that was no longer in the ministry plan?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Are you referring to the annual plan for 2017-18?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — That's right.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we do . . . In our work, we work with community-based organizations. We don't name them all in the report. On a daily basis, the same is true for our First Nations and Métis partners.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. Going back to the Children's Advocate report, I'm going to talk about the one that was just released this week. And there was some issues that he brought to our attention that I thought needed to be discussed a little bit more.

And the first one I'm going to talk about is the inadequate support for persons of significant interest placements. And I'm going to quote the Children's Advocate here. He indicates:

The current policies are not sufficient to ensure the safety of the children or youth placed nor to assist the caregivers in their responsibilities. Our province needs legislative amendments that would see a replacement of PSI with a comprehensive kinship care framework that would encompass equal standards for all caregivers.

So could you talk about what this ministry's doing with regards to this recommendation?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes, just a minute.

**Ms. Huber:** — Okay. I'll just start with a bit of a framing of this response just in terms of the kinship care quote that was made by the advocate. So within our ministry, we actually frame out or talk about our array of extended family care options as extended family care options. And under that arrangement, we actually have a number of programs. One of them is our alternate care program. And we also have a place of safety program, as well as our person of sufficient interest program.

So when we speak about . . . We don't use the terminology "kinship care." We actually talk about extended family care. And the reason for that is kinship care on reserve with our First Nations partners, as well as in some of our other communities off reserve, kinship care is really reserved for private arrangements that might occur with a family member. So it's outside of the child welfare system. So we want to respect that language, and we want to be respectful of those arrangements that are occurring every day. So that's where relatives make those private arrangements, and child and family would not be involved in those. So that's why we differentiate and we don't use the terminology, the same terminology as the advocate.

So I thought I would just frame that out as we're commencing this conversation about the changes that we've made and the direction we're moving in.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So one of the concerns raised by the Children's Advocate was that children and youth placed with extended family members are not provided the same level of supports. And I'll just provide you with some of the response to that.

Our policy requires that PSI orders are not sought until a child has been in the ministry's care for at least six months in a stable, extended family care placement. So they need to be in that placement for six months before a PSI order is sought. Policy requires that all extended family caregivers, both the alternate care providers that Natalie spoke of and PSI, sign an agreement for services. Policy requires that all PSI caregivers be provided with complete information regarding the PSI orders, and that alternate and PSI caregivers are provided with the equivalent rate of basic foster rates.

Special needs payments are provided as part of an improved case plan for the child. So supports to the caregivers are provided as required, in addition to that. Policy requires also that a home safety assessment be completed prior to the placement and finalization of a PSI order. And policy requires that annual reviews are to be completed with all, pardon me, alternate care or PSI caregivers, including a home safety check.

So that's done annually.

The next concern identified by the advocate was that there is some role ambiguity between the minister and PSI caregivers created by our financial support. We have attempted to improve that role clarity as defined in our policy, in our information brochures, and in the agreements. We're going to give that further consideration in a broader legislative review as we move forward.

The next concern identified by the Children's Advocate was about contact standards for PSI placements. For children in placements with an alternate caregiver, minimum children services contact in case management standards apply, as the child is in the custody of the minister. The minister has no legal authority to enforce contact requirements for a child in the custody of a PSI. However the agreement for services completed with the PSI caregiver includes a requirement for annual contact as part of their annual review.

And the last two that he referenced were the cross-jurisdictional recognition, and the concept of custody not being well-defined. Those are part of the larger PSI legislative reviews that are still ongoing.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — How many children in out-of-home care are placed with extended family or persons of sufficient interest?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So I'm pleased to say that over 50 per cent of the children in care are in extended family arrangements. The total is 2,614; 1,553 of those children have been placed with a PSI as of March 31st of this year. There are 420 children in alternate care, and there are 641 children in places of safety.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Would you have those numbers for till . . . 2012 till now? Would you have that?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — We would be happy to table that.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Yes. That would be great, thank you. So with the priority being to keep children with their family, what finances, what money in the budget was allocated for that?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So in this budget, there is a \$1.3 million increase in foster care and extended family care placements.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And so that money would be specifically to try to keep children with family.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So the Children's Advocate also indicated that he was disappointed that the ministry has not fully implemented all the legislation amendments to the child and family Act. Why have these amendments not been fully implemented?

[20:45]

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So as I indicated earlier this

week, the ones relating to adoption are all completed. The ones that are outstanding are outstanding because they require consultation with our other ministry partners because they do affect other ministries. So for example, the increase of the age from 21 to 24 will impact Advanced Education, as an example, and so we have to consult with them about those impacts.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. And what about changing the age of the child to 18 to better support children who are aged 16 and 17?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — With the age of 16 and 17, frankly there's just more research work to do. We are taking a phased approach to this. We do still need to consult with other ministries, but there is more work to do on that particular piece of legislation and that's why it is still under way.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — I know you've been brought to the attention of the issue of having children running away from group homes and that issue being addressed by some police officers that have been indicating that they've been trying to work with group homes and trying to work around that problem. And I know they involve the Ministry of Social Services with regards to those discussions, and so I'm just wondering, what has the ministry done to help reduce the numbers of youth running away from group homes?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So there's actually a very exciting pilot project led by Egadz, which I believe you're familiar with, which also includes the Saskatoon police force and the chief there, which is going to be creating talking circles for youth who run away repeatedly to talk about some of the reasons why they do. And I'm sorry . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, the training is just happening now.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — I had the opportunity to meet a lot of group home organizers and leaders that run group homes, and one of the things that they brought to my attention was the fact that when youth realized that at the age of 16 that they're no longer mandated to have to stay in the home, that oftentimes that's around the time that they get triggered to possibly leave the homes or run.

And I think a lot of us know some 16-year-olds and how . . . We're probably quite familiar of the brain development and their thought process with regards to that. And I know when we had these discussions, they talked about moving that age to 18, that youth grow so much within those two years, you know, in their brain developments and just the way they process information and thinking. And I know they indicated that they thought maybe that might be one way of reducing runaways.

I know it's such a complex issue and there's no easy answer for that. But for some reason I have in my notes here — and maybe you can help me trigger my thoughts of why I had this written down — but the strengthening families program, would that be related to this particular issue?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — No, it's about recruitment of foster homes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. Okay, so I'm not quite sure what my method of madness was with regards to that. So in the

ministry's operational plan, a key action was to strengthen family- and community-based supports for children and youth in care. What is this plan, and what's your goals with regards to it?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So a lot of the response to this is some of the things that I've already talked about. So we have of course the flexible learning response. We have intensive home supports that are provided through organizations like Foxvalley or CUMFI. We also have the PPP parenting program. What am I missing? Oh, and Family Finders contracts with First Nations agencies to help us find extended family placements for children.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — How many emergency receiving spaces do you have across the province and where are they located?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Two hundred and seventy-two, but we're just going to pull where they are.

So the communities where they are located: La Ronge, Meadow Lake, Melfort, Nipawin, North Battleford, Pilot Butte, Prince Albert, Regina, Saskatoon, and Yorkton.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And does that say the number of the receiving spaces? Could I have that tabled as well, that information?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Absolutely, yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay, thank you. So another concern that the Children's Advocate brought up was the rapid development of the emergency receiving spaces. He indicated that there was concern with regards to how quickly these homes were established and that it did not provide enough time for staff to receive the appropriate training and appropriate case planning and management done.

I also have received concerns that staff were not properly trained to manage some of the high-risk behaviours and that it's sometimes associated with . . . Managing youth that have these types of behaviour issues resulted in staff being hurt and assaulted and issues with staff recruitment. Has your department been aware of these issues, and if so, what have you been doing to manage it?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So we can certainly provide you with what qualifications the staff have to care for their children. However, I've read this report a number of times and I don't know where that concern is referenced. Can you direct me to where that concern is referenced?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Under the child apprehensions continue to rise. It was page 13. I could read the quote.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — I've got it. I'm going to ask Tobie to speak to this specifically.

**Ms. Eberhardt:** — Hi. Tobie Eberhardt, executive director with child and family programs. And so reading the advocate and how he was urging caution . . . And we recognize, as we ask any community-based organization to deliver service, that we want to be there to support them and ensure that they're able

to meet that service. And that's part of our contracting with them. The organizations that we're working with are willing and have the staffing that they need. We work with them to identify what their training needs might be and where to obtain that training, and also what other supports they might need. In general we have a regulatory team that goes into all our residential group homes and does reviews to identify where their areas of strength are and maybe where areas that they need to have additional supports.

[21:00]

In regards to children, I think in general when we have children coming into care, they have very complex behaviours, and some children have higher needs than others. And in each of those cases, we would assess the child's needs specifically, and what that caregiver needs to meet those needs.

And so some of our ER [emergency room] spaces, we might have a child going in where they have needs that are more than a general caregiver could provide, and we would put in additional supports for them, such as our MDO [Multi-disciplinary Outreach]. We have a behavioural specialist team at the ministry that could come in and help support and provide some behavioural modification ideas.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Because I know there was an issue with having the children in hotels, and nobody wants to have the children placed in hotels, but I hope it wasn't . . . making these emergency placements weren't done so quickly that it was so that they could get out of the hotels so it wouldn't look bad for the Ministry of Social Services. I hope that wasn't the reason and that it was done too quickly and maybe put people at risk.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — It's the same staff that would be with children in a hotel as children in an ER. And I think we can all agree that children should not be in hotels.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. Which staff will be required to take the 3.5 per cent salary decrease?

**Mr. Miller:** — So certainly there's an expectation across government that a total compensation savings of 3.5 per cent be achieved. Wages are just one component of compensation when you look at a total compensation package. Other examples would include benefits such as flexible benefit pensions and other things. The expectation that 3.5 total compensation reduction target be achieved across the entire public sector is in place. And the employers and unions have been asked to work together to find solutions to achieve those total savings for . . . The collective bargaining process will be used for employees in scope, and compensation for out-of-scope employees will also be impacted.

The next steps are certainly the responsibility of the various employers. For executive government, the Public Service Commission is the employer. So those conversations are happening right now, and in Social Services, we will continue to keep our employees up to date as updates come from that process. We want to respect the collective bargaining process.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — When are you expecting to be in the collective bargaining process?

**Mr. Miller:** — So bargaining is under way right now. And as I said, the ministry will wait for that process to unfold and sort of reflect the outcomes of that conversation in the ministry's budget as we're directed at the conclusion of that process.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So what percentage of the 250 million in cuts is coming from the Ministry of Social Services' budget?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — I think that's a question more appropriately asked for the Public Service Commission.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay. It is my understanding that Donna-Rae Crooks was hired as the chief transformational officer for the Ministry of Social Services. Can you tell me a bit about her background and the experiences that make her the best person to lead this process?

**Mr. Miller:** — So with respect to this question, the minister is not responsible for staffing within the ministry. And the individual hiring decisions of the ministry, as I understand it, are not purview of the consideration of the estimates of Social Services.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — But the reason why I'm asking about this is because it will have a lot to do with the transformational change that's been talked a lot about with regards to the income support programs. And so I think it's really important to know a little bit more about the person who would be leading that process. So that's why I think this information needs to be discussed during these types of estimates.

**Mr. Miller:** — So again the hiring decisions are not the purview of the minister, and my understanding again is that the individual decisions with respect to hiring in the ministry are not the purview of estimates for Social Services.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So would you be able to say when she was hired and how long the contract will be for?

**Mr. Miller:** — Certainly the employee being discussed is an employee of government, and I wouldn't care to discuss her contract or any . . . She's an employee of government, as are the rest of the employees of the Ministry of Social Services, and wouldn't care to discuss that further in this committee.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay, and would the cost for her salary be included in the estimates with regards to this budget? It'd be under the Ministry of Social Services?

**The Chair:** — If I might interject here, I think we're talking about personnel contracts that are done through the Public Service Commission, and there are privacy issues there.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay, so with regards to a job description that I saw, it indicated that there was going to be a research and development team. Can you tell me a little bit more about what this team is going to look like?

**Mr. Miller:** — So the research and development team is a team of ministry employees who are assigned to work on the development of income assistance redesign. These folks would have expertise in business analysis, as well as policy development.

Right now, there are 14 people assigned, including and led by an ADM. Of those, nine are full-time, four are part-time. And the 14 were recruited within the ministry on a term basis as we work across the ministry to redesign income assistance.

Otherwise, 10 are all internal resources, which include three front-line staff. So what we've tried to assemble is a team across the ministry that has, you know, a varying level of expertise . . . [inaudible] . . . the business, the policy, and that front-line connection to work, to develop, and to spearhead the development of income assistance redesign.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So how much money was put aside in this budget to go towards this team and to work on the income redesign process?

[21:15]

**Mr. Miller:** — So as I said, these 14 people have been reassigned from within the ministry, and there's not a specific line item within this budget for their cost.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So I'm assuming, like we know the Ministry of Social Services doesn't have an abundance of workers; so the 14 people that have been seconded to do this, they would have been replaced with someone temporarily in their position. So there should be some kind of information of how much that's going to cost.

**Mr. Miller:** — So as I said, these individuals have been reassigned to work on this project, IA redesign [income assistance redesign], and there's not a particular cost. So within the ministry, we've shifted resources to prioritize this important work.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So there's 14 vacant positions of people who used to be front-line workers that are now working in this redesign team?

**Mr. Miller:** — No. So as I said, these positions have been reassigned within the ministry to focus on IA redesign, and I'm just looking here for the number of front-line personnel. One second, I just have to check on that so I'm accurate.

So to be sure, it's three front-line positions that are deployed to this team right now, and those positions have been backfilled within the day-to-day operation.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Okay, so when can we expect some type of report coming from this team?

**Mr. Miller:** — So certainly the work of IA redesign will be rolled out as it's completed, per se. There will not be a report from this team. It'll be the actual, the rollout of the newly designed income assistance suite.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — How long has this team been working on this redesign process?

**Mr. Miller:** — Since early January of '17.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So I formulated some more questions with regards to my previous question with the 3.5 per cent salary

decrease. How many full-time employees will this affect?

**Mr. Miller:** — So with respect to the 3.5, as I had stated earlier, the expectation there will be a total compensation savings across government. Social Services will await the results of those conversations between the employer, and in our case that's the Public Service Commission, and the unions. And so it would be premature for me at this time to speculate the number of individuals that would be impacted.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And would the reduction of that value be from the total salary costs? Is that what you're looking for?

**Mr. Miller:** — The expectation that is across the entire public sector, a 3.5 per cent reduction, will be achieved. Social Services will await the results of the collective bargaining process for in-scope employees. And at that time, we will follow the direction that government provides, and our budgets will be adjusted accordingly. So as I said, it would be premature for me to speculate on exactly the shape that that would take because I anticipate there will be some conversations that are happening. And how that forms up in the end is still to be determined.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — I know when there was some changes with regards to funding with homelessness at the Lighthouse — and I'm talking about the Lighthouse in Saskatoon — shortly after we had all those discussions, an income assistant worker was placed there for a trial period of time. I'm wondering, is this still going on?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Yes.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — And is this still on a temporary basis, or was this shown to be successful and will be carried on further?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So it has been very positive and collaborative, and we have an agreement in place that says we will continue into the foreseeable future until we mutually agree that it is no longer required.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Well I think it's a great concept to have income support workers available in the community where clients' needs are higher. So would this be possibly a program that the Ministry of Social Services would look to expanding?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So as part of our income assistance redesign, the service delivery component is a piece that we are also looking at, and so this is something that we will consider.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — I had a chance to have a tour of the Homeward Bound program in Prince Albert. If you ever get a chance to come to Prince Albert, you should go take a look at it. It's a wonderful program, and it's doing really great things in the community.

And that was one of the barriers they said they had, was clients needing to phone in to report, and having to be on hold. And of course some of that population sometimes don't have a great attention span and patience. And so then if they didn't make their report, then their payments were late. And that was oftentimes something that was an issue there. And when I

talked to them about how this income support worker was at the Lighthouse, they said they'd been wanting something like that, even on a temporary basis.

And so it looks like this is something that is an issue within the communities. And it's nice to see, reaching out of our ministry areas, going into the community, and servicing the community where the needs are there. So I told them I would bring that concern to you, and here I have the opportunity to do that. So I know they currently have the services of the hub that go into their agency. And so they have addiction services that attend there. They have the public nurses go in there too. So it would be nice to see a lot of the other ministries going in and servicing clients where the need is there.

So that's going to bring me to another question I have. We've discussed before about the wait times at the call centre and working on some of the issues there. So has there been anything that has been changed? I know last time we were talking in estimates; there was talk about having some different types of programs so that people could report maybe online or expanding the different programs of reporting. So has there been any change with regards to that?

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — So the short answer is that there has been some improvement since you last asked about this. In terms of the percentage of calls answered in five minutes or less, from October of 2016 to March of 2017, that went from 4 per cent to 56 per cent which is a 1,400 per cent better response time. And it says here — let me say that again — 1,400 per cent better. So this is one that individuals are very proud of and rightly so.

I've had an opportunity actually to sit in on the call centre, and so that was a really interesting experience. So I can understand why they're very excited about that. The average wait time on hold in October of 2016 was 16 minutes. In March of this year, it was seven minutes. So that's 56 per cent shorter which shaves off nine minutes. Nine minutes is really long to sit on the phone.

The call volume has changed. So there's been 20 per cent fewer calls, which has helped us improve. Pardon me, that was on the SAID line. On the SAP line, percentage of calls answered in five minutes or less, so there's a 260 per cent better response time. There's a lot of use of exclamation marks here — 260. The average wait time on hold in minutes has changed from 17 to 10, so 41 per cent shorter wait time. That shaves off seven minutes. And then the call volume, there's 40 per cent more calls, but there's still improvements in the wait times that are there.

I would also add to this that as we look at income assistance redesign, we are looking at online tools which will also help with some of this.

**Ms. Rancourt:** — So what has helped with this improvement to begin with?

[21:30]

**Mr. Miller:** — So with respect to the call centre and the improvements that we've seen since October of '16, basically

it's a story of process improvements. So the staff is working differently together. That would include things such as cross-training, so that when folks are on breaks, for example, there would be somebody with a complementary skill set who could fill in and take those calls.

I think part of the improvement was also achieved in this change, between October and March, where folks were essentially reassigned to higher priority work, and so this is an example I think of management using the resources differently to achieve a better outcome.

So with all the exclamation marks here, you can see that we're proud of this because at the end of the day, those folks who are calling in are looking to, you know, get an answer to something that's important to them. And we want to be always, as a ministry, continuing to work forward, you know, in our interaction because this is an important interaction that we have with our clientele.

**The Chair:** — I would like to inform the committee that we have reached our agreed-to end time, so Ms. Rancourt, do you have any closing remarks you'd like to make quickly, and then I'll allow the minister to do the same?

**Ms. Rancourt:** — Oh it's lucky that it's the member from Prince Albert Northcote ending, not the member from Athabasca because it wouldn't be quick. I had to throw a dig.

Well I want to really thank all the officials again for being here. Like I said, you guys are always very prepared and have the answers that I'm looking for, and I really appreciate that. It helps me gain a better understanding of the ministry and a lot of the services that you guys provide. And like I've said before, I know that you work with the most vulnerable in our province, and I know its tough work, and often times you don't get the appreciation that you so deserve, you know. And I hope you realize that I do appreciate everything that you do, and our whole team does, the opposition do, you know.

And I also really appreciate the relationship I have with the minister and the deputy minister and everybody, too.

And so thanks for arranging this time. It seems like we always get evenings, you know. So maybe one day we'll be lucky enough to get some afternoons, but we'll see what the minister can do, if she can pull any strings because I know I don't have any.

I want to thank the committee members for taking your time as well. You guys always are very polite and patient and listen to the discussion at hand, and I appreciate that.

And thank you to all the staff that are here and everybody that works so hard to make sure . . . Hansard, to make sure that everything was documented; the staff that's working to make sure that we look good on TV. And like after a lot of these days, it takes a lot for me anyway, the late nights. So I really appreciate everybody's work here and thank you.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Madam Minister.

**Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor:** — Well first I'd like to thank you,

Mr. Chair, for being such a strong Chair and keeping things moving along and of course the members of the committee, the staff here.

And Ms. Rancourt, I'd like to also thank you for the tone of this discussion. We haven't seen that in some of the other committees, but I think you and I have a pretty good rapport, and I think have our interests in the same place even if we come from different ways of getting there. So I appreciate that and I respect that.

Of course I have the most amazing team, I think. I think I'm blessed with . . . and I tell them all the time. But I do think that I have the most amazing team, both my ministry staff but also my staff here at the legislature. And so I know that there's a few of them upstairs right now also watching this and serving us, as well as those down here, and all of the people here. You know, my team is an awesome team. I tell people that all the time, and I truly believe that. I'm as good as they are. If I could be as good as they are, I'm doing okay.

So I want to thank everybody for being here tonight. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Thank you very much to you, Madam Minister, and your staff, Ms. Rancourt, and the other committee members.

There is one last duty to perform, and I'm wondering if somebody would like to move adjournment. Mr. Fiaz. All in favour? Carried. This meeting stands adjourned until 2 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

[The committee adjourned at 21:35.]