



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

HANSARD VERBATIM REPORT



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BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

Hon. Todd Goudy, Chair
Melfort

Hon. Lori Carr
Estevan-Big Muddy

Brad Crassweller
White City-Qu'Appelle

Matt Love
Saskatoon Eastview

Hon. Tim McLeod
Moose Jaw North

Nicole Sarauer
Regina Douglas Park

Kevin Weedmark
Moosomin-Montmartre

[The board met at 10:03.]

Chair Goudy: — Well good morning everyone. Thank you for coming, some from further away than others. Appreciate you making it here safely.

I'd like to call the meeting to order at 10:03. And joining us today from executive government are Hon. Tim McLeod, Hon. Lori Carr, and from the government caucus is MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Kevin Weedmark. From the opposition caucus are MLA Nicole Sarauer and MLA Matt Love. Thank you all for being here.

So first of all we have the approval of the proposed agenda. Could we have . . . Moved by Hon. Lori Carr. And a seconder? Matt Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried. Approval of the minutes from meeting 5/25. Nicole Sarauer. And a seconder? Tim McLeod. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried. I would like to table the following: item 1, the *Mid-Year Report on Progress* for the period of April 1st to September 30th, 2025, for the Legislative Assembly Service.

Item 2, the third-quarter final report for fiscal year 2025-2026 for Ombudsman Saskatchewan and Office of the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

Item no. 3, the third-quarter financial report for fiscal year 2025-2026 for the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth.

Item 4, the third-quarter financial report for fiscal year 2025-2026 for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner Registrar of Lobbyists.

Item 5, the third-quarter financial report for fiscal year 2025-2026 for the Legislative Assembly Service.

Item 6, the third-quarter financial report for fiscal year 2025-2026 for Elections Saskatchewan.

And item 7, the third-quarter financial report for the financial year 2025-2026 for the Office of the Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Item no. 8, audit letter from the Provincial Auditor to the Board of Internal Economy and the letter of response from the Board of Internal Economy to the Provincial Auditor.

Item no. 9, Office of the Provincial Auditor 2026-2027 expenditure estimates approved by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

And item no. 10, (a) opposition caucus addendum to sessional paper 119 and (b) opposition caucus addendum to sessional

paper 273.

Item 11, review of the 2026-2027 budget for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Registrar of Lobbyists, vote 57; (b) review of the Estimates book narrative changes.

Conflict of Interest Commissioner Registrar of Lobbyists

Chair Goudy: — And I would like to welcome and introduce Maurice this morning — a familiar face — Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Registrar of Lobbyists. Before you begin your presentation, would you please introduce your official.

Maurice Herauf: — Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the board. Most of you know Sandra Arberry, who's sitting to my right. Sandra is the deputy lobbyists registrar and the executive operations officer for the Conflict of Interest office. And her assistance as usual over these many years has always been invaluable.

And I also wish to acknowledge the assistance we receive from the staff from LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] for their contributions in all financial and IT [information technology]-related matters. A special thanks to Judith if she's still around here. She goes above and beyond her duties to provide us with assistance, and we're ever so grateful.

We can accommodate the suggested 1 per cent reduction. I will address this further after a few remarks about our accomplishments in the past fiscal year.

The financial disclosure process for 2024 went well. There was 100 per cent compliance with the statutory timeline for both filing and the consultation processes. And I'm grateful to all members, both past and present, who have adhered to the filing requirements during my almost-six-year tenure as commissioner. I have yet to write a letter to the Speaker informing him of any late filers. My office will continue to pester and likely annoy any members that are approaching the filing deadline.

A Member: — As you should.

Maurice Herauf: — Thank you, Minister.

We're now gearing up for the 2025 disclosure process, and all members will have received notification of the requirements for the process. At the end of October 2025, the one-year statutory period for the 31 former members to seek opinions and recommendations from my office relating to their obligations expired. As well, the one-year cooling-off period for former ministers to refrain from participating in government contracts and lobbying also expired at the end of October 2025.

Finally, on the commissioner's side, while we did have the usual requests for opinions and advice over the past year, I was always happy to report that we did not receive any requests for investigations relating to the role or conduct of members; that's always a good sign. With all this background in mind, I anticipate on the commissioner's side of my mandate the next fiscal year will be more of a normal or standard year.

With regard to the lobbyist side of my mandate, there was a bump in lobbying activity after the last general election. The registry currently has approximately 300 active registrations and 950 active lobbyists.

This past year we received our first two complaints regarding possible contraventions of the Act. After further inquiry, I determined that there was no misconduct on behalf of the lobbyists in question. It was a bit of an eye-opener for the lobbyists to learn a complaint had been filed against them, and provided an opportunity for my office to reiterate the rules and responsibilities under the Act. As well, the lobbyist database and website were upgraded in 2024, and this has resulted in increased user satisfaction.

Now let us examine the budget. With respect to salaries — and you know that forms the majority of our budget, the salary allotment — we have no indication that an increase to salaries is anticipated, and this category remains status quo.

Travel and business. Saundra and I attend two conferences per year, one for each of my mandates. Every jurisdiction takes a turn hosting these conferences, and the cost to attend is largely dependent on which province is hosting. Just as a little catch on that, the lobbyists conference was in St. Andrews by-the-Sea in New Brunswick. We could've gone to Asia and come back and still had some money left over. So domestic airfare when we have to travel, it's the way it is.

This coming year the CCOIN [Canadian Conflict of Interest Network] — that's the commissioners conference — is going to be in Ottawa. And CCOIN is comprised of the various ethics and conflict of interest commissioners across the country at the federal, provincial, and territorial level of government, primarily those who have jurisdiction over members of legislative bodies. And it's always great to get together and exchange views and get updates.

And additionally every year my lobbyist colleagues meet for an annual conference. This year it's in Edmonton, Alberta. So the cost of course to attend will be substantially cheaper. So we'll see if we can both make it to that one.

Contractual services is mentioned in our proposal which I'm sure you all have read. This is the area where we were able to accommodate the 1 per cent reduction.

Supplies and services. That sees a slight increase of \$5,000. It's largely due to increases in two of our IT contracts with Powerland and Engineered Code consulting. However this increase has no impact on our overall budget numbers as we have reduced expenses in all other categories.

Equipment and assets. Although we did budget for new laptops last fiscal, due to the \$28,000 reduction to our budget, we were unable to purchase. We were informed in October of 2025 that two of our computers are so outdated they cannot be upgraded to Windows 11. This causes security and operational deficiencies, so we'll have to replace them this year. However we're only going to replace two of them. And I will keep mine because it seems to be motoring along, and I'm the one that probably needs it the least.

The base amount for COIC [Conflict of Interest Commissioner] and SRL [Saskatchewan Registrar of Lobbyists] licences has also decreased slightly this year. Together these two factors result in a slight decrease in this area. Our request as noted on our proposal is for \$589,000, and overall the budget request has decreased 1 per cent from the last fiscal for the reasons provided.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you for your presentation. Open it up to any questions at this point.

Kevin Weedmark: — Can I just ask, your contractual services area, you've gone down from 94,000 to 86,000. How were you able to bring that down?

Maurice Herauf: — As indicated in our proposal, we used to have a contract position, a temporary position. Those who have been here for a while will know Ron Samways. He worked for five or six months every year for the disclosure process, and he retired a little over a year ago. So we just decided not to fill his position because Saundra was kind enough to take it upon herself to do those things in addition to her other duties. And so far we've managed. So we're just giving that up, Mr. Weedmark.

[10:15]

We all miss Ron, but we're managing. We did it for one year. We make arrangements when we're both out of the office. We're always connected via phone, you know, cell phones, our computers, we take our iPads. Saundra was recently in Türkiye, and she was doing her lobbyist stuff while on vacation. When I'm in Vancouver — I take usually a month off in the winter — we connect. That's the way it's always been, and we'll continue to do that.

Kevin Weedmark: — Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for your presentation. I do have a couple questions around contractual services. Is that the area of your budget where, if you require a third-party legal opinion or assistance with drafting, is that where you contract those services out of?

Maurice Herauf: — Yeah, that's supply and services.

Nicole Sarauer: — Supply and services?

Maurice Herauf: — Yes, that's supply and services.

Nicole Sarauer: — How much did you spend last year, and how much are you budgeting for that area this year?

Maurice Herauf: — Yeah. We have a budget of 20,000, and how much have we spent on that? Because we had to come back and get a supplement because of the four investigations which quickly ate into it, it was 11,000. So we went up to 11. So this year to date, we've spent just under \$19,000.

There's lots of new issues. I've started the process where I want legal opinions so that we have some sort of record in our office for issues that haven't been raised before, or for my successors to come in and see. There's been a paucity of that. So we don't

really know if some issue has been dealt with by one of the previous commissioners. So I do retain.

We've had lots and lots of legal issues presented by the 31 new members, by the 31 members who have left. For example, one of the former ministers was running for the mayor of Saskatoon. How does that affect his ability to contract, the cooling-off period that former cabinet ministers can't participate in government? How does it affect lobbying?

We have another minister who ran for reeve successfully, unopposed, of the largest RM [rural municipality] in Saskatchewan.

I want to make sure when we give that advice that it's correct. So I don't always consult legal advice other than coming back for that request last year, or near the last fiscal year, when we were running out of money with respect to the four investigations.

I think I did more investigations, or we did, in a year than my predecessor did in 10 years and his predecessor in 10 years. So that was just one of those things. We can never predict it.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Not really a question, but when I was looking I didn't . . . I kind of perused through some of the verbiage. And I'm looking at the budget, and I'm like, oh my goodness, they're under a per cent. This is great. We don't really often see that. And then as I started going forward I'm like, oh they were told they have to take a per cent off. So you were going to get kudos, but good job on coming in at 1 per cent under. And everybody else.

Maurice Herauf: — Yeah. We aim to please, Minister.

Chair Goudy: — Thanks, Minister. Any other . . .

Maurice Herauf: — Mr. Chair, do we speak to the changes to subvote descriptions now, or is that . . .

A Member: — Yes, you should speak to them now.

Maurice Herauf: — Okay. You got the letters?

Chair Goudy: — Like she said . . .

Maurice Herauf: — Yeah, we had to do this as a result of GEM [government enterprise management] not being able to accept italicized legislation, which is really not correct, but rather than to raise a stink, we did it. And we put in the new wording without the piece of the legislation. So I guess that has to be approved by the Assembly, which is such an odd thing. Never experienced it in my six years. And I think there'll be others coming forward too, the three offices that had to do that. So I present that for your approval.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you.

Maurice Herauf: — And we'll hightail out of here.

Chair Goudy: — Okay. That's all the questions? Thank you too for being here. And your staff, or your officials, thank you

very kindly.

Ombudsman

Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner

Chair Goudy: — Item no. 12, review of the 2026-2027 budget for the Ombudsman Saskatchewan and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, vote 56; review of the *Estimates* book narrative changes.

And I would like to introduce and welcome Sharon Pratchler, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner. Before you begin your budget presentation, would you mind introducing your officials. Thanks.

Sharon Pratchler: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning to the board. With me today are two members of my office. Niki Smith to my left, the assistant deputy ombudsman for proactive engagement and capacity building, who works in our Saskatoon office. The main focus of her work at present is in our municipal jurisdiction. Also with me today from my Regina office, to my right, is Kathy Willerth, assistant deputy ombudsman. The primary focus of her work is to manage intake of all the files which come into our office.

Our office has two statutory mandates: ombuds work, which focuses on issues of fairness in the delivery of government programs and services; as well as the public interest disclosure work, which focuses on complaints of wrongdoing in government. It continues to be the case that the majority of our work is in the Ombudsman realm, with 12 files received in 2025 under the PID — public interest disclosure — legislation and 4,612 files under *The Ombudsman Act*.

The biggest challenge our office faces is managing the increased number of inquiries to our office, particularly because that increase is largely due to more files that fall within our jurisdiction. On page 7 of our written submission we provide a comparison of files received over the last six years. The trend for the past two years is a significant increase in files, with a 38 per cent increase in the number of files within our jurisdiction. I'll talk more about the significance of that specific characterization shortly.

The increasing number of files within the ombuds mandate is not specific to our province but is something that my counterparts in other parts of Canada are experiencing as well. We tend to look at trends over time, as there can be specific events which create temporary increases in one year. I should also note that the number of files doesn't reflect the number of issues which we deal with on a particular file. We count by file, but within each file there's often more than one issue raised.

Part of the reason to distinguish between files in our jurisdiction and those outside of our jurisdiction is that for those files within our legislative jurisdiction there's more analysis required and review of materials submitted to our office. I would also say that I've noticed a trend lately in terms of the submissions to our office which may have something to do with the use of AI [artificial intelligence], but they're quite detailed and mention terms like "maladministration" and things like that. So it's sort of interesting to see that trend over time.

Our organization has been in existence for 52 years. And when we compare the numbers we are seeing now to the numbers of files received in jurisdiction over the past 52 years of our existence, we have never before received the volume of files within jurisdiction that we did this past year. The total of those files was 3,756. The closest that our office has come to those numbers in the past 52 years was 3,419 in 2019, and we've only had four years in our 52-year existence where our in-jurisdiction files have exceeded 3,000.

For files that are outside our jurisdiction, we do a play a pathfinding function and help the member of the public find their way to an appropriate resource. Generally these files do not take the same amount of time as files that are within our legislative jurisdiction. And if we look at the total number of files both inside and outside our jurisdiction, then the total number of files is the 4,612.

And in the 52 years of our office, we've only had higher numbers in three years — 1994, 1995, and 2003. What's interesting about those years is that the number of out-of-jurisdiction files was considerably higher than it is now. For example, in 1994 there were 4,868 complaints, but 2,065 of those were outside of the jurisdiction, which is about 40 per cent.

This past year marked the 10th anniversary of our work with municipalities. Jurisdiction regarding municipalities was given to our office in 2015. In 2025 we had the highest number of requests for assistance regarding municipal issues at 708 files, and the closest number we've had to that was in 2024 at 589 files. In fact municipalities, I think for the first time, have come in the second-highest number for last year.

Our statutory mandate includes education on fairness and decision making by the public entities that fall within our jurisdiction. Traditionally that education has tended to focus on the two ministries from which we receive generally our largest volume of calls — Social Services and Corrections, now a part of the Ministry of Community Safety.

Given that the municipal sector also generates a high number of files for our office, we looked at how we could be proactive in our education outreach in this area. This approach dovetailed with what we were hearing from municipalities and a specific question that had been posed during a SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] convention on how municipalities could be proactive to try to address issues before they become complaints to our office.

As a result we created a new position of manager of proactive engagement and capacity building, which is the position Niki now occupies. She's been extremely busy in that role since her appointment to that position in May of this past year, and we couldn't have anticipated actually the overwhelming response from municipalities to that request. She's travelled widely through the province. And in fact this year our office travelled over 70 000 kilometres within the province, which is important for us because we talk about doing business throughout the province. And so we have offices in Saskatoon and Regina, but we like to travel and do grassroots outreach in communities.

We did a record amount of outreach this year as well. In that term I include a number of things — presentations, workshops, and

events that we attend in the province, such as the SaskAbilities conference this year and trade shows where we have a booth. We had 87 different engagements in total, many of which were presentations involving and requested by municipal organizations.

The presentations ranged from speaking at the SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] summer school for mayors, to the rural administrators at the Rural Municipal Administrators' Association annual convention, to a presentation at SARM's mid-winter convention.

Individual councils have also invited Niki to spend time with them as an organization, particularly to deal with conflict management and de-escalation. And I included in my written submission a particularly lovely write-up from one of the councils that actually said, could we please give you feedback because we were so pleased with your presentation.

We can already see after only eight months with this new position how much in demand with municipal organizations these proactive and education services are. A highlight of one of the events we offered this past year was a two-day civility session at Government House which drew municipal leaders from a wide range of municipalities, as well as representatives from municipal organizations.

Dealing with conflict and de-escalation is an issue that many municipalities face, and so we wanted to provide them with tools to proactively address these issues. We had a panel of mayors from Lloydminster, Yorkton, and one other city that's not coming to mind right now — Weyburn — that presented, along with former chief Todd Peigan from Pasqua First Nation. And it was very well received.

Our commitment to trauma-informed practices continues to mature, as does our understanding and commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. Our work in that area this year was led by our Knowledge Keeper Jim Pratt and included an Elder teaching event as well as a traditional sweat, the first for our office.

A big project which we worked on this year was to obtain a new space for our Saskatoon office. As noted on page 13 of our written budget submissions, we focused on accessibility for the public, good value to taxpayers, and a secure location for our staff in making the selection of our new office space.

We were very appreciative of the work of SaskBuilds — in particular Calla Kusch, Candice St. Onge, and Pam Williams — in making this a very timely and effective process for our office, from site selection through an RFP [request for proposal] process to getting the new space ready for our team. The process from RFP to move in only took eight months, which is an impressive outcome, and the office was fully ready when we moved in. In fact the general contractor was, I think, so enamoured of our team that he threw in a couple things for free at the end of the process.

I also credit our Saskatoon team with engaging in all aspects of this move in a collaborative process, which made it a very smooth transition. I would also like to thank those individuals in the Legislative Assembly Service and the Speaker's office who work with our office in various ways. We appreciate always their assistance. And as my colleague Mr. Herauf noted, Judith has

been particularly supportive of us.

Turning now to the budget call, we were asked to reduce our budget by 1 per cent, which represents for us a reduction of \$49,000. In addition we identified areas of increased costs for us this year and set out a plan to absorb those costs as well within that reduced budget. The priority for us in managing a budget reduction is to ensure that we don't affect the service which we provide to the public. We were able to leverage a lot of the hard work we've undertaken over the past years to review our classification system, organizational chart, as well as upgrade our phones to be able to meet the government's call for a 1 per cent reduction in our budget.

We've outlined the details of our plan in my written budget submission in pretty granular detail, so I won't review it in detail here. I would say that we did take a very sharp pencil to the exercise of reviewing our budget and coming up with cost efficiencies. As a result of that exercise as outlined in our written materials, we respectfully make a budget request to the board for the 2026-27 fiscal year for a total of \$4,865,000.

And before closing I should also reference the request which we have put before the board to revise the description of our office in the Estimates book. As noted by my colleague Mr. Herauf, it's the same italicized issue, and it reflects a request from the Ministry of Finance and relates to a system limitation in the GEM system. We ask the board to approve that change of wording to respond to the request from Finance.

[10:30]

Chair Goudy: — Thank you very much for that. At this time, any questions from the committee? MLA Weedmark?

Kevin Weedmark: — Just because, look, I do see your long-term trend increasing quite a bit. I think it's last year from 3,200 to 3,700, that's what, a 14 per cent increase? What do you think are the main things driving that? And do you think that's going to continue?

Sharon Pratchler: — So there's a large variety of things. I know that it's continuing already in January. We're still increasing in January — I had looked at it yesterday — which is concerning because, you know, how long? I'm hopeful that it'll level off at some point. We did have a specific event this year which caused a large number of influx of complaints in June. But other than that it's across all categories, except for Corrections is down. So credit to them. But it's really across the board.

And personally it's hard to gather empirical evidence, but my view of it — because I watch quite closely as things come in — it's very much, in the world there's a sense of uncertainty quite outside of our province. And our office is a very safe place for people to come.

And in fact, I don't want to say too much about his personal information, but a really good example of that is a fellow who walked into our office one day who was an immigrant who had been referred to us by the Open Door Society. There wasn't anything in particular that we could do for him in his situation because it was about a private company. But he expressed just the concern about how there was an escalation because he was an

immigrant, in terms of the comments about him.

So people come to us for all sorts of reasons, and more and more organizations are referring people to us. So I would say just that general sense of uncertainty in the world.

But also AI things. We come up in the search, so people think we can help. All of those sorts of things and the outreach that we do because we're saying, you know, this is the skill set we can offer in terms of education. And so municipalities, as I've said, have really jumped on board. And SARM in fact has asked for that follow-up on the civility event for their people. And then there's some unknowns that I, you know, can't really guess about.

Kevin Weedmark: — Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Love.

Matt Love: — Yeah, thank you for the presentation and for the work that you do. My question is, I think, a follow-up to my colleague's here about the casework. So you mentioned in your presentation that the largest volume is from municipalities, social services, policing and corrections. Are there any other categories that you're seeing increases in or higher volumes in that you could share with the committee?

And a follow-up, what's been the impact on your staff? How are you able to absorb this increased number of calls coming in in cases that you take on?

Sharon Pratchler: — So I'll start with the second part first. So when I was appointed in 2022, I had a very concerted effort to introduce trauma-informed practices into our office, which includes a very significant component of mental health for people in the office. And so the way we manage that is we don't put extra demands on them to respond to everything that's on the message board because that can be quite overwhelming.

So when I say "message board," we have an electronic system. Generally in 2024, 30 calls on that board would have been a high number. And it wouldn't have been sustained over a number of days but would be worked down. This year, 50 was our norm, especially from June on. And we had an influx of 388 requests for assistance in relation to SPSA [Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency] this year, which was a significant difference in previous years. We don't tend to get that from them. So when that happened, especially in June we had over 100 files at times or calls. So instead of putting them all on the message board, we triaged them and had a spreadsheet behind the message board. Because 30 or 50 is doable; 100 is like overwhelming.

So we also have Kathy Willerth as our intake person who has a background in mental health in particular and health generally. And so she has introduced a lot of different practices, including debriefings. So both Kathy and myself, but particularly Kathy, and our management team are available to have debriefings with people.

So there's an open invitation, like if you've had a bad call — because we do deal with people in distress every day — please take advantage of the autonomy of saying, I've had a bad call. I need to step back for a bit. And that's encouraged in our office.

We've really been a leader in introducing mental health practices that support our team. And I mean, I could turn to either side to have more practical examples of it on the ground, but it's something we've really focused on. And I think that's why municipalities have also been quite attracted to our office because they know that that's part of the work we're doing. And so we can help them have tools of . . . Just because the person who's coming to your office is dysregulated doesn't mean that you also have to become dysregulated. So what we do is coach people on how to return to calm, but also to take extra time for themselves during the day for self-care. And that's consistent with what many workplaces are experiencing right now.

Matt Love: — Okay. And as far as some of the other areas beyond the ones that you named, I assume that you kind of track the different areas. If you can report what's up, what's down, what the other kind of key areas are. I'm very interested.

Sharon Pratchler: — I do. I've got in front of me the chart of the top ones, and we'll report out on it in our annual report as we always do. But there weren't other ones that really jumped out, other than the ones I've already noted. Otherwise it was a fairly uniform increase.

Matt Love: — Okay. All right. Thanks.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Thank you for your presentation, Ms. Pratchler. First some questions about the file load as well. You mention in your report that you have been able to maintain your service targets despite the increase in files. I know you're getting close with the 91 per cent, but you're still within your goal. Can you explain how you were able to achieve that?

Sharon Pratchler: — Yeah. I will look to Kathy for anything she might want to add to it. But I think we just take a very team approach in our office. So there isn't a manager in our office, other than our finance person, who wouldn't take a call. And so personally this year I spent weekends working the phones, especially in June, just so that when my team came in on Monday they wouldn't be overwhelmed with the number of calls that had come in over the weekend.

We introduced a new triage system. So our admin team actually triage the files in the first instance. So high, low, medium priority, they have a really good sense of that. So every member of our team is actively involved in responding to the public so it's spread over.

And we actively monitor and do kind of an informal peer support within the office. So if anybody seems to be struggling, we immediately know that. And we'll go to that person and say, what can we do to help and let's take some files off your plate. Let's spread it around. Let's talk about how you manage.

So it was a challenging year in some ways, but it was also a year of building a lot of strengths. I don't like to use the word "resilience" necessarily, but it was more about how do you function with all of these demands coming at you and yet go home at the end of the day and leave it at the office. So we talk about those sorts of issues all the time, and that's really how we do it.

But we take the pressure off people. We don't say, you have to clean off that message board by the end of the day. We say, okay, our usual response time is one day. And we're really proud of that, but this year sometimes we're going to end up at four days. And that's okay because this is a marathon; it's not a sprint. So we need you to really focus on your mental health and your ability to function with that workload.

I'm just turning to Kathy if she wanted to add anything else to that.

Kathy Willerth: — No, I think those are the approaches that helped us manage the increased volume those months, triaging so that we could still respond to the most urgent situations quite quickly, and others that could wait the four days based on the information that we had at least.

So when people were losing their residence, hadn't received their social assistance payments, we could respond quite quickly to those. We could respond quite quickly to those. But those that could wait a day or two, we could deprioritize those — having regular check-ins, being able to have all hands on deck and really not focusing on anything else, saving some of the things that could wait for a bit. I think we did a bit reduced training those days, so we really did have an all-hands-on-deck approach to the busiest times that we had.

Nicole Sarauer: — And just so I fully understand — I believe this, but please confirm if this is correct — the summer influx that you had at your office, is it fair to say that your office is now stabilized? And are you receiving what you could maybe describe as a normal amount of case volume? Or is it still high?

Sharon Pratchler: — It's higher than normal, but it's coming down. So I'm hopeful. We have some files. So when you have an influx of files that's really large, that means that it sits on people's case list for a while longer. So we're working through that case list. So basically I said we're not doing anything else this year other than working on our case list because we need to get that down. So our annual retreat didn't happen, those sorts of things, just because we couldn't put that extra demand on people.

So it is challenging to balance when you have the increased demand and interesting things you could be doing. But our first priority is always, what's the health of our team. Because, you know, our work is always high volume at the best of times, and so you have to keep turning your files over. So that's the challenge. How do we keep being responsive? And I was really happy to see we didn't have a huge increase in complaints, you know, at a time when we're managing a lot of pressure on our people. But we have very frank conversations in our office about how do you manage this and how do you deal with it.

Nicole Sarauer: — I just have a few questions about — thank you — about your leases as well. You've mentioned in your submission that the Regina offices will experience a decrease in rental cost. Can you explain how that happened?

Sharon Pratchler: — I don't have any more detail from SaskBuilds other than I get the numbers. They don't give us an explanation. But we double-checked it to make sure, are you sure we're getting a decrease of 20,000? I suspect it has something to do with . . . Because we did get a survey recently from our

landlord saying, what keeps you in our building?

So I suspect it has something to do with us being in the downtown area and wanting to keep us. We're a full floor in the Bank of Montreal Building, so I think we're an attractive tenant and they'd like to keep us. I know that the tenant above us is reduced to one floor. So I suspect it's that, but I couldn't say with any certainty. SaskBuilds doesn't share those details with us. They just tell us the number going up or down.

Nicole Sarauer: — And you mentioned your new Saskatoon office results in an increase in rent, but that will be offset by the decrease in the Regina office. And in addition you plan on eliminating your out-of-province travel. That budget item — the out-of-province travel item — eliminating that, is that sustainable in the long run?

Sharon Pratchler: — I will look and see. You know, I actually did just get our rent bill last week, the first rent invoice, even though we've been in since November. And actually the rent is a bit lower than what I thought it would be for Saskatoon, so there's about another \$1,000 there.

So I think the most important thing to me as Ombudsman is ensuring the safety of my staff, whether that's mental health or physical safety. So that always will be a priority. So it will always be sustainable not to travel out of province. If they're safe . . . I guess that's the way I'd answer it.

But there are other areas in terms of services — if we don't use services in a particular year of various kinds which we don't have a great need for, then we can use that money. But it's just an easy number for me to look at and take without taking some off the top everywhere else.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you.

[10:45]

Chair Goudy: — Minister Carr.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Great, thank you. So I just want to understand, I guess, the process-y part of your job a little bit better. So when you do receive a complaint into your office, what would be the normal process as you take it in?

Sharon Pratchler: — So the normal . . . and it comes in, we have multiple pathways. So people can call. They can write. They can fax. They can do all of those sorts of things. So it all comes in to our admin staff, and we have an updated case management system which we updated a couple years ago. And it all goes onto what we call an electronic message board.

Now there's some sorting that has to happen because often we're copied on things, you know, that long list of . . . from the Premier to the Prime Minister to whoever else, and we're on it. So we have to make an assessment initially — is that something that goes onto message board, or is that actually being directed to somebody else and we're not being asked to do anything? So we have to make that initial assessment.

It goes on message board. Kathy schedules different people to be on message board in our office and gives them enough time in

between so that they can work on their files when they're not on message board. So the people in our office have autonomy to take whichever files off of message board when they're scheduled for message board that day. And we have, alongside our electronic message board, a Teams message system going all the time so we can see if somebody can just post on there, "I'm taking 15 minutes," or "I had a bad call," so we can monitor that during the day.

So the initial thing is to reach out to the person. Increasingly we're seeing people give us a preference of, if they're neurodivergent they might say, "We'd prefer to communicate with you by email." So we try to get to them as quickly as we can after they're triaged to the highest priority.

And then what we're doing is hearing their story. We're assessing, does that fall within our statutory mandate? And if there are issues that do, then what we're going to do is reach out to the public entity if we need information. But very often in talking to the person, we can help them understand what's happening in terms of the process and give them some coaching to go back to the process to re-engage with the public entity.

So a good example is a municipality. Somebody might come to us and say they're unhappy about something and we'll say, have you brought it to the attention of the municipality? So we'll explain to them how to do a delegation or how to raise the issue. So often we're coaching people how to engage in government. Because our long-term goal is the same as government's. We want people to re-engage with government because they always have to deal with government, whether it's local or provincial.

So does that answer your question sufficiently? I can get into more detail, but that's the basic sort of overview.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Yeah, no, I guess it does. So I guess when you do receive that complaint, just listening to you, it's fair to say that you listen to the complainant, you reach out to the public entity, you give time for I guess feedback from whoever the public entity is and the complainant to re-engage and all of that. So it's fair to say that normally, the first step wouldn't be to go to media and air that complaint out in the media?

Sharon Pratchler: — No, that's not our first step in the norm.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Okay, and I guess if that did happen, what would be the goal?

Sharon Pratchler: — So the goal would be to have the message heard.

Hon. Lori Carr: — But it's not part of the normal process?

Sharon Pratchler: — It's a tool we can use, but it's not the first one we go to for sure.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Not the first one?

Sharon Pratchler: — No.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Okay, thank you.

Sharon Pratchler: — Yes.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you. Any more questions? Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just I guess following up to the last question, you mentioned in your report about accessibility being one of your primary concerns. I see, I don't know that it's directly referenced, but certainly outreach and awareness of your office and its function is a critical piece of your work.

You mentioned that you will receive files and they go on your message board. Where do you draw the line, or I guess, how do you ensure that through your outreach work and making people aware, that you're not inviting further work to an office that's already seeing an increased workload? How do you draw that distinction where you're drawing a line between awareness and actually inviting complaints to further the workload of the office?

Sharon Pratchler: — I mean, that's always a challenging balance. So sometimes it's... There's no empirical sort of formula to know where it might reach that tipping point, and it's always very situational, right.

We're really lucky in Saskatchewan that we generally have very responsive public entities, and so we can do a lot of work with them generally. We tend to respond to the requests for education first, and we sometimes have to say no to people. And I think, increasingly this year, we're going to have to say no to people. But it's hard to say no to somebody if they're interested in understanding our office.

So that's a hard balance, right. So somebody comes and says, "I want to learn more about how to manage conflict," or "I want to learn more about how to de-escalate," it's hard to say no to them. Because if we don't provide that proactive engagement, it may actually end up with more files to our office. So there's no empirical formula.

I will be in contact with my managers to assess, what is the workload like for your team? What is the particular burden they're feeling? How are they managing it? And what can we actually realistically take on? So it's more a constant sort of assessing what the workload is like in the office to know if there is capacity. And if we can really build the capacity for people to engage on their own, that's something that we're really focused on.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you, everyone. Any more questions from the committee?

Well we sure appreciate you, again, coming. And that will be all. Have a wonderful morning. Thank you for your work again.

Sharon Pratchler: — Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — And we will move on to the next item.

Information and Privacy Commissioner

Chair Goudy: — So item 13, review of the 2026-2027 budget of the Office of the Saskatchewan Information and Privacy

Commissioner, vote 55. I would like to introduce and welcome Grace Hession David, Information and Privacy Commissioner. Before you begin your budget presentation, would you mind introducing as well your officials.

Grace Hession David: — Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, hon. members of the board. Thank you for inviting this office to present this morning. And I am assisted today on my right by Ms. Diane Aldridge; she's the deputy commissioner. And on my left is Mr. Tristan Hungle, and he's the executive director of corporate services.

So this is my first opportunity to address you, and I want you to know how grateful I am to be here today. Since my appointment in April of 2025 I've learned a great deal, and I could not have functioned to the extent that I have without the helpful assistance of both my trusted advisors on either side of me today. Ms. Aldridge has worked for the commission since its inception, and her knowledge of the three pieces of the legislation is impeccable. I believe she celebrated this year 21 years of service. Is that right?

Diane Aldridge: — It'll be 22 in March.

Grace Hession David: — Twenty-two in March. I know, I'm extremely lucky to have her assistance.

Mr. Hungle works magic with the numbers, and he is a technical genius. All of our laptop and computer needs are ably supplied by him. And he's going today to address any of the budgetary comments because that's where I really can't answer the questions, but he can.

So my job is to serve the hard-working individuals at our office as well as the people of Saskatchewan. And we set the goals, and the commission follows those goals. This year we have focused on helping our clients meet their informational needs while at the same time dealing fairly with the government institutions, health trustees, and other stakeholders that provide that information.

Strategically this year we focused on the issue of naming snoopers. Snoopers are those individuals who violate the privacy of others by breaching the trust of their employers while accessing informational databases for personal motives. The law says that the need-to-know principle must be behind the access to information. The need to know is always set out by the four corners of the employment contract. Snooping occurs with alarming frequency in the health care area, and this year we saw one report involving a police officer. We have taken this hard stand because snooping has always been a problem and it continues without abate.

In the report filed with you last week, we affirmed our commitment to the legislation we are trusted to administer in this province. We also explained our support of the federal Privacy Commissioner's commitment to the digital and online security of children. To that extent, we have embarked on a series of podcasts outlining what parents can do for children to ensure their safety online and to keep them free from the dangers of artificial intelligence, catfishing, online trolls, and offenders who pretend to be children.

We also have committed in a big way to education and

community outreach. I've been asked to speak at many community events in the past year. One area of great need was our rural communities. Many of them cannot afford to hire a specialized privacy officer in their offices, and we are currently planning webinars for the assistance in training of privacy officers of any reeve or any rural municipality that requires our assistance in navigating the requirements of LAFOIP [*The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*].

We monitor the members' bills as they appear before the Legislative Assembly to ensure that all privacy and informational concerns are adequately represented.

On page 11 of our submission, we outline one area of litigation that is up and coming in the King's Bench. In this matter, the criminal lawyers' association of Alberta, a very litigious body, was dissatisfied with one of my decisions and now seeks judicial review.

And finally statistically, I can report to you that we are as busy as ever, if not more so. We opened the largest amount of files in the past year at 381. Those 381 files are comprised of 207 review files, and those types of files are where we review the decision of the stakeholder to withhold information; 132 investigation files, where there has been an allegation of a privacy breach; three disregard application files, and this of course where a stakeholder has asked us to discontinue the file due to one of three possible options for disregard. The first is that the request could unreasonably interfere with the operations of the stakeholder, the second is the request could be abusive of the right of access, and the third is where the request is frivolous or vexatious.

Finally there has been 39 consultation files where a member of the public or a stakeholder has asked us to weigh in on a point of law or procedure in connection with one of the three privacy statutes in Saskatchewan. Of those 381 files opened this year, we were able to close 299. This past year we published 103 public reports. We published review reports, and those involve investigation reports and discontinuances and disregards.

We publish our reports for many reasons. To begin with, we feel it's important to allow individuals and stakeholders the right to appeal our decisions if they disagree. When we publish a report, a dissatisfied party to review our investigation can take our report to the King's Bench on appeal because that's allowed within the legislation.

Section 55 of FOIP [*The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*] and section 44 of LAFOIP was drafted such that the decision to write a report is discretionary. The need to report is mandatory within HIPA [*The Health Information Protection Act*]. However we also feel a duty to the community to write and publish our investigations' findings and recommendations because we want to ensure that our reports are available to the public not only for further litigation but as a mode of education.

Many of you may have seen the article in *The Globe and Mail* just January 19th entitled "When it comes to records, justice is blind." Canadian journalist Robyn Doolittle criticized many judicial officers in the country. She focused on Saskatchewan in particular and one judge who now sits on the Court of Appeal. Her complaint was that many judicial officers do not make their

reasons publicly available, and this contravenes the rule of law.

While it seems that Ms. Doolittle has never been introduced to CanLII, I can say that in the past six months, our webmaster, Ms. Julie Ursu, duly sends all of our reports not just to our website — because we have them on our website — but also to CanLII. And this year Ms. Ursu has also worked out an arrangement with Quicklaw such that our office may search those legal databases for free, and they include all of our reasons going back to inception.

[11:00]

We take our mandate seriously, and we publish all the matters that come to us for review and investigation and certainly in the cases of privacy breaches. Of the 103 reports that we published this year, some were from 2024. I am happy to tell you though there is currently no backlog of reporting. Our oldest file right now stems from April 2025, and we enjoy a very rapid response time of an average of 114 days from the initial request to the report being published on our website.

A few further details. Of the inquiries that come into our office, 17 per cent are matters that are outside our jurisdiction, and we assist those individuals to approach the proper federal or provincial body. Thirty per cent of our inquiries are informally resolved. Early resolution in intake or informal resolution by an analyst are dealt with by way of summary advice, and we outline that further on page 14 of our submission to you. Seven per cent of matters involve consultation.

We also monitor the legislation that sits before the Legislative Assembly, and we respond to jurisdictional questions. And we received one last week, very interesting question from a regional college. And that college wishes to know if using WhatsApp for communication between staff, instructors, and students . . . and whether that will violate the privacy concerns of LAFOIP. So that's kind of a unique thing, but that's the things we love to do.

Forty-four per cent of our inquiries involve matters that proceed onto reports. And of those reports this year, we enjoyed a very high rate of compliance. I'm happy to tell you there were 67 in full compliance with our recommendations, 30 per cent were partial, and only 3 per cent didn't bother to respond at all.

So at this stage we're currently publishing approximately three reports a week. These reports can vary in size, and the shortest report I've written has been nine pages. On Friday we just issued an investigation report with respect to a privacy breach and it was 38 pages long.

Therefore our work can be intense, but we remain committed to the benefit of this province. So subject to any further questions, I'm happy to have made that submission to you today. Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — Well thank you very much. And at this point we'll open it up to the committee for questions. MLA Weedmark.

Kevin Weedmark: — Can you just break down a little bit of how you got those savings in the budget under the goods and services line item and the commissioner's operations line item? Like how were you able to get those efficiencies?

Grace Hession David: — Thank you, Mr. Weedmark. And I did tell Mr. Hungle he had to answer that.

Tristan Hungle: — I'd be happy to answer that. Well the Ombudsman said that they didn't, you know, look at every single code. We did.

So ultimately for the goods and services, with a new commissioner comes new priorities. So one of the biggest ones is that we've been developing a database which we think is one of the best databases out there in this line of work. We've been developing that for about eight years. This spring we're going to finish it. We're going to be done with that, so that gave us a significant amount of savings.

Additionally in the area of travel, you know, oftentimes — as we outlined in our submission — providing professional development opportunities for our staff is significant because that is what helps us attract and maintain them. But for areas such as travel, you know, where we might have previously allocated for two people to go to some sort of training event, maybe we would drop it down — or sorry, four people — we would drop it down to two for this coming year.

And beyond that there's not really any large, significant numbers that I can point you out. We literally looked at everything. We looked at our four priorities that are listed on page 15 of the document and we tried to make the determination of, is it necessary to meet those goals, is it adjacent to those goals, or can we cut it? And when we did that, that's how we came up with the ultimately \$53,000 reduction from our goods and services.

Kevin Weedmark: — Nice. Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — I guess I would just firstly say welcome to this table.

Grace Hession David: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Attorney General.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — It's great to have you here and I think this is a very commendable budget. The work that you did to meet the target and where you found the savings while still addressing operational pressures — very well done.

Grace Hession David: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Attorney General.

Chair Goudy: — Just to that comment, rather than a question, I would also say I noticed there's a lot of . . . You have here a list of, how did you word it? "Along with our ongoing investigations and published reports we have been very busy with our community education and outreach activities this year."

Reading through that, is that normal that there would be so many that you . . . Have you taken some on? I just know in the conversations earlier there has been a big shift in the world, a lot of unsavoury characters out there who are intentionally going after our people and our children, and that has opened a lot of new responsibilities for the Information and Privacy Commissioner and her office. Did you increase the capacity?

Like, how did you manage all this with staying in budget too?

Grace Hession David: — Well I think that our commitment . . . We're a team as well. I really loved what Ms. Pratchler said about the team approach, and our office functions as a team. Well Diane and I actually frequently speak at conferences, but we also have . . . Our analysts are incredible in terms of the breadth of their knowledge, and so they have attended and educated the community. But we really are committed to the community. We saw the need with the rural municipalities.

But I will say where I see the office going . . . And this is one of my own particular interests is my previous experience in criminal law. I have seen such a drastic influence to the negative in the community with respect to artificial intelligence, and our federal commissioner has said children's privacy is really paramount. And so Diane and I have done our first podcast on that issue, helping parents try and understand what they need to do.

Because right now children have an unfettered opportunity to go online and they can meet with predators and no one will know. Because of artificial intelligence, the predators can assume the facial image of a cute talking animal. And so we're actually going back to the office this afternoon and we're taping our second podcast because there has actually been some case law now in Canada where these individuals have been sentenced. And we're talking about how they're discerned, how the police are finding them, and what sentences are coming.

But really it's important that people and parents in particular know what to look out for as their children engage in this. And there are cases in the United States where some children have had some very, very bad experiences because of AI. So this all falls under the umbrella of privacy in this province, and we're hoping to try and meet that need and be of assistance wherever we can.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you. Any other questions from the committee?

Well I appreciate that. And for everyone here, before we take the 15-minute break, I just want to say thank you for coming in today, all of the independent officers. So very important for the work of serving the people.

And so all of you who came in earlier to give presentations, thank you. If you'd like to stick around, it would be wonderful. We'd love to have you here. But if you have other things to do, as you mentioned, you're going to be busy with lots of things. So have a great day. Thanks for coming in, and bless you all. And with that, we'll take a 15-minute break.

[The board recessed for a period of time.]

Advocate for Children and Youth

Chair Goudy: — All right, we'll get started again with item no. 14, review of the 2026-2027 budget for the Office of the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, vote 76.

And I would like to introduce and welcome Dr. Lisa Broda, Advocate for Children and Youth. Before you begin your budget presentation, would you mind introducing your officials as well please? Thanks.

Lisa Broda: — Yes, good morning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and hon. members of the board. I'd like to introduce you to Leeann Palmer, our deputy advocate, and Caroline Sookocheff, our manager of finance and administration, who are joining me today to present our '26-27 budget. We also have two of our staff joining us as well, Terri Chatterson and Brittani Rumpel, who are at the back there. So thank you again for having us today.

I wish to point out too though that this is Caroline's last budget with me. It's our seventh together, and she will be retiring at the end of the year. Caroline's been with our office for over 26 years, is the longest standing staff member of the Advocate for Children and Youth office dating back to 1999. Right on. Of course we're all going to miss Caroline very much. I'm grateful for her time to us, her support and loyalty to our office and to me particularly as the Advocate for Children and Youth.

I'd also like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of the Board of Internal Economy as well for the continued support and trust they've placed in me as the Advocate for Children and Youth and our office, and also to the Legislative Assembly for their assistance along the way for us in the time that I've been in my tenure here. In entering my second term as the advocate, it's my distinct privilege to serve the young people of our province and be able to highlight the important work that our office has been involved in over the last year and our plans for the upcoming fiscal year ahead.

The Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth is dedicated to helping children and youth have their viewpoints and interests heard and meaningfully consider the decisions that affect them. What we see in our work is sobering. However we appreciate that our office is uniquely positioned to address the emerging concerns we see, track trends, and shed light on critical issues affecting this most vulnerable population, our young people.

As an independent office of the legislature, we are responsible for monitoring children and youth services and support programs and ensuring such services achieve desired outcomes for children and youth. The office's independence means we do not report to or through government ministries, although our office does work closely with all ministries responsible for the various aspects of child and youth well-being. Both this independence and the opportunity to work with such a diverse array of public bodies allows us to dig deeper into the hardest challenges and issues experienced by children, youth, and their families and those providing services to this vulnerable population.

Being in full service to young people and working to strengthen the services they receive is difficult and challenging work, and this past year has been no exception. Issues are complex, they're urgent, and there is often no clear path forward in most situations. Our top priority is ensuring our work makes meaningful difference in the lives of children and youth that we serve and advocate on behalf of. We strive to be focused and compassionate, inclusive and adaptable in our approaches. And our success is directly attributed to our staff and their unwavering commitment and dedication to providing high-quality service and support to the children, youth, and families we serve. I feel very grateful for that.

Individual and systemic advocacy is the cornerstone of our work. And the demand for advocacy services is increasing, along with

that complexity and urgency. And I have been foreshadowing this for probably the last three budgets for sure.

Case issues are up substantively again over the last year — over 500 since last year alone and over 1,200 in the past two years — which is dramatically impacting our capacity to bring our files to closure in accordance with our service delivery standards. To cope with this increase in demand, we have temporarily redirected some of our internal resources to address the pressure. However this is only a short-term solution.

To achieve a sustainable and long-term solution addressing our demand, it will require additional resources. The intricacy and difficult nature of our casework require considerable effort to ensure young people that are struggling can navigate access to services, know their rights, have their voices heard in the decisions affecting them, and achieve successful and supportive outcomes.

These cases reflect a full spectrum of social, economic, health and well-being, and physical safety issues, such as food insecurity; homelessness and unhoused; family separations and placement challenges; lack of access to education; mental health and substance misuse problems, where we see suicide or attempts to end life by young people or using toxic drugs such as meth or fentanyl; trauma neglect with family and sexual violence; and difficulty transitioning to adulthood, just to name a few.

Unfortunately too many children and youth have adverse childhood experiences and are not thriving in safe, nurturing, or supportive environments. Recent reports have reflected the issues with school absences across Canada for the last five years and found across the country more elementary and secondary students are missing school, particularly in the urban centres. This is evidenced by the overall provincial average of attendance rate that's dropped close to 4 per cent, with the increase in absences most pronounced in early grades. And this effect on mental health and early childhood development cannot be understated.

We continue to see how children without structured, nurturing, safe, and protective environments can easily become disenfranchised and marginalised, leading to worsening mental health symptoms or symptoms of mental illness. In Canada the suicide rate for 15- to 24-year-olds continues to be the second-leading cause of death, which illustrates the worst outcome of poor mental health.

Further, as highlighted earlier, the impact of food security, homelessness, poverty, and general health care is substantive. Food insecurity or a lack of consistent physical and economic access to enough safe food and nutritious food is a worry even in Saskatchewan, as evidenced by the unprecedented level of demand on food banks that are experienced across the country.

Another key aspect of our work involves systemic research, project reviews, making and monitoring recommendations, and consultations on various ministries' legislation, regulations, and policy related to systemic matters. We're continuing to work in collaboration with provincial ministries, agencies of government, publicly funded health entities on a range of issues.

Our office examines the issues we see and identifies the potential

to positively impact on the interests and well-being of children and youth. We are currently monitoring 69 recommendations across all ministries, inclusive of what we recommended this past year for improved services to young people. In 2025 we are pleased to have closed five recommendations made to the Ministry of Social Services as fully completed, pertaining to improvements to group homes for young people and expanding harm-reduction approach for complex needs in transient youth.

Our systemic work also includes monitoring trends arising from child death and critical injury notifications to our office. Starting in 2024 our office noted a pattern related to exposure and harm to children aged 0 to 5 caused by illicit drugs such as fentanyl and methamphetamine. Following our preliminary research we triggered a systemic investigation into the efficacy of the child protection response in protecting these incredibly young children from exposure to these substances. This work is ongoing and will be completed in early 2026.

[11:30]

Our office is also engaged in a systemic review of oversight and case practice in child and family services, and we are pleased to consult with the Ministry of Social Services on the key aspects of this file. Further, we consulted significantly on the ministry's serious occurrence reporting and review policy, of which the ministry accepted much of our feedback.

On behalf of Saskatchewan children, we continue to lead national work with other provincial advocates and federal bodies to further the interests and rights of young people. As the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth and the president of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates, we appeared before the Senate Committee on Human Rights as an expert witness on youth aging out of foster care. And our submission informed the recommendations of the resulting report, entitled *Nothing to Celebrate*.

We also appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology as a panel witness on the national child and youth strategy framework bill put forward by Senator Rosemary Moodie. This work is key in advancing important outcomes that can address the issues children and youth face across Canada, and that of course includes Saskatchewan.

During the 2025-26 fiscal year, we spent considerable time monitoring and meeting with stakeholders on the recommendations made in our previous reports. And we look forward to updating our progress in our upcoming annual report as well.

Public consultation outreach also continues to be a key focus of our work in 2025, ensuring that children, young people, and families and all of our stakeholders are aware and continue to connect with our office. Our office maintained its province-wide presence this past year by hosting more than 500 strategic engagements during this period. These included presentations to agencies, conferences, workshops, community and Indigenous-led events, and presentations to ministries, to name a few.

During 2025 we also conducted 90 self-advocacy workshops and reached nearly 1,800 children and youth, providing information

about our office, rights, and how to advocate for themselves. Since the inception of this workshop in April of '22, we connected with nearly 7,600 young people across the province.

Advocacy will continue to be at the forefront of our work going into '26-27 fiscal year. And as previously mentioned, we're anticipating that the issues requiring assistance for children and youth getting service will continue to increase. We acknowledge that this will be challenging work, given the multi-faceted and complex nature and the urgent nature of these cases and really the sheer volume of the requests that we receive. This requires more time and resources to achieve resolution and to ensure the young people receive the services to which they're entitled, as is their right.

Our office will also continue to focus heavily on its systemic work. As highlighted earlier and over the past several years, we've been collaborating with provincial ministries, agencies, and publicly funded health entities on proposed changes to legislation, regulations, and policy and programming. In this we continue to advise and recommend improvements to systems and outcomes for children and youth, and this is key for young people to get high-quality services and timely services to address the complexity of issues we see in our everyday work.

Key actions also for '26-27 include the promotion advancement of our public consultation. Our office has already accepted a request to provide workshops for 600 Indigenous children in several fly-in communities in 2026. We're grateful for this opportunity to connect with children and youth in the farthest of our northern communities.

Additional efforts will also include monitoring recommendations made in previous reports concerning mental health and addictions, group homes, and the person of sufficient interest program with the Ministry of Social Services. And we're pleased that the ministries have been working collaboratively with us and, you know, we're making inroads in implementation of those recommendations and those portfolios.

So now I know that you have our budget submission in front of you, and our budget proposal reflects our most prudent efforts to manage our existing operational pressures and our spending while addressing a reduction in our budget and managing case-issue pressures particularly. You will see on page 5 of our budget submission that we discuss the assumptions, current pressures, the offsets, and the details of our funding requirements for '26-27. And a summary of our '26-27 budget request is also detailed on page 8.

I'll leave it right there. And with that, I will respectfully request the Board of Internal Economy recommend to the Legislative Assembly an appropriation for the Advocate for Children and Youth, vote 076 for fiscal year '26-27, as outlined in section 5 of our submission.

Thank you for the opportunity to be before you today and to provide this request and allow me to make remarks. And I'd be pleased to take any questions.

Chair Goudy: — Well thank you for your presentation. And now we'll open it up to the committee for any questions. MLA Love.

Matt Love: — Yeah, thanks so much for your presentation and your report and for the work that you do throughout the year. My question is about the increased number of cases and the work in your office that you've identified for us today. Can you maybe show a little bit more detail as far as your process? When someone comes to your office, you know, looking for help, what is the process of the complaint coming in or that case that comes in to you when you decide to take somebody on? And what's been the impact on your staff of the increased volume of casework that's coming your way?

Lisa Broda: — Thank you. So we take in about 1,800 to 2,000 files per year roughly, anywhere in that, by calls or walk-in. And I might ask Leeann actually to give us . . . I'll let Leeann maybe speak to this in terms of our timelines and then I'll come back, circle back on the impact.

Leeann Palmer: — Sorry. Sorry. So when the majority of our requests for . . . well I'll just use intake. We call it early resolution but that's our intake. The majority, the high majority, come in through phone calls, but for sure walk-ins, letters, and our general email account.

And so we have staff that are on intake every day, our regional advocates. I'll say over the years as we continue to see the increase in issues, in the past, years ago, we had two staff that were specifically assigned to intake, whereas our other regional advocates would be out travelling the province and doing the longer term advocacy files.

The majority of our files or our standard I guess for our files, our intake we try to do in 30 days. We still maintain a response time of a 24-hour period. So when callers are calling in, like the Ombudsman had spoken to, we have what we call our queue system. Calls go in to our admin; they put them on the queue. And then within a 24-hour time frame, like one business day, we respond to those.

The only people who do not go on our queue are children and youth. So when they call in to the office, somebody responds to them. And one of the impacts it can speak to when sometimes a youth will call in, all of our regional advocates are on the phone. And so then our executive director of advocacy or myself as a deputy will take those calls. We want to capture and respond to children and youth when they're calling us in that moment, right. Because they might not call us back, or we might not be able to get back to them. So we still maintain that. And then likewise, like the Ombudsman spoke about, then we hear their story and we do the necessary follow-up with all the stakeholders involved.

The increasing complexity: there is usually not only one other stakeholder involved. There's usually lots of professionals or family members that are involved. So then we gather all the information, like as much information as we can to kind of really have a good sense of what's going on for the children and youth.

Matt Love: — So the position that you're looking for, the additional permanent position, is an advocacy position. Is that a front-line, taking-phone-call position? Or outreach and education?

Lisa Broda: — No, that position is actually . . . So because of the pressure points we've been having, that pressure's caused me

to look at our resources and to redirect our resources actually. And so we've redirected them. Because where we're bottlenecking is on the closure at the back end. And there's a quality assurance that comes along with the closure of our files, which it is our leader, our executive director of advocacy, who does that. So we've had to redirect some resources into supporting that back-end load — that we don't have — to do it, and to ensure that the volume that's coming in, that there's no missteps in terms of taking too long to close those files. So that if there's something missing . . . because you know, our executive director's the closer really, and overseeing all of our work.

And systemically too in terms of what's coming in our advocacy arm, they're responsible for, you know, getting those files closed. If there's something that was missed by one of our regional advocates — it's not typical, but if there is — that timeliness is key for us to be able to go back, because that may impact the service the child's going to get.

We have quite a lot of expertise in our office. And I, you know, can stand with that unequivocally. And what I will say is that on our front timelines, you know, that's been going fine and we're doing that. But the impact with respect to our closures is where we're seeing the bottleneck, and that's what the position's about.

And you had also asked too about the impact on our staff and how they . . . I think your question is about . . . Is it about our staff resources? Or are you asking about the impact on our staff, the volume we have coming in?

Matt Love: — Yeah, about the increased volume of cases and the volume of work but also the complexity of the work and the impact that's having when you have limited resources that you're trying to redirect internally. What's the impact on the, you know . . .

Lisa Broda: — Operational complement?

Matt Love: — I guess on one end, on the quality of work that they can produce under this weight, but also on their well-being.

Lisa Broda: — That's right. On both of those we . . . Well one of our priorities is organizational culture and wellness. You'll also have seen that outlined in our budget. That's one of our five priorities. So we do take very good care of our staff with respect to any impact they have, if they have any difficulties or challenges with the calls that we have coming in. For every team, actually — for all of our investigation systemic team as well. So really all of us, actually.

But yes, the impact on the operational piece is, you know, we are pulling from other sources to do what we're doing right now to address the pressure we have. Like I've been saying to the board for five budgets now, and I haven't asked . . . I don't think we actually in our office have had any positions for at least my time, which would be 13 years in the office. But the pressure point is, we're pulling from somewhere else to do this. And understandably there's a 1 per cent reduction on the table, you all saw, a little bit better than that. And you know, unfortunately I am at the point where I would have to put this on the table as well and have done so. With respect to the board . . . and certainly respect the board's decision on whatever outcome that may pass

with this.

Leeann Palmer: — Might I add that . . . Sorry. My point earlier for saying we used to have staff that solely did intake, we've moved from that. So all the staff on our advocacy team now take turns doing intake, but it allows . . . Because day after day, right, it is challenging.

And so the set-up that we have now, the structure that we have now, everyone takes turns on intake. And then it gives them opportunities to then . . . On some days they can just do case management to work on their files, and other days they can work on their public education and going out into the community. So it gives a better balance to achieve all their tasks, their workload.

Matt Love: — I think you may have identified my final question here. I think you answered, but maybe a little bit more clarity here if you can. My question was about how, during your time at the office, your staff and complement has changed to keep up with what's over time been a steady increase in case volume. I think what we heard is, you've had the same staffing complement that you had when you started 13 years ago. Can you provide any more detail on that as it relates to the increase in volume?

Lisa Broda: — Well I think just, you know, we look at our budget with such good stewardship and prudence that, you know, we have a . . . If I didn't need it, I wouldn't have asked, and haven't asked. That's why I haven't asked. I'm bringing it here today in the context of a 1 per cent reduction.

We've been able to manage through different ways actually, but also the volume has been more the last five years. And we all like to say it's the post-COVID, potential the post-COVID, but we are in a time where the social and economic conditions aren't ideal for families and children right now. And that's just the reality we're in.

And we see a lot more issues, you know, because of that but also because I think that . . . Yeah, there are just a lot more issues because of those things. And I think all the issues I highlighted earlier around the food insecurity and homelessness and unhoused young people — well families because, you know, children live in families — so we see that. But you know, the mental health and addiction piece is palpable. And I certainly know the government's well aware of that. And we're pleased to continue to work closely with them on the recommendations that we've made around that. But all of that adds up to where we are today with respect to really the social and economic conditions since post-COVID.

Matt Love: — Okay, thank you.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for your presentation. I have just a few questions. The first: what is your current FTE [full-time equivalent] structure? How many FTEs do you have, and do you have any vacancies at the moment?

Lisa Broda: — We have 20.5 and two vacancies right now.

A Member: — 20.4

Lisa Broda: — 20.4. 20.4.

Nicole Sarauer: — FTEs.

Lisa Broda: — And yeah, we have a couple non-operational vacancies at the moment, and that's been how I've been redirecting our resources to deal with our pressures right at the moment.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you provide some description as to what the two vacancies are?

Lisa Broda: — Yeah, in our HR [human resources] and in our communications.

Nicole Sarauer: — And your proposal does have a reduction. You have described it as a 1 per cent reduction. Can you explain what was reduced?

[11:45]

Lisa Broda: — Yeah, we looked at our discretionary items carefully, and we do that actually throughout the year. Every budget quarter we are looking at that to see how, you know, we can continue to be prudent, what can we do, where are the lines, where are we maxing, where are we not. And we looked at our travel budget and also in our communication budget for the discretionary item piece, yeah.

Nicole Sarauer: — That's where the reductions were?

Lisa Broda: — That's where we'll do it.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you. Just further on that point about the reduction, I'll admit I struggled finding the landing place here because it talked about a 1 per cent reduction. But correct me if I'm wrong, and maybe I am misreading it. But the landing place was actually . . . The ask is, my calculation, 5.15 per cent higher than last year, so it's an increase in the request. Am I getting that right?

Lisa Broda: — You are correct.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Okay. Do you want to speak any further to . . . The call was at minus 1, and you missed it. Do you want to just elaborate on that specifically in any further way, beyond what you already have?

Lisa Broda: — I think what I can say to that is that we're still reducing it by 1 per cent, our budget. That's a reduction. But I look at a position as an operational resource that . . . We're feeling such pressure that we just needed to put it on the table and ask. And certainly respect the board's decision about that.

In the seven budgets I've presented, I do believe we've been fiscally responsible and used our existing budget very creatively, throughout my time at least. And when I think of an FTE, I think of that as an operational resource that I require to fulfill my mandate and adhere and to uphold my service delivery standards.

Now if the board makes the decision to decline that, that's with utter respect I have for the board in that decision. However it'll definitely be impacting my non-operational positions at this time.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you.

Lisa Broda: — Yes, thank you so much.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Weedmark.

Kevin Weedmark: — Thank you. Can you quantify, with that additional advocate position, can you quantify what you would expect the impact to be in terms of the time required to close cases?

Lisa Broda: — I think, well the biggest impact will be adhering to our ability to maintain our quality assurance around our closure process and to ensure that we can continue to look and monitor and analyze the systemic trends that are coming in at closure. Because that's where we really do a lot of that work, actually. And so that's a piece of it.

And really that secondary review is necessary to uphold that quality assurance. And so, you know, that's really what we'll be using it for, and then it will free up. Because when you're using your existing resources operationally speaking . . . And I know we're using a non-operational position right now because we happen to have an opportunity to do that. And I took it and redirected it to support this back-end process piece that we've sort of been struggling with the last three years, actually, but been managing. So that's really what'll happen.

And in the end, I think that we do need that type of oversight actually on the files that we're seeing because they're multi-issued, they're complex, and it's urgent. And the timing is urgent for children and youth because if there's something that was missed or that our manager and our executive director need to see with respect to an issue that might have been like, oh, we need to probe farther about this, or did you ask this, or does this child need this service, or what about this pathway. Then we would want to be able to do it in a timely way.

Leeann Palmer: — But I could also add that we've already seen success in the months that we have been piloting the manager of advocacy, who has been helping with that. For the first time in several years, we did not have a backlog of file closures come December 31st. So based on the calendar year and so for the last several years, we have had a backlog. And this time all of our file closures were done and complete by December 31st. So it was already successful.

Kevin Weedmark: — Okay. Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Sorry, one other area of questioning I forgot to ask. You somewhat recently have moved office space in Saskatoon. Can you speak to that? And apologies if I missed that in your submission. Has this resulted in a rental increase or decrease for your office?

Lisa Broda: — A decrease for a monthly . . . We came in at it on a soft market, so we were lucky with respect to our monthly lease

costs. So it's less than what we would have had, had we taken over or had the opportunity to take over the space that we were in that we shared with the Ombudsman. And so we were able to get office space for a little less than we were, because of the soft market at the time, a little less than what we have been able to get it there. So we took the opportunity to move, so we did.

Nicole Sarauer: — So, sorry, was it less than what you were currently paying or less than what you would have paid if you took over the whole office?

Lisa Broda: — Less than what we were currently paying if we had taken over the whole office.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay.

Lisa Broda: — Oh, are you . . . Yeah, before that we were sharing costs with the Ombudsman.

Nicole Sarauer: — Correct, yes. So has this resulted in an increase to your budget?

Lisa Broda: — No, actually, no it didn't. No it did not. Yeah, we were pleasantly surprised about that. Yes.

Caroline Sookocheff: — [Inaudible] . . . 10 more weeks with them and the costs were lowered.

Lisa Broda: — Because of the lease that we secured.

Chair Goudy: — Any other questions from the committee? All right. Well thank you for your presentation and appreciate you being here with us today.

Lisa Broda: — Thank you.

Chief Electoral Officer

Chair Goudy: — All right, item no. 15, a review of the 2026-2027 budget for Elections Saskatchewan, vote 34; review of the Estimates book narrative changes. I would like to introduce and welcome Dr. Michael Boda, Chief Electoral Officer and give him a moment to settle in here. And once he has, we'll ask him before his budget presentation if you could just introduce your officials.

Michael Boda: — You're not going to take a break?

Chair Goudy: — We just did. Whenever you're ready.

Michael Boda: — Okay. Well thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me and my officials today to discuss Elections Saskatchewan's '26-27 budget estimates with you and the board.

With me today at the table I have Jennifer Colin. She is our deputy CEO [Chief Electoral Officer] at Elections Saskatchewan. Behind me I have Richard Hall. He's the executive director for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer; and we have Aaron Thompson who is the director of finance for Elections Saskatchewan.

You know, they represent not just our head office but a field leadership team of returning officers and elections clerks and

thousands of election workers around this province to whom I am grateful for the work that they do every day. This is not about me. This is about a major team that is in every corner of this province. And I'm proud to be part of the team and proud to have these people on our team. Many of them have been with us for three or four general elections, and that's important to think about because there's a lot of experience that's there.

So with your permission, Mr. Chair, I'd like to take about 15 minutes to present my budget estimates. And after that I would be pleased to take some questions from the board.

Mr. Chair, today marks the 14th time that I've had the honour of presenting my office's budget estimates to the board. And over those years I've settled into a pretty consistent approach, and I've always tried to do three things. First, to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of our budget estimates — the one that you have in front of you today, I hope. Second, to highlight the key elements of that document. And finally, to conclude with a formal budget request before turning to you for questions. That approach has worked pretty well in the past, I think, but given what I want to achieve here today, I'm going to adjust it slightly.

I'll begin with a brief overview of our new strategic plan, the document that will frame Elections Saskatchewan's work not just for the coming fiscal year but right through to FY [fiscal year] '29-30. And I sent each of you an electronic copy of that this week. I hope you've had a chance to take a look at it. And you have a copy of it in your hand today, particularly with a cover letter.

As in the past, I'll provide a bit of background on how my office operates, but I had intended to keep that very brief. We just have one new board member this year, Mr. Crassweller, but he is not here today. So I would be happy to sit down with Mr. Crassweller and talk through how our office operates and what our mandate is.

Then I want to focus on our key operational priorities, what we plan to do with the funding proposed today. But unlike in past years, I'm going to leave consideration of our institutional challenges until the end where I want to focus our attention on three fundamental challenges before concluding with a formal budget request and then turning to questions.

So I'll start with the strategic plan along with my cover letter. This document will guide Elections Saskatchewan across the province through the next general election and through this four-year cycle. Now I know that you have limited time, I really do, and that you've got several budget submissions to look at today. But I hope that you really do dig in to this strat plan and take the chance to look at the cover letter and spend some time at it. It's an important document for our institution, and it frames the work and the commitments behind the estimates that I'm presenting you today.

If you could turn to the strategy map which is on page 6 and 7 of the strategic plan, I want to draw your attention to one specific part of the plan and what we call the strategic imperative. Now the map's organized according to three sections, if you look at that. At the top in light blue are our foundational statements — our vision, mission, our values — and the strategic imperative itself, which I'll come back to in a moment.

The grey section in the middle sets out what we will deliver across election administration, regulatory affairs, and stakeholder engagement. What we do hear and how we do it is central to achieving our foundational commitments.

At the bottom in light green are lenses. Think of them as lenses, pairs of glasses. And we use those to measure progress through our stakeholders, through our financial stewardship, through internal priorities, and through institutional capacity.

And then beneath that map, not shown there, sit the goals, initiatives, and actions that support each part of that plan. But at the heart of it, what are we really trying to achieve over the next four years?

If you look back at the foundational statements, you'll see that delivering on them is essential. And over this cycle, one commitment will be measured as a key indicator of success. The strategic imperative states that our success will be measured by the trust of our stakeholders — voters, political parties, and candidates, and our partners. And I'll return to the challenge of trust in a few minutes, okay. But this is the takeaway I want you to hold on to today. It's that between now and 2029, maintaining trust sits at the centre of everything that we do.

So before I turn to the main operational priorities reflected in this budget, I want to step back briefly and provide some context on how Elections Saskatchewan operates and how our budget is built each year.

[12:00]

First and most importantly, we plan the budget on the basis of a four-year electoral cycle. Unlike most government ministries, we don't deliver the same programs and activities year after year. Our work unfolds across the cycle with a general election in the latter half of the fourth year.

Since 2012, Elections Saskatchewan has deliberately moved away from being an event-based organization concentrating most work in the final year to a cycle-focused approach; that lets us spread out our work more evenly, strengthen our voter access, and safeguard the integrity of the election system.

So like most events, like the Grey Cup or the Canada Games, an election can't and shouldn't be prepared in a single year. It involves far more people and is far more complex. From a budgeting perspective, spending rises from year one through year four, then drops sharply after the election and resets for the new cycle.

Second, I want to spend a moment on how our budgets are structured. This is an approach I introduced, arriving in 2012. It's designed to be transparent of the true cost of a general election, and it allows me to make and stand behind the spending commitments in our strategic plan. At a high level, we distinguish between ongoing administrative costs on the one hand and event-related costs on the other, as shown on page 10 and 11 of my budget submission.

Administrative costs relate to day-to-day operations — permanent staff, head office, warehouse rent, telephone and the internet, and other core expenses. On page 15 the pie chart shows

that staffing plus supplies and services, primarily office and warehouse rent, account for more than 80 per cent of the administrative budget. The remaining categories make up about 17 per cent combined.

Over on the other side, event-related costs are tied directly to planning and delivering an election — ballot papers and supplies, temporary election resources, election workers, and statutory reimbursements to parties and candidates, among other election-specific expenses.

So across the electoral cycle, administrative costs are relatively stable year over year while event-related costs rise as we move toward the election. So when I refer to the cost of a general election, I'm talking specifically about those event-related expenses directly tied to implementing the election, and we track them carefully across the full cycle.

So with that context in mind, the four-year cycle and the distinction between the two budgets, I want to walk you through some of the major priorities we're advancing in FY '26-27, which is year two of the election cycle. And these are outlined between page 15 and 21 of the budget estimate document. There are several initiatives funded through the event budget. I'll give you a brief overview of only a couple consistent with year two. We're still in a ramp-up phase, focused on planning and preparation. In '27 and '28 we shift more into an implementation phase.

The first priority I want to highlight relates to determining the operational footprint for the next general election. Last October I released legislative recommendations arriving from our assessment in 2024. In the months ahead I'll continue to work with both government and opposition to introduce a limited net new process changes, changes not yet tested in a general election.

Once legislation amendments are in place and the board has considered those directives, we'll be in a position to finalize the policies and procedures needed to move . . . Sorry, I want to back up because I'm confusing you because I said we're talking about legislation. But then this spring I'm going to bring forward a number of CEO directives, an ask for a general directive. The board is required to approve those directives for me to move forward, and those will be the net new process changes, okay?

So there's the legislation, which was the changes we made last cycle. This cycle we're bringing forward net new changes with CEO directives before the end of the session, with net new processes.

Once legislative amendments are in place and the board has considered those directives, we'll be in a position to finalize the policies and the procedures needed to move ahead for the 2028 planning.

So for example, electronic poll books were introduced through a CEO directive approved by this board. That was last election. Having now piloted and proven their effectiveness, I've recommended that their use be set out in legislation. Once approved, we'll determine whether and how broadly they can be deployed. We know it will extend beyond the 34 constituencies piloted but not all 61, given logistical complexities and risks.

A second priority is refreshing several internal software tools. While it's easy to focus on visible parts of an election — polling locations and ballots — much of what enables modern election delivery happens behind the scenes through core systems that support every aspect of our work.

Now some of you may be familiar with ELMS [Electoral Management System], and if not, your financial agent from the last election certainly is. ELMS is the platform used by candidates and political parties to support financial returns. Over the coming year we'll make targeted improvements based on user feedback focusing on usability and stronger support functions so it better helps users meet their legislative responsibilities.

We'll also make a significant upgrade to the permanent register of voters. This will be the first major update since 2014 and is necessary for functionality and security. These changes will also improve workflow, automate duplicate record identification, reduce manual intervention, and lower the risk of error.

There are other priorities in this submission and many other projects for FY 2026-27, but those are the two I wanted to highlight for you today.

So I've outlined the strategic plan and I've walked through our operational priorities for FY '26-27. I want to turn now to the challenges that we face as an institution, challenges that I believe will become even more pronounced in the months and years ahead. As a board and as a legislature, I think it's important you understand these challenges not just as they affect Elections Saskatchewan but as they affect us as a province, as a country, and as a community of countries that are democratic.

While pages 13 and 14 of my budget submission describe several specific challenges that Elections Saskatchewan must address in FY '26-27, today I want to focus on three fundamental institutional challenges that you've read about through my estimates document.

And I want to begin with trust. I've worked in the field of democracy for more than 30 years now, and at no point have I been concerned about the health of democracy as I am today. My concern isn't specific to Saskatchewan. In fact Saskatchewan and Elections Saskatchewan are fortunate. We continue to enjoy high levels of trust and institutional stability in a broader environment that feels increasingly unsettled.

Our post-election surveys consistently show strong trust among voters and political stakeholders. That reflects the hard work of my team, but it also reflects circumstance. We haven't faced major disruptions like severe weather during voting week or widespread system outages during results reporting. Other jurisdictions have not been so fortunate. Some jurisdictions have experienced what I would call unforced errors: a misplaced ballot box, a polling location closing early, results taking too long to report. These are individually manageable issues, but collectively they diminish stakeholder confidence in competence and integrity.

My concern extends beyond election administration. In the years ahead, Canada may face heightened political pressures. Data described in my budget submission show declined trust in politicians and governments more broadly. Taken together they

are very troubling. A recent national survey found that 12 per cent of Canadians report low trust in elections. That translates to more than 3 million Canadians nationwide, and if you were to apply it here in Saskatchewan, that would be 100,000 voters. Our own data tells us that this isn't our reality today, but I see it as a clear warning sign.

Trust is hard to build and is easy to lose. And we took that seriously in the lead-up to the 2024 election by setting expectations early; working closely with political parties; briefing the media so that the public understood what to expect, including why some results would arrive sooner rather than later. All of this leads to a simple point that trust is central to everything that we do, and it sits at the heart of our new strategic plan.

The second challenge is the cost of elections, an issue I focused on throughout my career and particularly as I've come home here to Saskatchewan. Until recently it was common for each election to cost roughly 50 per cent more than the one before it. That was true here in Saskatchewan and across many other jurisdictions in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere.

Even before becoming Chief Electoral Officer in 2012, I viewed this as unsustainable. In addressing the problem our first task was being able to say, with confidence, what an election actually costs. And that's why we introduced four-year cost tracking and separate administration from event-related spending, to provide transparency for you and for the public.

The results are clear. The cost increase dropped from 56 per cent in 2016 to 31 per cent in 2020, despite COVID-related pressures, and I'm pleased to report that the 2024 election cost almost exactly the same as the 2020 election even after significant inflation. Those figures will be detailed in my forthcoming report, *Statement of Expenditures* volume 3.

I've also made a public commitment in our strategic plan, and reiterated it in the submission, that the 2028 election will cost the same as the 2024 election adjusted for inflation. That commitment assumes a couple of things: that statutory reimbursements are excluded since they're set in legislation, and that the next election is administratively comparable to the last. I'm making this commitment publicly because I believe it's achievable and because I believe rising election costs don't have to be inevitable.

The third challenge connects directly to the second. We've constrained election costs and I intend to continue to do so, but the way we've achieved those efficiencies has placed growing pressure on the centre of our organization. In 2016 we recruited more than 12,000 election workers. In 2024 that number dropped to just over 4,500. Better data, expanded vote by mail, and increased use of technology have contributed to this, but they've also shifted more responsibility onto my permanent staff.

Centralization has brought real benefits. It allows us to deliver more consistent service across the province. A voter in La Ronge receives the same experience as one in Estevan. A candidate in Meadow Lake receives the same guidance as one in Regina Pasqua. At the same time, it has increased pressure on head office functions like training, IT, and human resources, areas that now carry far more of the system's load.

So recognizing this, I engaged Deloitte last fall to conduct an organizational review of Elections Saskatchewan focused on whether our structure and capacity remained aligned with our mandate. This has been the first comprehensive review of workload and capacity in more than 15 years, since the Hamilton report fundamentally reshaped my office. Deloitte's review includes recommendations aimed at addressing these pressures.

[12:15]

Mr. Speaker, with your and the board's consent, I would welcome the opportunity to brief you and the board in camera on those recommendations immediately following this presentation. But for now I am happy to conclude my remarks and respond to questions regarding the budget estimates themselves.

So Elections Saskatchewan's budget request for the coming fiscal year balances my commitment to cost restraint for the next general election with the need to deliver with integrity a trusted, accessible election for the people of Saskatchewan. Accordingly I would ask that the Board of Internal Economy recommend to government that the allocation of \$5,823,037 of statutory funds be approved for fiscal year 2026-27.

Mr. Speaker, as always let me thank you and the members of the board for the time you have provided me today and for the support and co-operation you've given this office over the years. Recognizing that our time is limited, I would suggest that we spend the next few minutes focusing primarily on questions related to the budget submission and our plans for the coming year rather than fundamental changes I've mentioned.

I'm hopeful that with the board's permission we can transition to a few minutes of in camera, where I'd be pleased to offer an introduction to the work Deloitte has undertaken for my office. And with that I'll yield back to you, Mr. Chair.

Chair Goudy: — All right, thank you for your presentation. And now I'll open it up to the committee for questions. Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you very much, Dr. Boda, and thank you to your team as well for this presentation. Are you able to give me an idea what the 2024-25 budget was? It wasn't in the materials because I realize that's two submissions ago. But that would be the election year, I guess, is what I'm looking for, what the budget request was that year.

Michael Boda: — So are you asking specifically for that budget year, or are you asking for the total cost of the event?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — I'm asking for that budget year.

Michael Boda: — Okay.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Yeah, if you have it.

Michael Boda: — I'll turn to Jennifer, and she can provide those numbers for you.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you.

Jennifer Colin: — So the 2024-25 fiscal year budget was

\$3.4 million in admin funding and \$25.8 million in event funding.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you. And I guess that would speak to a comment that you had made regarding the four-year cycle and that you have incremental increases over the four years and then a sharp drop-off. So we would have gone from what looks to be about 29 million in the election year down to 4.994 in the year after, being last year.

My concern I guess is, while that logically makes perfect sense that we have that cycle, this is an ask for over 16 per cent, which is a very large increment if we're talking about increasing each year, year-over-year budgets. Just I'm struggling to anticipate what . . . If that's the case, if we're increasing year over year and we're only in year two of the cycle, and we're increasing by over 16 per cent year over year, where does that lead us by the fourth year, I guess, is my concern.

Michael Boda: — Well that is the commitment that's being made in the strategic plan, and it was made in the budget estimates, that the cost of the 2028 election would remain the same with inflation — with inflation; I think that it would be unfair to suggest we could do otherwise — but it will be the same as it was in 2024.

So each year is different and each cycle is very different in the context of the work that we do. And so it is very hard on the event side to be able to say this is exactly how each budget year is going to work. But we are making that commitment — I am making that commitment — to be able to deliver an election at the same level as 2024.

Now I will go back to quickly articulate . . . What I am trying to articulate here is that in 2012 there was no sense of what a four-year election cost in Saskatchewan. And I can tell you that other jurisdictions have not taken these advances. They have not done this in the country. There is no other jurisdiction that monitors their spending over a four-year period and demonstrates what that cost is.

This is something that we implemented early on but it has taken some time for us to get there because, some of you will recall, pre-2012 there were many difficulties at Elections Saskatchewan, and that was because we were an organization that was event-based. I mentioned that today. We were not cycle-based. And as a result, people were being hired and money was being spent at the end of the cycle which frankly was highly inefficient.

We don't have near the number of people that are involved from that earlier cycle or in those earlier cycles because they were very temporary. What we're doing is working over a four-year period to build our system so that we can function efficiently in that last year. So I can't tell you much more than we've been working on this for a decade to get this under control.

2016 was a 51 per cent increase. 2020 would have been lower had we not had to add about \$5 million in terms of COVID expenses. And then we were able in 2024 to do a flat line, basically, and that's what we're aiming to do moving forward. Some of this has to do with it. You know, a lot of it has to do with innovations. Innovations are allowing us to . . . If we move to the

centre and we introduce the technology that we do, we're able to use fewer people in the field.

That's part of it, but on the other side, net new issues are being introduced to election administration that were never there before. And I use the example of cybersecurity, but we have to focus on cybersecurity throughout this process because there are bad actors out there that are attacking Elections Saskatchewan and it's just a fact.

So we have to address this. And it comes back to focusing on our democracy. Do we take this seriously? And that's what I'm trying to get at here today. We have to take this seriously. I'm very concerned about where we're going as a province, as a country, and as a group of countries that believe in democracy.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you for that. Just getting into a little bit more detail about the breakdown here. I'm sorry. I'm struggling to get it on my computer. The contract services were a significant increase in the budget year over year. Thank you. Can you just elaborate on where that increase is seen specifically?

Jennifer Colin: — So are you referring to contractual services overall or specifically related to the admin or event component?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — I was just simply looking at the summary of appropriation and expense on the line item, contract services, under event-related budget. There's a significant increase there year over year.

Jennifer Colin: — So a large portion of those costs are related to services such as software subscriptions, things like that, for our field leadership team. We hire 61 returning officers and 61 election clerks who all need to be equipped with laptops and cell phones and the associated subscription costs that go with that.

We also see increased contractual costs for things associated with our system of development projects that Dr. Boda referred to earlier. So we do have a small in-house IT team, but when we undertake major enhancements or upgrades to our two main systems — the financial filing system as well as our register of voters — we do like to bring in external consultants with the expertise to help us do that.

And that's for a couple of reasons. Because we want to make sure that we are leveraging experienced resources in the field that we don't necessarily have on staff, but also we have very compressed time frames under which to undertake some of this work because we know the election will happen in October of 2028 and our systems need to be ready to be deployed well in advance of that so that we're able to test effectively. So a large portion of those contractual services are related to our event-based funding.

Michael Boda: — And let me add to that, because what Jennifer has explained really is the result of reducing your staff in the field — I noted from 12,000 to just over 4,500 — means that we have to have systems in place which are technology focused. But we have to have those in place in order to manage the field effectively because we don't have the 12,000 people doing the hand work out in the field.

So as a result, we need to work at the centre, and we don't have the individuals at the centre to do that work. And that's part of what I'm talking about here today, that there has been a shift to the centre and it's put a lot of pressure there.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Weedmark.

Kevin Weedmark: — Two-part question, Dr. Boda. First of all, do you have sort of internally like a four-year budget that basically is showing what increase you'd have from year one, year two, year three, year four to the cycle? And secondly as part of that, could you explain . . . you know, part of the answer was just given with that increase in the contract services from 655 to 976,000, but could you explain in a little bit more detail what sort of items are in this 2026 budget that are in there to start building for the 2028 election?

Michael Boda: — So the indicator is that I'm making this commitment to be able to maintain our costs. So we know basically what is coming forward, but we do not have a four-year budget. We do a budget as we are asked year by year, and then we have to respond to some things that arise over the four-year period.

So basically there is no four-year budget. You couldn't possibly do that until you ramp up and move into that context where in year four we're spending a lot more.

In terms of the specifics, I think, yes, I would go back to the fact that we have placed more pressure on the centre and that could contribute some to the higher contract numbers that are there. But I wouldn't put all those numbers in there, because again you can't compare. It's not apples to apples from one cycle to the other because you're working on different elements, different projects.

I mentioned the fact that we will be working on ROVER [permanent register of voters], the register, and making improvements to that. That was established in 2014. We haven't changed the register in that time. So we are just coming back to that because it's . . . there's a life cycle to it and it needs to be improved.

The other thing that I would keep in mind and I would just want to mention is that register has grown in such a way . . . Let me go back a little bit. In 2012 when I arrived, we did a door-to-door enumeration in order to create the list for an election. That was proving to be highly challenging. And what we determined was that we could be more effective in creating a permanent register. We went from 3,000 workers whom we would put out on the ground to where we have two individuals working on this today in collaboration with eHealth, with SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance], with Elections Canada. But we have been able to be more efficient, more cost-effective as we've been moving forward.

So another thing about it is that the cities have been coming to us and asking us for help. They are not creating their own lists, but they want the lists in order to improve their elections. And we're able to collaborate with them at a really minimal cost to each of the cities. And I see this as an opportunity to expand. So I hope that answers some of your questions.

Kevin Weedmark: — It does, thank you.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thanks. Thank you for this explanation. I have a couple of questions somewhat related to the questions that have already been asked. I understand how every year is different, and of course, as you've already described very well, every cycle is different as well. But still, are you able to provide us some information as to year two of last cycle, what the percentage increase would have been in the budget between year one and year two?

[12:30]

Michael Boda: — I think we can give you those raw numbers. But again, because we're working on different projects, it will be different.

Nicole Sarauer: — I understand.

Michael Boda: — But '22-23, there was a 19 per cent increase.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay. Between year one and year two, 19 per cent increase?

Michael Boda: — Correct.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. My other question to you . . . And I fully understand how you're a different independent officer from the other independent officers that were discussed today, and they've all been asked to find efficiencies. Leaving that conversation aside, what would be the impact to your operation if you were not given an increase in your budget this year?

Michael Boda: — Well I guess what I'm going to explain is that the budget estimates that we have submitted demonstrate an administrative budget is lower than it was last year, and that is the budget that remains stable over the course of a cycle. We try to keep that. So the event budget is the one that increases and decreases significantly. And the funding, if you consider it statutory, we change it over the course of the cycle based on the projects that need to be achieved.

But over the four-year period, what I am making a commitment to is that we won't be increasing the event budget. We will be maintaining the event budget which will be . . . It is a 10-year project, but it is reducing it from consistently increasing by 50 per cent. So there's a lot of savings that are on that side of the equation, and we're trying to . . . The challenge is on the administrative side. So a lot of savings, but the challenge is on the administrative side.

This year what I'm submitting to you is a reduction in the administrative budget. We will talk more, if you allow me, in the in-camera to talk about the needs that are there at the centre.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — Minister Carr.

Hon. Lori Carr: — So just to jump on what you just said, but

when we look at the, I guess, the event-related budget as compared to the administrative budget, are you just like really just shifting those expenses over to the event-related budget?

Michael Boda: — No. There are costs that are being shifted. I'll describe that more in camera for you.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Okay.

Michael Boda: — But I have indicated that there are costs that are being shifted when you are hiring 12,000 people, when we're hiring 3,000 people to create a voter register. Yes, those responsibilities have to go somewhere, and that has been placed on the centre. But we have been able to be more efficient at the centre than we were out in the field, and so there will be cost savings over the longer term.

Hon. Lori Carr: — And when you say that you're going to keep the costs the same as the previous event, as we look at this budget and we're watching the event-related budget increase from year to year, are you talking about in year four like the 25.8 million for the event of the election? And are you adding in the cumulative event costs that are building up to that? Is it all inclusive?

Michael Boda: — That's exactly what we're doing. In terms of the event budget, it's year one, year two, year three, year four. And that is what is unique about what's going on in Saskatchewan. That is not being done in other jurisdictions. They're either just talking about the writ period, or at best they're talking about the year of the election. We have changed our approach from 2016 on, that we are monitoring the cost of the election so that we can be more efficient over the course of the four years.

Hon. Lori Carr: — So we won't really know if we're, like we're giving you an increase this year on . . . because you're doing more work in advance of the actual election. So we won't really know if we're successful until year four is done and we add up those four years and compare them to the four previous to know that they're on par with each other.

Michael Boda: — Well I guess I could say yes but . . .

Hon. Lori Carr: — I mean, short of inflation, as you mentioned.

Michael Boda: — I think what the challenge here is you're focused on year two and what it cost in the last cycle. But I bet if you went back to the cycle before, it would be higher. Because again it depends on what projects you're doing in preparation for the last year. So some cost more and some cost less, and sometimes you do it in year two. If you're really good at it, you're doing more in year two than you are in year three, because the goal again is to even out the work over the course of the four-year cycle.

But I get what you're saying and I guess what you're saying is . . . No, I don't know that you're saying this but potentially you're saying that you have to trust me that this is where we're headed.

This is my third cycle, and I have kept my word for the last two cycles and I will continue to keep my word. I'm not a magician

but I am an expert in what I do. And that's my role for you, to give you good advice. And this is my advice in terms of how we operationalize the process with the goal of reducing the costs of elections.

Because if you're focused on the costs . . . I'm focused on trust as well but if you're focused on costs, costs were out of control and we are getting them under control. And I haven't been asked to do that. This is something that needs to be done. It is important. So that's why I'm putting it forward in this strat plan.

Hon. Lori Carr: — So I'll just add on to that, because what I heard you say was the expenses will not be more than the last election.

Michael Boda: — The . . . Sorry.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Expenses will not be more than the last election, given inflation. We need to add that on, fair enough. So I guess whoever our bean-counter is . . .

Michael Boda: — Jennifer. Or Aaron Thompson.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Fair enough.

Michael Boda: — He counts the money.

Hon. Lori Carr: — We're probably going to want to see that four-year event budget, including the election year, as compared to the four-year cycle before that because that's all I'm comparing it to. I can see the changes that have been made and the drastic percentages from years previous. But I guess whoever is in these seats three years from now, it would be interesting to see that true comparison, four years to four years and how that looks, knowing that you are spending money in advance, hopefully saving money as we move through the cycle.

Michael Boda: — So what you'll receive . . . Literally in the weeks ahead I will be tabling volume 3. And volume 3 outlines the cost of this past election, the '24 election. It takes about a full year for us to be able to add up all those costs and make sure that our funds are paid out to political parties and candidates, etc. That is what was missing from the equation in 2012. There was no account of what an election actually cost, the total cost.

When I came to you with a budget, when I came to the board with our election budget, we thought that the budget was going to be around thirty-two and a half million dollars. I'm not going to release the report yet. I need to table it. But I can tell you that I've been able to reduce that amount.

So fundamentally I don't see it as feasible that we can give you a detailed budget for a four-year period because the planning has not been completed for this election. I don't have election legislation in place. We first have to have election legislation in place. I've made those recommendations. Once that's established, then we go through the planning process, and then we can establish how much it's going to cost.

So election administration is challenging. I'm sure you appreciate that. Running for office is challenging, and I know you appreciate that. It's difficult, but what we try to do is manage it over a four-year period. And I've been grateful that I've had 14

years here in order to do that, that I've been able to change the direction of the organization, from a cost-effective perspective.

Hon. Lori Carr: — Now I just have one last question. How does municipal elections come into play here? Is that part of this budget or is that just like a line item over . . . Do you guys help with municipal elections? But it's outside of this. There's a cost recovery.

Michael Boda: — It's outside of this budget estimate although I'll give you a proviso on that. But essentially the municipal legislation has in it that they are allowed to ask for advice from the Chief Electoral Officer, and as a result they do. So we collaborate quite effectively.

There was no communication and not much of a relationship between Elections Saskatchewan and the municipalities when we began in 2012. We have fostered those relationships and, particularly the larger cities, they have come to us to ask for advice on how to move forward. So we are identifying different areas in which we can help reduce their costs. So for example I mentioned the voter registration, the voter list. We are providing them with the voters list.

In my legislative recommendations I have asked for further ability to collect information on school boards, for example, because we are not allowed in our legislation to collect the information on school board support. If we had that we would be able to collect the information and provide the full list to the cities and to the municipalities as well. Right now we can't provide them with the school board information. So there's a chance obviously we have one taxpayer, and there's an opportunity for us to again be more cost-effective.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Love.

Matt Love: — Yeah, I just had a question about some of the information found on, I think it's page 23 of your report. And I think that this might fall under some of the increases in contract services that relate to website development, you know, updating of the website and some AI integration, researcher work.

I imagine that for the AI part of that, probably the first time that you've endeavoured to do that work. So I don't know if you can provide any more detail on what you're hoping to achieve through that work. And as far as the website redesign, when was the last time that Elections Saskatchewan had, you know, website overhauled? What kinds of new features do you need to have in place in advance of the next provincial election?

Michael Boda: — AI and website. Okay, I'll begin with AI. AI is obviously something that is hitting all of us. It is something that will transform the way that we work in the world. And my colleagues across the country and I have been working on this question of how will it impact elections over the longer term for probably about two and a half to three years now. What I can tell you is that nationally we are working together to determine what effect AI can and may have on the electoral process in each jurisdiction.

But what I will also tell you is that our team here in Saskatchewan has been very proactive in this context. And we have been working for the past six months at a higher level of thinking about

policy. And not just individual projects that relate to AI but how can what is unfolding, how will it impact us as an institution. And what policies do we have to have in place to make sure that we're focused on the right areas and that there are other areas that are no-go areas.

We're very concerned about the data and information that are provided to us in terms of privacy, and we need to make sure that we're managing that properly. So that's where policy has come in and we have been working on that very hard.

We've also been looking at usability in terms of areas that we might use AI in in the years ahead. What I can tell you is I can't see a world in which it's part of the electoral process, but I think it is part of making us more effective as a team across the province. And we're just in the midst of trying to determine how we might move forward in that context. But it is my view that the policies around it, strong policies around it that make sure you're framing what you're doing is most important. So that's the AI side of the equation. Happy to answer more questions on that.

[12:45]

In terms of the website, we completed a brand new website. It was around 2016, for the 2016 process in which we completely changed the website so that it stood at the centre of our information at Elections Saskatchewan and for the electoral process. We wanted it to be the centre of knowledge for anyone, that if they wanted information they knew they could get accurate information from our website. That website has evolved over time, and it has been improved over the course of 2020 and leading to 2024. But at this point I'm of the mind that a complete renovation needs to take place with respect to the website, and so that's what will be happening over the course of this cycle.

Matt Love: — And that's seen as an event-based cost as opposed to administrative because it's to serve the needs of the '28 election?

Michael Boda: — It is about the election, yeah.

Chair Goudy: — Any more questions from any board members? So I just have one. The 12,000 employees to the 4,500 shift, that it's wonderful costs remained the same through those . . . You know, there's a lot of factors that changed obviously. Are there any other jurisdictions that kept to, you know, the top-heavy model of numbers of staff for an election? Are there any other jurisdictions that have kept down that road that would be close to us or comparable to us?

Michael Boda: — I don't want to go out on a full limb on this, but most have remained at those higher levels. We are unique in that regard. Certainly at the . . . It's a 62.5 per cent reduction. And if you were to look at Elections Canada for example, how they ran the last election here in Saskatchewan, it would not even be close. They just have significantly more staff.

Chair Goudy: — And did their costs . . . How did their costs come in? Like as they've remained, you know, top-heavy on numbers I guess rather than administration, how have their numbers played out over the last, you know, election to this election or the one before? Just so we . . . like something apples to apples.

Michael Boda: — Well if I'm going to base it on the models of a 50 per cent increase, that's not just Saskatchewan; that has been across the country. And that has been part of the fabric of increasing costs, which is what I was trying to get control of.

Oh yeah. Jennifer has just mentioned that, it's just apples to apples can be very, very hard. Because if, for example, you were to call a snap election today, your costs would go up dramatically because you can't manage those costs over a four-year period. And the feds have been in the context of running snap elections. And so it's very difficult to make that comparison with the feds here in Saskatchewan. But when I look at other provinces, they have not reduced their staff in the same way that we have.

Chair Goudy: — And as far as exposure or risk by having, you know, more online rather than . . . Or does that make any changes to the percentage of digital work I guess that we would be doing rather than just . . .

A lot of people look at elections feeling like one safe thing about it is it's up to the hands of the people, you know. And I think if you're worried about, you know, some other jurisdiction influencing ours, it seems a little easier to do that through digital capacity rather than trusting that individual to do the work. Like is there any . . .

Michael Boda: — I've heard that. I mean I hear that from you and I hear that from others. But keep in mind, all ballots are cast by hand in Saskatchewan. So the digital side of the equation has to do with the electronic poll books, which has nothing to do with the balloting process. So there is an integrity that's there: they're separate completely.

Even if you did use vote-counting equipment, which we've talked about in the past, it is still very secure because you're using actual ballots that people are using. So you have them in order to complete a recount. So the technology is what is driving the costs lower because you have electronic poll books. You can push more voters through. It's more accurate. It provides a better service to each of the voters.

But there are other systems as well in terms of which I mentioned, where it has to do with training. The centre has taken on, has to do a much better job of training those 4,500 workers. There are things at the centre that we do that save what had traditionally been done by a returning officer or an election clerk or an election worker. So a lot of that work is being done at the centre.

Vote by mail is a really good example. It is an example that has increased the integrity of the process because we are able to tell who has voted by vote by mail or who has voted in person. That integrity is there; it was never there before. But vote by mail, as it was known before as absentee voting, was conducted in the returning office. It's done at the centre now and we're able to manage it more effectively and efficiently.

Chair Goudy: — Any more questions? All right. Well thank you for that presentation. And I guess at this point we would need to have a vote. Just a very short, if we could have . . . Would that be? It just takes one person to make the motion to do it, so it's everybody in . . .

Hon. Lori Carr: — I'll move to go in camera.

Chair Goudy: — All right. Minister Carr at 12:51 has moved that we have a short in-camera meeting. Thank you all for being here and attending, your hard work.

[The board continued in camera from 12:51 until 13:08.]

Chair Goudy: — The board comes out of camera at 1:08. Moved by Minister McLeod. And to break for lunch we need a . . . Don't need a motion? We recess until 1:50.

[The board recessed from 13:08 until 13:57.]

Legislative Assembly Service

Chair Goudy: — So I would like to reconvene the meeting at 1:57 p.m., and we have one last presentation. Saved the best for last here. Item 16, review of the 2026-2027 business plan and Legislative Assembly proposal, vote 21.

I would like to introduce and welcome Iris Lang, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. And before you begin your budget presentation, would you mind introducing your officials. Thank you.

Iris Lang: — Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just flip this a little bit. I'd like to introduce members of the LAS executive and leadership teams who are joining me today to present the business plan and funding proposal. From the leadership team we have Judith Majkut, principal director, financial services; Krista Halayka, executive director, member services; and Marieke Knight, executive advisor of Office of the Clerk. And from our new executive team we have Rob Park, Deputy Clerk; Danielle Humble-Selinger, Principal Clerk; and Marie Shalashniy, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. And then I'll let Judith and Krista introduce the people from their teams.

Judith Majkut: — Oh Jerry's here, so Jerry Arnold. This is the manager of financial services.

Krista Halayka: — And I have Shannon McMillan, the director of member services.

Iris Lang: — Okay. So, Mr. Speaker and members, it is my pleasure today to present, as you said, the Legislative Assembly Service 2026-27 business plan and vote 21, Legislative Assembly funding proposal. Our proposal, as the Speaker said, is in item 16 of your package, and it looks like this if you don't have it right in front of you.

It is an honour for me to lead the Legislative Assembly Service, and I'm grateful for our dedicated and unified team. The LAS has over 120 working professionals and experts who are passionate about upholding and promoting the values, processes, and ideals of parliamentary democracy.

I'll begin by introducing the proposed 2026-27 key actions and budget, and then Judith and Krista will present the LAS budget proposals and statutory and non-statutory overall decreases. Then we will answer any questions about our plans and operations for this coming year.

The current fiscal year is the LAS's first year operating under a new strategic plan. This plan was designed to strengthen parliamentary processes and democratic engagement, deliver client-centred services, optimize resources and technology, foster a healthy workforce, and strengthen governance. We will continue to build upon this business plan that describes the key actions that will support attainment of our strategic plan. These are found in page 6 and 7 of our proposal.

[14:00]

Our key priorities for the upcoming year include investing in initiatives that advance parliamentary support, including improving access to parliamentary publications through a new digital platform, redesigning the Legislative Assembly website, continuing to strengthen our safe and inclusive workplace by offering psychological health and safety training, investing in technology and services that enhance our support to clients and safeguard our systems — this includes cybersecurity solutions that minimize digital threats to our systems and data — and continue to focus on service reviews ranging from organizational, policy, process, projects, along with improved accountability.

Related to security, the Sergeant-at-Arms will continue to conduct safety reviews and constituency office visits. This action supports members and constituency assistants to make informed decisions about their safety.

Over this last fiscal year we've collaborated extensively with the Government of Saskatchewan on the enterprise business management project. Next year we will continue to work diligently to fully implement the new government enterprise system, GEM, for the LAS and for the officers that we support.

Once GEM is fully implemented, another LAS key action will be to explore an electronic member payment system. We will determine if efficiencies can be made by integrating a new online payment process.

Lastly the LAS will continue to work to strengthen governance oversight through process, policy, and directive reviews, which support accountability and efficient decision making that include planning and project management capacity.

These key initiatives align with our vision to broaden parliamentary participation and ensure the democratic system is trusted, valued, and understood. We have an ambitious three-year plan, and I'm grateful to the LAS team for their support and dedication. I'm proud to lead such a valuable and well-respected organization.

Now to the funding proposal. This year's budget request for the Legislative Assembly, vote 21, is 33.235 million. This reflects an overall decrease from last year's appropriation. I will now call on Krista and Judith to discuss the details of our funding request.

Krista Halayka: — Great. Thank you, Iris. Good afternoon, Speaker Goudy, and of course board members. I am pleased to present the 2026-27 Legislative Assembly funding proposal for vote 21. This budget is built on the principles of fiscal responsibility and of course the province's current financial situation.

In developing our budget we established the following three assumptions. First, the consumer price index, or what we usually refer to as the CPI. Based on the Ministry of Finance's initial CPI forecast, we have applied a modest 1.9 per cent CPI rate to our budget for goods and services as well as the member directives. Next a 1 per cent overall budget decrease, and lastly, sitting days. We have factored in the standard sitting days and ordinary meeting times and adjournments.

This year's budget request for the Legislative Assembly, as Iris mentioned, is 33.235 million, which is an overall decrease of 1.505 million or 4.33 per cent under last year's appropriation.

On page 10 of the proposal, you will see the increases and decreases for 2026-27, and they're broken down into five categories. The statutory or MLA-related cost increases and decreases include consumer price index, which is an increase of 18,000 or 1.2 per cent; post-election transition allowances, that's a decrease of 1.265 million or 84 per cent; travel and living expenses, a decrease of 21,000 or 1.4 per cent; interparliamentary associations, a decrease of 25,000 or 1.7 per cent; and finally a \$212,000 or 14.1 per cent decrease in the Speaker's office and LAS operational costs.

Further information related to our increases and decreases are also outlined in the budget recommendation details on page 11. I will now turn the presentation over to Judith to discuss the final pieces of our proposal.

Judith Majkut: — Thanks, Krista. Our summary of appropriation and expenses is outlined on page 13, which provides a complete overview of the 33.235 million budget request. As Krista has already presented the key increases/decreases, I won't walk through this section line by line, but we are happy to answer any questions at the end of the presentation. The proposed revenue estimates for the upcoming fiscal year remains unchanged at \$10,000.

Finally I will touch on our Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund request, which is outlined on page 8. This fund was established in 2007 to support improvements to LAS and Legislative Assembly facilities, and to procure capital and non-capital assets.

In 2022, \$350,000 was approved by the board for a five-year term ending March 31st, 2027. For the upcoming 2026-2027 fiscal year, the LAS is again proposing that this funding be allocated to enhance member meeting rooms, optimize LAS facilities and space usage, and for projects focused on technological modernization and security. The enhancement and completion of member meeting rooms includes improving the infrastructure to meet the current needs of members and completing the MLA women's washroom.

Our other projects include modernizing the LAS's network security infrastructure and the Legislative Assembly website, which will increase security, accessibility, and function. Finally we will continue to develop digital versions of parliamentary and Assembly publications related to order papers and the progress of bills.

In closing, this budget reflects our commitments to modernize and improve our services, infrastructure, and processes. The LAS

remains dedicated to serving the Assembly and all members impartially and confidentially while also providing the highest level of customer service.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our proposed budget. And I now welcome any questions that you may have. Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — All right, thank you. And now I'll turn it over to the board for questions. MLA Weedmark.

Kevin Weedmark: — Thank you. Thank you very much for that presentation. I'm just curious. Can you walk us through on page 10 there, where you've got the breakdown of the various cost savings? Can you explain how you're getting that much savings in salaries in item 5 there?

Iris Lang: — One of the major ones is that we've had significant retirements as of late. And of course as people leave, they're typically at the top of their salaries. And we bring in new people; they're at the lower salary. One in particular was at one point in time we had a Law Clerk and Marie was in a succession planning role. And so since Ken Ring's departure, that's significant savings there.

Also what we have been doing is not necessarily . . . If someone retires or leaves the organization, we don't automatically fill that. I want to make sure that we've had a review of that particular work area. Does it still make sense to fill that position, or do we have time to review? If we don't have the time to review, can we use co-op students or can we hire a term for that position? So that's where we've been building a lot of capacity as well as a lot of cost savings.

Kevin Weedmark: — Excellent. It's nice to see those savings. Thank you.

Chair Goudy: — Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you for the presentation and for the submission. And even just in the way it's presented, it was very easy to follow, and I really appreciated that. And it's evident throughout the submission that you sharpened your pencil and found a lot of savings where you could, so that's greatly appreciated.

Just a very quick question, and if it's in here and I missed it I apologize, but the very last piece of the presentation is a \$10,000 revenue line. Can you tell us where that \$10,000 revenue was found?

Judith Majkut: — Ten thousand dollars is sort of made up of various items. Sometimes departing members will buy their own equipment and pay for the equipment when they . . . you know, such as their laptop or cell phone. So it's made up of sort of miscellaneous items that happened through the year. You can see \$10,000 is not very much. And for the most part, unless it's an election year, we don't even come close to the \$10,000.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Okay, thank you.

Krista Halayka: — It can also include any, I call it, kind of a self-assessment by members of where you have voluntarily told

us where, say, some of your telecommunication costs as an example . . . If the entire amount is currently paid by the Legislative Assembly Service, some members will declare a portion that is personal use and then repay us for that portion at the end of the year.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Okay, thank you.

Chair Goudy: — Any other questions? They've got lots of answers. I've got experience with that. MLA Love.

Matt Love: — I'm just curious, you know, as my colleague pointed out, some of the decreases that you have here. Looking at page 10 again, the post-election transition allowance. We had a big turnover in the Assembly, tremendous. How does that compare to previous years as far as the allowance? And what transition allowance . . . It says a reduction of 84 per cent. What would still be paid out at this point more than a year after the last election?

Krista Halayka: — We are completely 100 per cent finished paying out anything from the transition allowance, again barring any potential volunteer, I'll say, departures by any members who might want to retire and that kind of thing. So it's never fully just a 100 per cent thing because we never know what might be coming down the pipe as well, but you're correct. I mean the reason the number is so striking is simply because a large amount of turnover, whether it was retirees or defeats at the polls.

Chair Goudy: — Any other questions? Well here we are. Thank you all for being here and your hard work. All right. So could I have a motion to move into camera?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — I'll so move.

Chair Goudy: — Minister McLeod at 2:13. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried. So the board now moves in camera at 2:13. Thank you again.

[The board continued in camera from 14:13 until 15:15.]

Chair Goudy: — Okay. The board now moves out of camera at 3:15 p.m., and we'll move through the items for consideration now.

Item 11(a), the 2026-2027 budget for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, Registrar of Lobbyists, vote 57. Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move:

That the 2026-27 expenditure estimates for vote 57, Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Registrar of Lobbyists, be approved in the amount of \$589,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted \$589,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Chair Goudy: — Seconder? MLA Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Passed.

11(b), the Estimates book narrative changes. Could I get a . . .

Hon. Lori Carr: — I'll so move.

Chair Goudy: — Minister Carr.

And a second? MLA Sarauer. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried.

Item 12(a), the 2026-2027 budget for the Ombudsman Saskatchewan and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, vote 56.

Can I have someone move that? Nicole Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — I'll move:

That the 2026-27 expenditure estimates for vote 56, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, be approved in the amount of \$4,865,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, \$4,603,000; statutory, \$262,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you, and who would second that?

MLA Weedmark. All right. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried.

12(b), the Estimates book narrative changes. MLA Love. Motion seconder? Minister McLeod.

Item 13, the 2026-27 budget for the Office of the Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner, vote 55. Who would move that motion? Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — I'll move:

That the 2026-27 expenditure estimates for vote 55, Information and Privacy Commissioner, be approved in the amount of \$2,887,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, \$2,634,000; statutory, \$253,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you, and who would second that motion?

Hon. Lori Carr: — I will.

Chair Goudy: — Minister Carr. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried.

Item 14, the 2026-27 budget for the Office of the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, vote 76. Who would move that motion? Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Mr. Chair, I move:

That the 2026-27 expenditure estimates for vote 76, Advocate for Children and Youth, be approved in the amount of \$3,228,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, \$2,966,000; statutory, \$262,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you. Who would second that motion? MLA Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried.

All right. Item 15(a), the 2026-2027 budget for Elections Saskatchewan, vote 34. Who would make that motion? MLA Weedmark.

Kevin Weedmark: — I move:

That the 2026-27 expenditure estimates for vote 34, Chief Electoral Officer, be approved in the amount of \$5,493,000 as follows: statutory, \$5,493,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you. And someone to second that motion? MLA Sarauer. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried.

And 15(b), the motion for the Estimates book narrative changes. Anyone to move that motion? Minister Carr, and seconded by MLA Sarauer.

Item 16, the 2026-2027 business plan in the Legislative Assembly proposal, vote 21.

16(a), the Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund, RARF. Who would move that? MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — I move:

That for the 2026-27 fiscal year, the Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund be approved for restoration and refurbishment of Legislative Building spaces and technological modernization and security

projects, \$350,000.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you. And who would second that motion? Minister McLeod. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Goudy: — Carried.

16(b) the 2026-2027 budget for Legislative Assembly, vote 21.
Who would move that motion? MLA Love.

Matt Love: — I move:

That the 2026-27 expenditure estimates for vote 21, Legislative Assembly, to be approved in the amount of \$33,235,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, \$11,675,000; statutory, \$21,560,000; and

That the 2026-27 revenue estimates for vote 21, Legislative Assembly, be approved in the amount of \$10,000 as follows: revenue to be voted, \$10,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Chair Goudy: — Thank you. Who would second that motion? MLA Weedmark. All in favour? Carried.

All right. Item 17, any other business? Seeing no other business, would someone move a motion to adjourn?

Nicole Sarauer: — I will.

Chair Goudy: — MLA Sarauer. All in favour?

The board now adjourns to the call of the Chair at 3:23 p.m.
Thank you all.

[The board adjourned at 15:23.]