



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Cannington

Ms. Danielle Chartier, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Riversdale

Mr. Larry Doke
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Mr. Muhammad Fiaz
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Mr. Todd Goudy
Melfort

Mr. Warren Steinley
Regina Walsh Acres

Hon. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 15:00.]

The Chair: — I would like to welcome everybody to the Human Services Committee meeting for December the 4th, 2018. With us today . . . I'm Dan D'Autremont, the Chair of the committee. And we have with us Larry Doke, Muhammad Fiaz, Todd Goudy, Warren Steinley, the Hon. Nadine Wilson, and substituting for Ms. Danielle Chartier is Ms. Nicole Rancourt.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — No. 1
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — Today we will consider the 2018-19 supplementary estimates — no. 1 for the Ministry of Social Services, vote 36, central management and services, subvote (SS01). Minister Merriman is here with his officials. Before we begin, I would ask the officials to please state their name for the *Hansard* record before speaking into the microphone. Mr. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the Ministry of Social Services supplementary estimates. Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to introduce my officials. I have Natalie Huber, assistant deputy minister; Janice Colquhoun, executive director of service delivery; Tobie Eberhardt, executive director of community service; and Joel Kilbride, executive director of program and service design.

From disability programs, I have Raynelle Wilson, assistant deputy minister; and Bob Martinook, executive director of community living services. I have Shelley Reddekopp, executive director of program and service design.

From finance and corporate services, I have Lynn Allan, assistant deputy minister; and Ray Arscott, executive director of finance. From housing, I have Raynelle Wilson again, assistant deputy minister; and Tim Gross, executive director of housing development.

Income assistance, I have Tracey Smith, the assistant deputy minister; Doris Morrow, executive director of program service design; Jeff Redekop, executive director of service delivery. And from the deputy minister's office, I have Bob Wihlidal, senior adviser to the deputy minister. My deputy minister, Tammy Kirkland, was unable to be here today.

Over the past decade, our government has invested in programs and supports for Saskatchewan's most vulnerable population — children in need of protection, at-risk families, people with disabilities, seniors, and those with low income. Therefore it is important that the ministry continuously reviews its programs and services with two major goals in mind: first, to serve the clients better so they achieve better outcomes; and second, to increase the efficiency and make the best use of the public dollars.

For example, Saskatchewan introduced an autism individualized funding program in 2018-19, which was developed with input from autism working groups of parents, service providers, and advocates. Initial funding of \$4,000 per child under six is available for parents and caregivers of children with autism. The program helps government support Saskatchewan's disability strategy and early years plan by providing more choice and flexibility for families and improved access to supports. As of October 24th, 2018, 308 applicants have applied to the autism individualized funding and the IF [individualized funding] benefits have been sent out to another 240 of those families.

We also continue to have successful transition from Valley View residents into new homes and communities of their choice. So far, 114 residents have successfully transitioned to new homes in the community, and planning at various stages of the remaining 37 at Valley View. Since the closure of Valley View Centre was announced in 2012, we have also developed two new safety net homes and 34 group homes that are either developed or under construction.

If you recall, there were 94 Calls to Action under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the first four were directly related to child and family programs. We are pleased to report progress on these related actions. Leaving care and going home is the best for children and youth and contributes to shorter stays in high-cost, community-based homes.

In Saskatchewan we have been working hard to keep children with their extended families and community. We have a number of contracts with First Nation agencies to find families to match with children who might be apprehended on both on- and off-reserve. We have also been working closely with our First Nation and Métis partners to recruit more indigenous caregivers. Around 60 per cent of Saskatchewan's children in care are placed with extended families, making us a national leader in placing children with indigenous caregivers.

In an effort to help income assistance clients make positive life changes and achieve goals, we've started using a new empathy-based approach to working with our clients called motivational interviewing, or MI. MI is rooted in empathy and personal accountability. It works with clients' own motivations to make changes in their life when they have mixed feelings about moving forward. MI is evidence based and supported by three decades of international research and field study. Manitoba and New Brunswick have implemented MI in their income assistance program in the past two or three years and have reported positive outcomes for both clients and staff.

Despite these efforts, external factors and social trends beyond the ministry's control have a direct impact on our caseload and budget. These factors contribute not only to the volume of our caseloads but to the increasing complexity of clients' needs. We continue to work towards programs and services that are more effective and delivered in a cost-effective way, but meeting the needs of our clients will always be our first priority.

Nowhere is that more true than our child and family program division. Pressures in this area account for 21.1 million of our \$23 million request. Of that, 1.6 is for specialized residential care and services. Some older children and youth have very

challenging behaviours or severe cognitive disabilities. They need specialized care beyond the care that a family member and foster parents can provide.

This kind of care which is available through organizations as Ranch Ehrlo, Eagle's Nest, and some of the First Nation child and family services agencies comes at a very high cost. Our \$1.6 million pressure is mainly due to the increase in the per diem rates of specialized services which were higher than we anticipated. While specialized residential services are essential for some youth, extended stays in these programs may interfere with normal growth and healthy psychological development. We're continuing to work with these service providers to transition children and youth back into their communities more quickly, reducing the length of time that they spend in these programs as well as the overall cost.

Another area that we're seeing increases in: service delivery on behalf of child and family programs by third party service providers. Our total pressure here is 15.9 million, which includes \$2 million for intensive in-home services. These intensive in-home services prevent many children from coming into care by providing supports to the family right in their home. These same services help us to reunify families more quickly so the children can leave our care and return home safely. On any given day, these programs serve and support close to 3,000 children who are safely at home with their families rather than in care.

We have \$13.9 million in pressure related to residential contracts with third party service providers. The number of children in our out-of-home care has grown by almost 15 per cent in the last five years. The number of children in protection is not declining, and children are staying in care longer. As I mentioned earlier, these trends can be attributed to the more complex issues facing families today, including severe addictions, mental health challenges, and domestic violence. In family situations that are extremely high risk, where vulnerable children cannot remain safely at home, an only option is to bring them into care.

In the past we have had no choice but to place children in hotels when extended family placements weren't possible and foster homes were full. In the absence of these options we began developing community-based homes throughout the province and contracting with third party service providers to provide short-term care. Children staying in these homes are temporary while our workers continue to search for extended family caregivers or foster homes to provide longer term care. They also focus on working with families to reunite them with their children as soon as it is safe to do so.

The ministry has also partnered with Saskatchewan Foster Families Association on a campaign called Foster New Beginnings. The campaign includes recruitment ads as well as online foster family training to improve accessibility and enhanced supports for foster families during their first year of service. It's definitely producing results. Since the campaign launched in 2016, we have recruited 128 new foster families.

Lastly for our child and family programs, of the \$21.1 million we are requesting includes 3.6 million related to salaries and program delivery. Budgeted salary dollars and FTEs [full-time equivalent] have not kept pace with the number of children and families needing our service.

As I stated earlier, the child and family caseload has increased by almost 15 per cent in the last five years. After the province terminated its agreement with the Saskatoon Tribal Council in 2016, staff were hired to take on the agency's caseload. To address the high number of children in community-based homes, the ministry has added positions to concentrate on working with these children and their families so they could be reunified.

In this fiscal year we've added additional front-line staff to focus specifically on safely reunifying children with their families. This is the best for children and will relieve some of the pressures of the out-of-home care caseload, but it does result in salary pressures this year.

We also have \$1 million pressure in income assistance program delivery. In the last decade, our income assistance caseload has grown by 40 per cent. We've added income assistance staff on the front line as well as in our client service centre to keep up with client demand. I'm pleased to say that the client wait times in the service centre have improved significantly. In October the average wait time on hold for income assistance clients was 12 minutes, down from 21 minutes this summer, even though our staff handled more than 1,500 more calls in October than in the previous month.

A further investment of \$9.2 million will help redesign the province's income assistance program. We continue to review a very complicated and outdated suite of benefit programs to find ways to make it more user friendly and effective for our clients. This funding will help us develop new information technology platform to support income assistance payments and programs.

Lastly our request for \$21 million includes \$900,000 for emergency social services. Keeping people safe during natural disasters is something that we take very seriously. In May and June, residents of Waterhen Lake First Nation, Keeseekoose First Nation, and Kahkewistahaw First Nation and the First Nation village of Southend were evacuated because of wildfires and severe storms. We provided food, transportation, clothing, and shelter to more than 1,100 people until they could return to their homes.

Thank you for your attention, and my officials and I would be happy to discuss any questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We will now proceed with the supplementary estimates, vote 36, Social Services, central management and services, subvote (SS01) in the amount of 900,000. Are there any questions? I recognize Ms. Rancourt.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all I want to thank the committee members for being here this afternoon. It's the last week of session so everything is wrapping up. But especially I want to thank all the staff from the ministry for being here as well to answer some questions that I have this afternoon. You guys always do such a wonderful job with providing some of that information. And we definitely recognize the hard work that you have with helping out the most vulnerable families in this province, and we thank you very much for all the hard work that you do. So again I want to thank you for taking your afternoon here to answer some questions. And sometimes it feels like you're on the hot seat, but we really appreciate the answers that you have for us today.

And thank you, Minister, for coming. I think this might be the first time we've ever had estimates together because I was previously the critic but then I had about almost a year break, and then now I'm back at it. And I'm really excited to be back in this role. It's an area of passion for me. Being a registered social worker, I think social workers in this province, we really do appreciate the work that the ministry does for a lot of the most vulnerable families because oftentimes they're our clients even if we're not working for the ministry. So again, thank you.

So I do have a bit of questions here. I'm going to start with regards to the staffing in child and family services. And so I was wondering what vacancies are there to date in child and family services and if you could break that down to the locations?

[15:15]

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thanks for the question. We have it broken down into three zones across the province. In the North, we have 11 positions that we are in the process of hiring; centre of Saskatchewan, we have nine front-line positions that we are in the process of hiring; and in the South, we have three front-line positions that we are in the process of hiring.

Ms. Rancourt: — How many of these positions are currently being backfilled?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I guess to answer your question, all positions are being backfilled. The current caseload is absorbed within the existing complement of staff. So there are no positions that are not being backfilled right now.

Ms. Rancourt: — And what is the average time that the position is vacant, on average, in each of these zones?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thanks again for the question. I guess it very much depends on the position and where it is. Obviously there are some challenges with filling some of the northern positions that we have. But we do have a . . . There are certain positions that are already being planned to be backfilled. If somebody is on a maternity leave, we already have a succession plan in place for them to be . . . when they are going to be off for whatever time that they've determined to be off. Whether it's maternal or paternal leave, we make sure that we plan for that well in advance. So those might be some of the positions that are in transition that have been identified.

Ms. Rancourt: — So with the number of vacancies that you provided — the 11 in the North, nine in the centre, and three in the South — are all of those permanent positions that are vacant or are some of them temporary? And can you give me a breakdown of that?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I don't have the exact breakdown of which ones are permanent positions and temporary, but I'll supply that to the committee, and I'll make sure that there's eight copies for all committee members. And we'll get that to you within a week if that's acceptable.

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes, for sure; I'd appreciate that. Thank you. So what is the plan to address filling the vacant positions in the harder to recruit areas of the province?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — To answer the question: on the short-term basis, obviously we do advertising in all of the local areas as well as across the province and throughout Western Canada, depending on what the exact position is. That would be the short-term answer to it.

The longer term answer would be: we're working with First Nations University; we're working with our post-secondary institutions. We're also working with First Nations agencies as well as Métis agencies to be able to recruit and develop a pool of resources that may be from the North, that they can work back in their home community. So that would be the longer term development.

And this has been going on for a while and we're just starting to see some of the benefits of it, of people going back into their home community with their degree in social work or whatever the corresponding position is.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay, great. One of the questions I have as well was, are any of these vacancies due to trauma-related injuries?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — To the employee?

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Okay. Thanks for the question. I don't have the information on anyone specific, but we can provide that for you. But there is a whole bunch of reasons, which I touched on before, that might cause some staffing issues. People might be working into a different area. There's promotions. There's a lot of movement within Social Services.

Also as I alluded to before, there could be maternity leave. There could be an illness in the family. We want to make sure that our staff always has the healthy environment that they need to be able to work in to be able to perform their duties.

Ms. Rancourt: — I agree with that. When a staff member for the Ministry of Social Services leaves, my understanding is that there'll be an exit interview done, completed with them. And I believe the ministry is supposed to be keeping stats on some of the issues that are brought forward by some of the employees. Could you give me a little bit a breakdown of some of the top issues that are being brought forward from individuals who are leaving the ministry?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — As far as an exit interview, it is a voluntary process. If the departing employee wants to go through that, so we do, do that. Some of the main themes that I'm hearing about are the reason for leaving is a promotion; the other one which is personal reasons which could be whole gamut of their personal reasons. It could be family reasons or whatever. The other side is, is people are moving around the province. We have people that are going from sometimes from urban centres out to rural; somebody going from the South to the North; and we have a lot of movement around the province which I think is healthy for the work environment.

Ms. Rancourt: — So I wanted to bring the following report to your attention. It's a report that was done by the Canadian Association of Social Workers. It's called *Understanding Social*

Work and Child Welfare. It was a Canadian study and interviews with child welfare experts across the country. And this report was given to the minister, the federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, but I think there's a lot of good information in here that would be really good for Saskatchewan to start working on as well. So I think it'd be something that would be really good for you to take a look at.

But I have to point out that it does paint a bleak picture of the child welfare systems in each province and territory. And it talks a lot about what the workers in the departments of child welfare are feeling. And it reports that 75 per cent of the social workers indicated that they had unmanageable work loads and are at a crucial . . . which is a crucial issue in their practice; and that 44 of them have experienced threats and violence on the job; and 45 per cent of social workers who left the field did so because of stress and vicarious trauma.

So I think that's very important when we're looking at the mental health of our workers and recognizing the stress that they undergo. And when we see the shocking increase of caseloads, increasing within our province and I'm sure others as well, the pressures that that puts on the workers that are working in the field. And so the result is when workers don't have an opportunity to fully provide the level of scope of their profession, it results in more children in care and more families needing support.

[15:30]

So I think it's really important to recognize that, and they talk about in order to retain workers within the field, making sure that they have “. . . a manageable caseload, an organizational climate of support, organizational values that include professionalism where employees feel valued, and workloads are reasonable.”

And so I thought that this was really important to bring forward with these supplementary estimates, because when they were brought forward, they said that the reason why we were needing to add more to the expenses for Social Services was because of the increase of the caseloads. And I think it's really important that we recognize the impact that has on the workers within the ministry. So I really encourage you to take a look at that report and see how that might actually be having an impact also on the people who provide those services within Saskatchewan as well.

So I'm going to move on though. I was wondering what the cost related to using rental cars were within the ministry.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thanks for the question. This is a new process that we're just embarking on. It just started in April of this year. To date we've had 1,513 bookings with a rent-a-car. I don't have the dollar amount but I can get that for you. But we just want to make sure that this process is working for all of our staff in various locations throughout the province, so we are moving from more CVAs [central vehicle agency] to less CVAs and trying this out. So we're kind of balancing the two right now, so I wouldn't . . . I can get you the accurate dollar amount of what we've spent but we're kind of in transition right now, so it might not be reflective an ongoing price because we kind of have both systems running right now.

Ms. Rancourt: — What was the decision behind going away

from the CVA practice and instead using rental cars?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — This was a government-wide initiative that we've gone away from the CVAs. The question is . . . might be better posed to the Minister of Central Services because that's in his specific area of the car rentals.

And just kind of backing up to the report that you presented, I'm more than happy to have a look . . . [inaudible] . . . get it on the record that I'm more than happy to have a look at that report and finding out what some of the stresses of the social workers.

Some of the programs that we are implementing that will alleviate this is the motivational interviewing, which I touched on in my opening remarks, being able to understand the clients' needs a little bit better and having that ongoing relationship between worker. As you are well aware, the cases are more complex. The volumes are changing. So we want to have that constant contact from the worker to the client to be able to understand . . . so each can understand each other's needs. So we're working on that.

But I'll endeavour to get you the dollar amount on what we have done on the rental cars, but Central Services might be able to answer that better than we can.

Ms. Rancourt: — And with talking with motivational interviewing, I'm very well familiar with that type of process. But in your opening remarks you indicated that . . . My understanding was that you indicated that that was part of the interviewing process for workers who are working in income assistance programs. Are workers that are working in the child and family services program, are all of them going to be trained in the motivational interviewing process?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — As I've been told, within child and family they have an integrated practice strategy which is very similar to motivational interviewing, just a different approach to it because it's child and family versus income.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, my colleague would have some questions to ask right now. Thank you.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Belanger.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And welcome to the minister and his officials. And my questions are going to basically be circling the . . . involving the adoption and the foster parent section of the supplementary estimates. And I should know this but basically to refresh my memory, how does . . . Once a child gets apprehended — I guess that's the proper phrase — from a circumstance, a family circumstance or whatever the case may be, what's the general process right from the time that the social worker orders the apprehension?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I'm going to get Tobie. I even forgot your title.

Ms. Eberhardt: — Tobie Eberhardt, with child family programs. So I think I'll talk from the start when we would receive a call about some kind of safety concern. And so our staff would go out to assess the concern, and if during their assessment they determine that there is some kind of a safety threat to the

child, they would first work with family to see if they could develop a safety plan to mitigate that risk. If they can't mitigate the safety threat, then the child would be apprehended, or if the parents agree to it, they would have like a voluntary agreement. So once the child is removed from the family, the first step we would always take is to work with the family to immediately see if we can find some family or significant other that we could go out and immediately assess to place the child with as a place of safety. So that would be our first step.

If we're not able to do that, we would then look at placing the child in another safe environment on a temporary basis, such as a foster home. We then work with the family to sit down and talk about what those risks are. We would ask them to bring in their support system to try and come up with a plan to address that risk. If we can't come to an agreement, then the ministry would apply to court, and we would have to go before the courts to set out what our concerns are and why we don't think the child can safely be returned home at that time. And then through that, we would work with the family, identifying what is their supports, what are the services we could put into place.

We have a number of community-based organizations that we can put into the home to provide intensive services with the family. If it's issues around perhaps addictions, we would work with our health partners to help the family get connected to addiction services. And during that time, we're always also working with the family, and if they're indigenous, with their First Nation community to see if we can identify some options for the child to be placed with someone connected to them.

Mr. Belanger: — So I just want to reiterate that in these supplementary estimates, that as you look at resourcing more money to the department, it's not compromising our ability to apprehend children and place them in safe care.

Ms. Eberhardt: — Sorry, I'm not clear. I'm sorry.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I guess I can answer that question, Mr. Belanger, is no. The answer is no. We would make sure that the appropriate resources are always in place to make sure that the child is safe.

Mr. Belanger: — All right. So just to recap how children are apprehended or removed from the parent or parents, there's many complications to how we do this very distressing job of removing children from their homes and from their family. Obviously the best interest of the child is paramount to all the work that we do. Both the minister and I have agreed on that statement on many occasions.

So the first step, as you get a complaint and you justify the complaint, you . . . unable to mitigate the potential harm to that child, you remove the child from the home and from the family. And then the other first step is you place them with family. Second step, you'd place them with a foster family if you're unable to find family to accept the child. In the course, in the process, I'm assuming the vast majority of families whose children were apprehended from want their children back, so then you'd be working with them as well. So it's almost like a three-prong, three-stage process. Is that fair to describe it as such?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Yes, there is many processes that happen when a child is taken temporarily into the care of the ministry. First of all, when we remove the child, as we've always said, to make sure that that's a safe environment for the child, we try to place them with family. And while that process is happening, we go in with the family to be able to make sure that they have some supports that they might be able to need because we have to reunify the family from both sides. We have to reunify it from the parent side of things to make sure that they have a safe environment for the child and that the child can go back into that safe environment because we don't want the process to repeat.

Mr. Belanger: — So when you look at the points . . . because obviously developing a network of good foster homes is so vitally important to some of the work that you undertake. And I appreciate the incredible value of the foster parenting system within our province. And certainly it's got its challenges as well, but obviously there's some very good families doing some very good work to help fill the gap, even on a temporary basis. So we certainly want to send, you know, a positive message in regards to the foster family system throughout our province.

So after you've placed a child into a foster family, then eventually . . . I'm looking at time frame here. It's so difficult for foster families not to get attached to the child, you know, and I think they even get counselling to that effect, but many do. Many do get attached. It's a normal human reaction to get attached to a child even if they're with you for two months or two years. How long is the process, and what is the process, between placing that child in foster care before you allow them to adopt them as their own? Is it through an assessment phase? Or is there certain time constraints before they look at adoption? I just wanted to get clarification on that.

[15:45]

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you for the question. Couple of points is . . . I'm sure it is very difficult on the foster families too, but this is something that . . . We provide them with training upfront and training on the back end when a child is temporarily in their care. And I had the opportunity of attending a long-service award for foster families, and there was one lady that fostered for 50 years and she'd lost count on how many children had been through her home and her husband's home, who had passed away a couple of years ago. The one thing I said, congratulations, thank you for everything that you've done. And she said, I'd do it again in a second. Which was very heartwarming.

But as far as a specific time frame, it's really on a case-by-case basis depending on what that is, depending on what exactly the circumstances of the parents and of the child are. But we're continuously trying to work towards reunifying the family with supports from our ministry for the family and also for the child and for the foster parents, to make sure that everybody is supported while this process is taking place, and that our continuous goal is to try to reunify the family at any point in time. As far as the adoption process, it very much depends on the situation at hand.

Mr. Belanger: — But again I just wanted to . . . I think I myself, being a grandparent, that you would assume that if the situation arises — and hope it never does — that where my grandchildren

are apprehended or there's some issues with their care, that as a grandparent that they would come to me if they're apprehended, saying, would you take care of these children? So I just wanted to reiterate the point earlier that it's important, and I think in the best interests of the child, to go to the next family member, be it a grandparent or aunt or uncle. I think that's a natural instinct of not only professionals wanting to go in that direction but children as well.

You know, we were raised by my aunt after my mother passed away so we instinctively wanted to go there. It's just . . . Children do that. So it's nice to see that correlation between the policies and procedures of the Ministry of Social Services saying, yes, the next obvious step would be going to the next family members to see if they want that child, and that we should do all we can to support that effort. And of course, the third level is to foster families. And I imagine you also have emergency homes where people will open up their homes for, say, a week? Is that also part of the process when you apprehend children?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Again, a very good question. On the PSI [person of sufficient interest] or the people that could take a child into care temporarily, we would encourage any family members that are out there that they can register with Social Services as a place of safety. And once the process . . . if there is an issue and we have to go out and make an assessment of the situation and if that child has to be temporarily removed, we would have something on file as a place of safety with a grandparent or with a relative that we would be putting at the top of our list.

I agree with you. The connection to any family member would be good at that time, because the child and the family is in crisis. We want to make sure that the child has an opportunity to see a familiar face, and the parents feel comfortable that they know where their child is and is with somebody that they know as well personally. So I agree with you that that's very important.

We need to make sure that that happens when it can happen, but we would also make sure that if there are any families out there that want to be registered, that they contact Social Services and we can register them on the file, that if there is something that happens within their family unit, they can be identified as a temporary place of safety. And then we can work the process that we just talked about before while that is happening.

Mr. Belanger: — Now again, I would ask that you correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Minister, in the sense of the process. I just want to reiterate again for the third time, that as you look at apprehending children, the process is that you do the assessment. You assess the risk and you find that there's no way you can mitigate the risk to the child. So you remove that child from the home. Your first instinctive and policy-driven reaction is to place that child with family — aunt, uncle, grandparents. And then you look at the foster family, support mechanisms, emergency homes, and the PSI — persons of sufficient interest, I guess is the full . . . and then you would look at those options for placing these children. So that's the process in priority sequence that we're undertaking.

When does the child become a ward of the ministry? Like, how does that work? The day you apprehend them? Or is it after you've exhausted all the avenues? Or is there an age bracket? I

just need to understand that process.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Again I just want . . . and your process that you outlined is accurate. The only one I want to just clarify is when a child is temporarily removed from a home, family would always be the first option, but we have to make sure that that family spot is a safe place for the child. We want to make sure that that is a consistently safe spot for the child, the individual.

And then after that, as far as permanent ward, that's our last-case scenario. That's when, as you had mentioned, all else has been exhausted, that would be the last-case scenario then we look at that step. But we want to make sure that we have done everything we possibly can for that child and for that family to be able to make sure that they can be reunified. And if they can't, then we take that final step, but we only do that when absolutely necessary.

Mr. Belanger: — Now is it easier to adopt a child once they become a ward of the ministry, or is it easier to do it as a grandparent before they become a ward? I want to just get clarification on that. Because you're saying the last course of action is go to court and they become a ward of Social Services. But if I'm the grandparent, I'm the grandfather of the child, I say well I'd like to adopt this child; I'd like to have this child as my own. Would that be considered only after they become a ward of the ministry? Or can you intercept that process and say, well I'm the biological grandparent. Can I adopt that child before they become a ward of the ministry?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — As I understand it, when a family member is a PSI, they have custody. They can apply for custody over that individual child or children. For the adoption process to be able to start, they have to be a permanent ward of the state. Once that has happened, then we would do an assessment if . . . and the family would obviously, any family members would be, to adopt the child, would be at the top of the list.

Mr. Belanger: — So I just want to make sure I understand this completely, Mr. Minister. The fact is, do family members have an opportunity to intervene before the child becomes a ward of the ministry? And is that the time, the opportune time, to adopt that child before they become a ward? Because I want to understand. So they have to become a ward for them to adopt or to exhaust all family avenues before they become a ward? I just wanted clarification on that.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — As I understand it, they can have . . . A family member could have custody of the child. In order for them to be adopted into their family, they have to be a permanent ward of the . . . So there's kind of two processes. There's the custody side of it and the PSI that they would have custody over their child. In order for them to officially adopt, the child would have to become a permanent ward and then it would go into the adoption process and the family has that opportunity. So they can still have custody over the child and have all authority over that child as a PSI, but to officially adopt that child, the process is, is it becomes a permanent ward of the state and then the adoption process starts from there and family would be the top priority.

[16:00]

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. Because I'm a bit confused. Sorry. I just need to understand this completely. At the early outset — that's why I asked for clarification — when a child is apprehended or is found to be in no one's complete care, then they're apprehended by Social Services. And then Social Services turns around and says, okay let's look at the family. Is anybody interested in raising these children? And usually you get a lot of interest from families, as families do. In the absence of any families that are able to assume the care of these children, then you'd go to the foster families support mechanisms.

And I assume that before they became a ward that you would exhaust all avenues of family first to assume the care of the child. So how is it that the adoption process follows the child becoming a ward of the state, after the fact, if you know what I'm saying? So you're saying before they become a ward, we look at all the . . . exhaust all avenues for the child for family, to be placed with family. And after they become a ward of the state, then the families that assume them can adopt them.

It just seems a bit confusing because I'm just trying to figure out if I . . . I'll use my grandchild as an example and we'll use Nixon. He's a good guy, Nixon. But Nixon, his mother decides to leave him. Social Services interferes — not interferes but intercepts — and does an assessment and say, okay, this child needs to be apprehended. So I come along and I say, okay, I want Nixon in my care. So as a grandfather, you'll give me Nixon, okay. And now Nixon is with us for a couple of years and then my wife and I decide, well we want to adopt Nixon. Well you know, we want him to be under our care, under our name, under our care and control, so to speak. So we can't do that until he becomes a ward of Social Services? I just want to clarify that.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I'll get clarification on it.

Now I've got clarification. My understanding of this is, in your scenario that you presented to me, you would have, as a PSI, you would have custody and be able to make all decisions for that individual. You would be able to make the decisions for that individual completely as a parent. That's as a PSI. So that's in that kind of zone over there.

The adoption side of things would be a little bit different for it to become a permanent adoption. That's where the process changes a little bit.

But you would have, as a person of sufficient interest, you would have the control over the decisions of that individual child. The adoption process would be separate. Now that's not saying if everything checks out and you work with the Ministry of Social Services and say, in your scenario, I'd like to adopt my grandson specifically, we would work and make sure again that everything is still normal and the house is meeting all of its normal requirements. And if there's a process for a private adoption, then we would go down . . . You would have to get a lawyer and do a private adoption. But in order to adopt a child from the state, it has to be deemed a permanent ward of the state. The state can't just adopt children out.

Mr. Belanger: — So the purpose of deeming a child a ward of the state is simply saying, okay . . . Now I'm just trying to . . . I'm not trying to belittle this by saying . . . So that child becomes property of the state in order for the state to allow the adoption

process to occur. Is that a fair assessment of how you would characterize the child being a ward, being a ward of the state, that you're now authorized to allow that child to be adopted? You have to assume the ward, that this child is in your care and control, to adopt that child out. Is that a fair assessment?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — When we take a child in, we want to make sure again that the safety of the child is first and foremost. In order for the process to happen on the adoption side of things we want . . . You know what? Actually I'm just going to get clarification on this. I'm just going to get some extra clarification on this.

I'm going to get Janice Colquhoun to address this because it's getting fairly technical for me, Mr. Belanger, but I'll get Janice to touch on it.

Ms. Colquhoun: — Hi. Janice Colquhoun, child and family programs. So thank you for your questions to date and I'm pleased to try to answer your questions.

So you know, when a child gets into the system because of reasons with child safety and goes along a journey, there are various pathways that can happen with a child and the planning, and there can be various family members interested in the child. So we have those scenarios. And we determine that largely through a person-of-sufficient-interest order proceeding. Largely family members want to go down the pathway of person-of-sufficient-interest order planning. They mostly don't go down the adoption.

Now having said that, if there is a family member that very much wants to adopt, the adoption legislation in Saskatchewan allows for two different legal statuses in order to adopt when a child is in the ministry. And that's through a voluntary committal, where you would actually have both parents signing off voluntarily that they fully agree that they want their child adopted, or it's through a permanent wardship order granted in the courts.

So when a child is in the ministry and in our system, those are the pathways that occur. So there are at times family members who prefer to adopt and therefore . . . Those are the two options. Now often it ends up being a permanent wardship order because there are parents that need to be served in court proceedings and sometimes there isn't a unifying agreement on the adoption planning. So therefore we go down the permanent wardship order planning in court and parties are served and people make their cases. And then if a permanent wardship order is granted, then the ministry proceeds with planning in collaboration with interested family members, all in the best interests of the child.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, and that's paramount. And that's the basic understanding I have. It's all in the best interests of the child. We keep going back to that principle because that's obviously where we all want to end up.

Now I just want to get clarification. Can you actually adopt a child without Social Services being involved? Like I'll go back to my Nixon, okay. And I say, okay, Mom, you're not doing a great job. I'm going to take Nixon. I want to adopt him as my own. He's now under my care.

Ms. Colquhoun: — Again when a child comes to the attention

of the ministry and then we become involved, what happens is that there are then parties to the proceedings, which are often the mother and the father, and then they need to agree to that. If they both agree that they would like an adoption to occur, it does happen sometimes where you could discharge planning and a private adoption could occur. It's often done more, sooner into the planning as opposed to later on in the planning stages, but the laws would not preclude that kind of discussion to occur.

Mr. Belanger: — Now the other scenario I'll present . . . We have no problem with Nixon. Nixon is fine, but I'm using him as an example here. Now if I see that my daughter is not caring for Nixon well, and before Social Services gets involved . . . Even though she's not on assistance, they could still get involved to get a child safety complaint. But if she's not on assistance, there's no concern to the ministry, and I say to my daughter, well I want Nixon as my own. I want to adopt him. Nothing is stopping me from doing that. Social Services is not involved. I can do the private adoption on my own. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — It could be, but in your scenario, the parent would have to relinquish their rights to you. If the parent relinquishes their rights to you, then you could pursue a private adoption. Social Services doesn't have to be involved unless there is some particular incident or some safety of the child. If, in your scenario, if your daughter wanted to relinquish her rights as a parent, to you, that would be a legal agreement between the two of you.

Mr. Belanger: — Now going back to both parents agreeing to allow this child to be adopted as one of the pathways that you explained. The other pathway being if Social Services agreed, they'd actually become permanent wards. That's the other pathway. So what if one of the parents is incapacitated either, for example, very ill, or in a coma, or in jail, or something of that sort, if one of the parents is in that situation, what happens then?

Ms. Colquhoun: — Yes, there's procedures and legislation that allow for dispensation of the interest of the party. And then, you know, there'd be an application to court for dispensation of their involvement. And then there would information tabled to court, of why.

Mr. Belanger: — Now again, going back to both parents agreeing. What if both parents agree, and say okay, we're going to give grandpa Buckley this child. Then Social Services should be doing all to accommodate that process. You know, it could be the child obviously is within your system, so both parents agree, both Nixon's parents agree that I would be the adopted person to take care of Nixon. Then that should end it, right?

Ms. Colquhoun: — Yes, I mean if both birth parents are in full agreement, and what we call, they'd have to consent. They'd have to consent to adoption, and they could undertake an independent adoption planning to conduct that. Again if both birth parents were deemed as not to be able to care for the child in the interim, Social Services' interests would be that the child is safe in some placement.

[16:15]

Mr. Belanger: — Now the other point I would ask under this process is as I adopt this child — again going back to Nixon —

he becomes my child. And the theory behind not putting Nixon into foster care is that (a) I'm family, and (b) I'm assuming Nixon as mine. So in assuming Nixon as mine, and both birth parents have signed off, then I'm responsible for Nixon. Right? So I wouldn't and shouldn't expect any supports from the Department of Social Services. Is that a correct assumption to make?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — It would depend on the case. In Social Services, child and family, as long as everything's safe in that particular household, there wouldn't be any cause for involvement. Now that doesn't mean that the person could touch Social Services in other ways on one of our income assistance programs or something like that. To be general, I'd just say not in Social Services, not in child and family as long there is . . . You would be now the parent of that child and then Social Services would not get involved unless there is some specific reason — if there is an incident and we have to investigate back to what we were talking about before. There would be no reason for Social Services to be involved in that case actively.

Mr. Belanger: — So I've got Nixon under my care. He's now my adopted child. And he was apprehended by you guys. You know, and I don't say that in a negative way, but just for the sake of being very simplistic in my approach. So Nixon is nine years old. Who would get Nixon's child tax? Would you get it because he was in your care or would I get it as the parent of Nixon? How would that work?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I'll get some clarification on that. As a parent you would be entitled to the child tax as soon as that adoption is processed and finalized. Then that would turn over, that you would be able to get the benefits entitled to that child like any other parent.

Mr. Belanger: — I only got two or three questions remaining. But is there a different level of support? Like I assume that there is with adopting because if I want to adopt Nixon, he's mine and I'm responsible for him. I got to pay all his costs, you know. But there's obviously a difference between what the foster family may assume over . . . when they assume a child, that there's probably supports for the foster family and also PSI, person of sufficient interest.

Are you finding that there's less people willing to look at the adoption because there's better benefits under the foster scenario? Or I shouldn't say foster because foster is a different . . . not in the same family, but the PSI. Is there encouragement or is there better rates for supporting a child through that PSI arrangement as opposed to adopting?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Just to make sure we're accurate, I'm going to get Tobie to explain the exact side of it.

Ms. Eberhardt: — Okay so our foster parents and our extended family caregivers — so those are approved PSI caregivers or any other family caregivers — they receive the same rates. So the same maintenance payments and they're eligible for any additional payments based on the child's needs.

If a child is adopted through our domestic adoption program — so that was a child who was a permanent ward and then adopted through us, be it with family or someone in the general public — that family is eligible to receive assisted adoption rates, which

are about 90 per cent of what foster rates are and are also eligible to receive special needs payments. And so that's sort of in recognition that a lot of our children that are in care, that are permanent wards, might have some special needs that are going to require some additional supports. And so we do provide some financial support to assist adoption parents.

Mr. Belanger: — So again, I'm sure my daughter's going to give me heck for using Nixon as an example, and Nixon's a good kid. But anyway, if you look at the scenario with Nixon. So I'm adopting Nixon; he's my grandchild but he's now my child. And if Nixon . . . I hate to even say this, but if Nixon had FAS [fetal alcohol syndrome] as an example and he becomes my child, Social Services would help with the FAS challenges that Nixon might have once he becomes even adopted by me, legally adopted by me? That support mechanism you talk about would kick in? Is that fair to say that's what would happen?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I think it would be accurate to say that as you as the adopted parent are the parent now, and you would get the same services as any other parent that it is applicable to. In or outside the system, you would get the same services as any other parent whether it was your natural child or not. Once you've gone through that adoption process that child is your child so we would treat it as the same.

Mr. Belanger: — And it applies if I'm on assistance, right? It wouldn't apply if I had a good income, like say I was making 100,000 a year.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Maybe I misunderstood. If you adopt a child it's your child. There is no other process whether they were involved with Social Services or not. The child is your child as far as the letter of the law. You've gone through the adoption process and the child would be yours, just like it would be recognized as any other parent whether it was a natural child or an adopted child. You would be recognized the same.

Mr. Belanger: — Now if I'm in the process . . . I got this child. I got Nixon in my care. I'm on my way to adopting him, and you guys are helping me out with him. And then who would get the child tax? Would I as the PSI or the planned adopted parent get that child tax from Ottawa? And would your ministry take that child tax and say no, this is our child in care so we get the child tax? Or would the PSI or the planned adopted parent get that child tax?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — As far as I understand, once the adoption is finalized then the parent would get all benefits that . . . any child tax benefit or any tax credits. Once that adoption process is in place and finalized, like I said, that would mean that the child is now yours for all sake. And as far as the government is concerned, it is your child and we wouldn't see it as whether it was an adopted child or not. So the tax implications or the tax benefits would follow whoever has full custody of that child at the time.

Mr. Belanger: — Now you apprehend Nixon. I come along, I want Nixon under my care. You give me Nixon, so I have him under my care. I'm planning on adopting Nixon, so I'm spending a lot of money trying to adopt him. That process could take a long time. You're not helping me on anything as a ministry. You're not giving me any money at all to support Nixon. Who would get

that child tax credit? Would you get it as the minister responsible for Nixon because he came into your system? Or would I get it as a PSI or a planned adopting grandparent or even as a foster parent? Who would get that child tax credit from Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Just for clarification, the child tax credit is obviously a federal program and they decide where the funds flow. If the ministry was in custody of that child, the child tax credit would flow through the ministry but we would be flowing that money back out in excess of that money to be able to support the PSI at that point in time. So we're not receiving any excess funds from this. We're actually supporting the family in excess of what we're receiving as a child tax credit or benefit.

Mr. Belanger: — So right now, I'm a PSI. I've got my Nixon, and you guys would be helping me with Nixon. And if you're not helping me with Nixon, then you shouldn't be taking that child tax. That child tax should be coming to me. So I just want to clarify it. If the ministry is not helping me with Nixon achieve any costs or cover any costs and I'm a PSI with Nixon, then I should be getting the child tax, not the ministry, unless the ministry is helping me. Is that a fair assessment?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — The federal government would decide where the child tax benefit goes to. That is under their jurisdiction, not ours, as to where the child tax benefit flows.

Mr. Belanger: — So what if from Saskatchewan's perspective, if this child was taken by a family member in, say for example, Edmonton. Because when I was five years old my aunt adopted me and moved me to her home and then eventually to Edmonton. You know there's interjurisdictional issues today between provinces.

And how about the States? What if a child gets adopted in the States? What happens there? Can parents apply for benefits from Saskatchewan or for the child tax if that child is considered Canadian? Do you know anything about that? And have you supported families in other jurisdictions for providing services to Saskatchewan-based kids that were one time in your care?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I guess I'll check on the second part of the question, but the first part of the question again is the child tax benefit is a federal program. This isn't administrated by the province. So they decide where the money flows and how much flows, and that's all in their parameters and their regulations and their legislation.

As far as international adoptions, I'll have to . . . I'll check with my officials, but we might have to get back to you on that because it's pretty specific and a pretty narrow case. But let me check with my officials and see if I can get you an answer.

[16:30]

To answer your question on the child care benefit, and any funding that we do as the Ministry of Social Services flows wherever the child is. So if the child is in British Columbia, for example, we would work with social services or the child and family department in British Columbia and make sure that that child that comes from Saskatchewan is supported across . . . Anywhere in the country, we would work with that.

On an international basis, we would have to deal with that on a case-by-case basis. But if there's something, if you've got a case and there's something specific that you want our officials to look in, we'd be more than happy to do that.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. I'll certainly refer to your ministry on one particular case that I'm working on, and that's the basis of all these questions.

So my final point is this, and you can clarify if I'm right or wrong. So let's go back to Nixon. Okay, Nixon is apprehended and I don't assume control of Nixon. I'm not a PSI and I have no interest in taking Nixon. So the mother wouldn't get the child tax. I wouldn't get the child tax that's attached to Nixon. Would your ministry apply for that child tax since that child is in your care?

Does the Ministry of Social Services provincially apply for the child tax credit for those children in care? Because obviously the mom wouldn't deserve it in this case, and neither would I. So where would this child tax credit go? Would it come to the ministry as the person responsible for this child? Have you applied for the child tax credit from the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Again to answer your question, the federal government determines where the money flows. As far as if we are, as the province of Saskatchewan, are in custody of the child, then the federal regulations determine that that money flows to where the child is. And if the child is in the custody of the province at that point in time, then the funds flow to the province at that . . . But this is, again, this is the federal government that has mandated this. All jurisdictions across Canada are the same on this. So we're abiding by the federal rules.

Mr. Belanger: — Would you be able to share a figure as to . . . Because we often hear children in care, the rates are going up, and we hear children being apprehended at a younger age, been going up. Is it fair to ask for an estimate as to what the province gets from the federal government under the child tax credit program? Is there a figure that you can share with the committee?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I've got a dollar amount which is in Public Accounts, and this is the transfers from the federal government to the Ministry of Social Services for a total of 37,382,000.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. And I just want to finish off. Thanks to my colleague for allocating time with me. We have a lot more questions on this process and we'll undertake them as we embark on this journey.

And the follow-up question I would have — and obviously we would see that we'd have to afford more time to your officials to give me the answer — but of the 37 million you get for the child tax, from the child tax program, how many of these children in your care or registered under your care that may be in other jurisdictions or may have had no interest from their family in terms of getting some of that money . . . like, how much of that 37 million is actually retained by the department for children that may have been just simply adopted by their families or may have been moved to another country like the States, as an example?

Because we would hope that the resources attached to the federal

child tax program is spent on the children, and that if nobody's coming forward . . . and we hope that your ministry is making every effort to make sure the dollars follow the child, whether they're in the States or in Europe or any other province or territory.

So I would maybe ask the officials to find out what the difference is between the money following the children versus the money that we aren't following the children. What's left over between the two as it pertains to the child tax program? Thank you. Thanks again for your information. I'll wait for that information.

The Chair: — Are there any further questions? I recognize Ms. Rancourt.

Ms. Rancourt: — Thank you. I also have some questions with regards to children in care. I was wondering how many children are currently in care.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — As of September 30th of 2018, we have 3,197 children in the care of the ministry.

Ms. Rancourt: — And does that include the PSI placements?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — The number of PSIs are 2,030 as of September 30th this year.

Ms. Rancourt: — So that's above and beyond the first number that you gave me?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Correct.

Ms. Rancourt: — How many of those youth, both in the PSI placements or the other placements, identify as being indigenous?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Again as of September 30th, 2018, there was 73.3 per cent that were self-identified as indigenous.

Ms. Rancourt: — And do you have a breakdown of where the children in care are, in which placements, like therapeutic homes, emergency placements, or how many of those children are under the care of other child and family services arrangements?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — The font is very small on this, so bear with me. The percentage of children in extended family care placements is 56.8 per cent; percentage of children in foster care placements is 17.9 per cent; percentage of children in community-based homes is 6.2; and the remainder is a combination of group homes and private treatment.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay. So we've been discussing newborn apprehensions, and so I was wondering if you can explain the increase of newborn apprehensions.

[16:45]

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thanks for the question. As I've mentioned many times in the House and certainly in committee and out in the public, our first and primary is always safety of the child — always. And we will always put the child in the centre of the scenario and be able to work on the safety first and foremost. As far as the reason — I think I said this in the media

— is we're seeing some very complex cases. We're seeing some certainly with mental health and addictions. And just the complexity of the cases that are coming in are very challenging and we want to make sure that we do have the appropriate in care. And again we want to make sure that if there is a child that is in need, that we're there to react. And in the scenario before, being able to work with the family to be able to provide the best care for that child on a short-term and long-term basis.

Ms. Rancourt: — The social workers have been telling us that child apprehensions are made worse by the challenges of getting women and family members into rehab beds, and the gap between detox and rehab. So can you speak a little bit to how this in particular impacts newborn apprehensions?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — We wouldn't be able to touch base on the rehab numbers and that. That might be directed to the Minister of Health as far as that . . . I wouldn't have that and my officials wouldn't have that information.

But the complexity that we're seeing of the children coming into care has changed and evolved. And we're working with the community-based organizations and with other . . . with Health and certainly with the families to be able to make sure that again we can provide the best care for that individual child either on a short-term or long-term basis.

As far as the addiction numbers and that, I'd have to get the Minister of Health to be able to . . . And maybe that might be something that can be done in a written question. They might be able to answer that.

Ms. Rancourt: — But is your ministry seeing how the wait times, in particularly health fields if you're talking about mental health and addictions, the wait times for family members and parents to get services is having an impact on services that you provide and causing some particular stresses on the services that you provide because these families are waiting longer to get the services they need so that they can be healthy to raise and take care of their own children?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — We're not hearing anything specifically about that across, but there obviously are some hot spots in the province where there are some challenges. But we have a very close and ongoing relationship with the Ministry of Health and with the Saskatchewan Health Region to be able to make sure that we're in constant communication, that if we're hearing anything they're aware of it, and if they're hearing things on their side, that they can keep us informed as to what's happening out on the ground, when the boots hit the ground, so to speak, that we're going in there as a team to be able to support the family.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay. Some information we got with regards to apprehensions of children less than the age of 30 days, in 2017 it indicated that there was 148 children between that age that were apprehended. Do you have a breakdown of which regions these apprehensions occurred?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — The answer to your question is no, we don't have it broken down by region. We would have to go back and be able to dig up some information on that to be able to provide to the committee, if that's the wish of the committee. It

will take us a little bit of time because we have to contact each one of our offices to be able to pull that information together. We just have a centralized information.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay. Because earlier you indicated in some regions there was a longer wait time than others, so I thought maybe that might have an indication of what regions might be having a longer wait time for services for family members.

But up to today's date, do you have a number for 2018 of children under 30 days old that were apprehended?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — As the information was provided in written questions for 2017, the number was 148 and I think that's what was received. As far as 2018, as the fiscal year hasn't completed, we don't have a grand total of that. So I don't want to provide a number that isn't reflective on an annual basis, and we're comparing apples to apples. We'll get that number at the end of the fiscal year.

Ms. Rancourt: — Okay. What's the plan to get legal aid wait times to see a lawyer for recourse on child apprehension lowered?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — The legal aid side of things would be more of a Justice thing, but my officials are continuously working out and providing feedback to the Justice side of the government to be able to update them on if there are any concerns that we're hearing from the field on wait times or if there's a longer wait time.

We obviously want the process to run as smooth as possible. But as far as the legal aid, we would have to touch base with Justice to find out what their wait times are. But again, we work with them continuously to make sure that our clients' needs are served as promptly and as quickly as the justice system can provide.

Ms. Rancourt: — So can you outline all options that exist in terms of recourse for families seeking to contest child apprehensions. And how does that compare to other provinces?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — I guess the process would be the normal process of going through Legal Aid. There are other options like CLASSIC [Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc.] in Saskatoon that also provide legal services to anybody that might have some financial restraints. We also have court workers that support our clients throughout the court process, so again we work with Justice and to be able to make sure that our clients are getting the proper representation that they need in a timely manner.

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you very much. As per the agreement between the House leaders, we are to have . . . We have another four minutes. That includes time to vote this supplementary off so we need to proceed with that. Ms. Rancourt, do you have any closing comments?

Ms. Rancourt: — Yes, thanks. Of course I always have so many questions and I love this opportunity to ask these questions and learn more about the complexity of the Ministry of Social Services. And I know the minister as well, we both learn a lot through this process, don't we? And so this is a wonderful opportunity to have some time with your staff and so I appreciate

this time and I look forward to the next time we get together. And again I hope everybody has a good evening, and thank you for answering all of our questions very timely and respectfully, and we appreciate that. So thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the questions. Thank you to you, Mr. Chair, the committee members, and thank you to the great people that I have the honour of representing in Social Services that are doing an amazing job across the province. And I very much appreciate their support during this process. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and thank you to the officials for coming in today.

Okay, vote no. 36, Social Services on page 12, central management and services, subvote (SS01) in the amount of 900,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Income assistance and disability services, subvote (SS03) in the amount of \$1,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Child and family services, subvote (SS04) in the amount of 21,100,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Social Services, vote 36, 23,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Okay, I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2019, the following sums for Social Services in the amount of 23,000,000.

Would someone move that please? Mr. Fiaz. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Committee members, you have before you a draft of the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Human Services. We require a member to move the following motion:

That the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Human Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

Would someone . . . Mr. Steinley. Is that agreed? Oops, sorry . . . Oh, Mr. Steinley. Ms. Wilson.

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — I so move, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — All in agreement?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Okay, Mr. Steinley, you can now get your name on the record. We need someone to move adjournment.

Mr. Steinley: — I'll so move, Mr. Chair. Thanks very much.

The Chair: — Moved by Mr. Steinley. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee of Human Services now stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 17:00.]