STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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Hon. Jamie Martens
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Regina Northeast

[The committee met at 16:08.]

Chair B. McLeod: — And welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. Welcome everyone to the committee tonight.

Sitting in, to my right is Hon. Jamie Martens; Sean Wilson chitting in for Racquel Hilbert; and Megan Patterson, member of the committee. And on the opposition benches, or bench I should say — benches; we're in committee not in the Chamber — we have Jacqueline Roy; and we have Nicole Sarauer chitting in for Leroy Laliberte; and Brittney Senger chitting for Betty Nippi-Albright. Welcome everyone here to this Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice.

And today we will be considering three bills before considering the 2025-26 estimates for the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. And following a break from 7:30 to 8, we will then consider the 2025-26 estimates and the '24-25 supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, and the Firearms Secretariat before considering the remaining committee resolutions.

Bill No. 6 — *The Safe Public Spaces (Street Weapons) Act*

Clause 1-1

Chair B. McLeod: — We will begin today with consideration of Bill No. 6, *The Safe Public Spaces (Street Weapons) Act*, clause 1, short title. Minister McLeod is here with officials. And I would ask all officials, please introduce yourselves before they speak for the first time, as I'm sure you are aware of. But let the Hansard operator turn on the mikes for you and please don't touch them. It causes a little bit too much hardness on the ears, so thank you for that.

Minister, please introduce your officials, and we welcome your opening comments. Minister McLeod.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am joined at the table. With me here is Neil Karkut, senior Crown counsel, legislative services; and Darcy McGovern, K.C. [King's Counsel].

Mr. Chair, I would now offer opening remarks for Bill 6, *The Safe Public Spaces (Street Weapons) Act*. This bill allows Saskatchewan municipalities and First Nations to opt into rules to ensure that certain items such as knives and bear spray are not used as street weapons.

Part 2 of the bill prohibits persons from possessing street weapons in public urban spaces, defacing or altering street weapons, or possessing altered or defaced street weapons. People in breach of these rules can be charged with a provincial offence. Part 3 of the bill allows police to seize and impound street weapons from persons in public urban areas if the weapon constitutes a threat to public safety. These seizure powers exist whether or not the person is charged with an offence under the Act.

Mr. Chair, additional House amendments will be moved today. This February the government announced new measures to protect communities against illicit fentanyl and methamphetamine. As part of these measures, the proposed House amendments will add hypodermic needles, fentanyl, and methamphetamine as categories of street weapons.

Fentanyl can serve important medical purposes; however when used illicitly, it creates extreme risks for the public. Similarly needles serve a necessary medical purpose but also pose a significant public risk when used illicitly. Methamphetamine also creates unique public risks due to its extremely addictive nature. The amendments will allow police to seize these items from people in public spaces when they threaten public safety. If appropriate, police may also lay provincial charges. Appropriate exemptions are also added for individuals who require fentanyl or needles for legitimate medical purposes.

Mr. Chair, this bill will help improve community safety by ensuring large knives, bear spray, and other similar items are not used as street weapons. The bill forms part of our government's comprehensive strategy to address public safety while also providing appropriate resources for individuals who are struggling with addictions and mental health issues.

With that, Mr. Chair, I welcome questions respecting Bill No. 6, *The Safe Public Spaces (Street Weapons) Act*.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you. I will now open the floor to questions. MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks. I want to first start off by asking a few questions about the proposed amendments that will be moved later in this committee.

My first question is around the expansion of the definition of street weapon. As you had mentioned in your opening remarks, the expanded definition includes fentanyl, methamphetamine, and hypodermic needle related to issues around the usage of drugs in public spaces in communities right now. But it also includes hatchet, axe, hammer, sledgehammer, which are also additions, I believe, to the definition. Can you explain why these were also added?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Certainly. The government recognizes that many items can be used as street weapons, but those items may also have legitimate legal purpose. So the items that you're referencing, while they may have a legitimate legal purpose, could certainly pose a significant risk to the public if they're in a public urban space. I see no reason why you would want an axe or a hatchet in the food court of a mall, for example, or a sledgehammer in a park. Things like that.

If they're there for a legitimate purpose, then they are exempt under the Act. But where they pose a danger or a risk to the public, that is the reason that they would be included in the list.

Nicole Sarauer: — Do the police already have powers to seize any of these items if they are discovered on a person? Can you just speak a bit to the powers that police already have and whether or not this proposed legislation will enhance that power?

[16:15]

Darcy McGovern: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, through you to the member. The gap that's trying to be dealt with here to a degree is, as you know, the list that's there by and large includes items that . . . Carrying a hammer of course is in and of itself not a criminal activity, not something that would be subject to a seizure.

So what this does is try and introduce the idea that only where it's a threat to public safety, which is the . . . As the member's aware, in the purpose clause for the Act, the Act "applies to the possession, transportation and storage of items that may be used as street weapons in a manner that threatens public safety in public urban spaces." And so that's the niche that needs to be filled here.

As you know, you can't have a hidden weapon under the Criminal Code. That could indeed be seized. But the problem you have is the gap where if you had your Gandalf sword, or if you had your other large . . . But to be more serious about it, if you were wearing body armour, which from a policing perspective sharply heightens the threat of violence, if you feel like you're Superman and invincible, then the likelihood of inducing violence is much higher.

There may be legitimate uses for that body armour in certain circumstances, but if it's in a circumstance where it threatens public safety, that's the gap that this Act seeks to address.

Chair B. McLeod: — And just for the record, can I get you to state your name just for the record, so that it's on there as well? Thank you.

Darcy McGovern: — Sure. Darcy McGovern.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you. MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. You mentioned a few times in your remarks, Mr. McGovern, that this power will be allowed if it's considered a threat to public safety. Is that threat to public safety defined in the legislation?

Darcy McGovern: — Not as such. That would be a matter of discretion for the police. As you know, we don't have purpose clauses in every Act, but that's the clear statement here that the minister wanted included as well, was that it applies where street weapons are used in a manner that threatens public safety in public places.

Nicole Sarauer: — I was just thinking that — you're absolutely right, Mr. McGovern — that's why this committee work is so important because we don't often have purpose clauses. But we're able to have these conversations about the purpose of the legislation and the bill in committee. So that should it be needed to be used in the future, it can. So thank you for that.

I did want to ask about the second proposed amendment, which is the expansion of 2-1 to include a subsection (6) and a subsection (7). Could you provide some context to those proposed amendments? It's one proposed amendment, but the two clauses that are added at the end?

Neil Karkut: — Neil Karkut. This adds two carve-outs, or exceptions, from the addition of fentanyl and hypodermic needles as street weapons.

There are of course legitimate purposes that people would be carrying those items. So for example, in subsection (6) if you had someone who is a diabetic, that would allow them to continue to carry their needle with them in public because they need that for a medical purpose. And similarly with subsection (7), there are medical purposes where an individual would have fentanyl on them in limited cases. So for example a cancer patient might receive fentanyl through a patch. These exemptions just ensure they're allowed to still have those items in public places for lawful medical purposes.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for that. Going back to the definition of "street weapon" and, as has been discussed, the inclusion of body armour. There are other jurisdictions in Canada that regulate the sale of body armour in their provinces. Has there been a discussion within the ministry to regulate the sale of body armour in Saskatchewan?

Darcy McGovern: — Thank you. More recently there's been less discussion of it. As you note, it has popped up in certain situations. And we feel like this is a less intrusive method of dealing with it where it's a problem, rather than stepping in further to try and regulate the actual sale and the purpose for which it can be used. You know, we're aware, and I know from previous conversations, you'd hear from bull riders and you'd hear from people who are taxi drivers who feel like they have a legitimate use for that.

I had mentioned I think the area of concern here which, as I said, is where you are making individuals feel like they're invincible. And that has a real tendency to increase the level of violence. If you know the other person's wearing body armour, you may be less inclined to punch that person. You might be less inclined to use a knife. And I think that's the escalation of violence that body armour represents that we're trying to get at here.

Nicole Sarauer: — I wanted to ask about the definition of "private place." I note that in subsection (a) it includes the words "genuinely and actually," in that it says a private place will mean "any of the following places that are genuinely and actually occupied as a private residence."

Can you speak to why those particular words — "genuinely" and "actually" — are used and what the legal implication will be, if the ministry knows yet at this time, on the operation of this legislation?

Darcy McGovern: — I think the intention with this was to make very clear that we do recognize that some of these objects will be legitimately used. Knives of a certain size are absolutely used in a private place. The concern with that was to not have that be an offhand justification for having a bunch of people carrying pepper spray, and saying that, you know, we all live here. This is the place where we're at.

And so there's an intent here to establish it. I don't view it as a term of art, per se. For example, we're not suggesting that "genuine" and "actually" reflects a particular case law, as much as we hope it will reflect legislative intent with respect to the provision.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. So just to clarify, just so I understand, I believe this is what you just said. There is no case law around those phrases at this time that you're aware of.

Darcy McGovern: — Not that I'm aware of.

Nicole Sarauer: — Yeah. Thank you. Can you speak to who was consulted in drafting this legislation?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thanks for the question. In the preparation for this bill we did consult with the chiefs of police, the leaders of SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities]. We met with Indigenous leaders, Métis Nation. Had consultation with other leaders, including FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations] and Saskatoon Tribal Council.

So a lot of conversation around interested parties who were all committed to making our communities safer. And some of the feedback that we received, in particular from SUMA and SARM, were part of the reason why we have introduced an opt-in clause, where some communities may wish to have this piece of legislation apply in their municipality, some may choose not to. But it will be made available to all municipalities and First Nations and the leaders of those communities can choose to opt in or not.

Nicole Sarauer: — Did anybody from policing express any concerns with respect to this legislation?

Darcy McGovern: — I think it's fair to say, and as the member knows, the police will tend to look for as much support legislatively as they can. This is something, you know, they view as more tools in the tool box. It's positive in that regard. It won't be a substitution for criminal law, nor should it be. That's an appropriate response where there's criminal behaviour. But I think the policing agencies view it as one of a part of steps in the other direction.

As I mentioned, we have that anomaly where, under the law, if I have a knife on my belt and you can see it, it's not a concealed weapon. But I don't have an appropriate usage for it, and it doesn't have to be, you know, in a sheath. And so what we're hoping to be able to do is to pick up that anomaly, and I think they appreciated that.

Nicole Sarauer: — Apologies for moving back. But moving back to the definition of "private place," a stakeholder asked me to ask the committee whether tents located within a homeless encampment, for example, will be considered a private place.

Darcy McGovern: — I think, as the member can well appreciate, it would very much be a case-by-case factual consideration. And I think, you know, the wording in the provision would have to be parsed with respect to the circumstances, with respect to the individual. And you won't be surprised that certainly this wouldn't be an environment where we would suggest that there would be a fixed answer in every circumstance.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you explain to the committee how this legislation compares to legislation that may or may not exist in other jurisdictions?

Neil Karkut: — This particular piece of legislation is I guess taking a bit of a lead in this area. There are some other jurisdictions, both at the provincial and municipal level, who have dealt with street weapons. So for example, Calgary has a similar rule at a municipal bylaw level where you can't carry knives above a certain length or you may face consequences for that.

Manitoba has passed *The Long-Bladed Weapon Control Act*, which takes a bit of a different approach there, more focusing on some of the rules around retail sale. But they have not included rules along these lines yet of the public carrying those weapons or street weapons in public.

And there are a few other municipalities, for example Vancouver and Edmonton that have passed certain bylaws that deal with bear spray, for example. So you see a mix of different approaches at both the provincial and municipal level.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. No further questions.

Chair B. McLeod: — Seeing no more questions, we will proceed to vote on the clauses. It will just take a moment to get myself ready here. Clause 1-1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Agreed. Carried.

[Clause 1-1 agreed to.]

Clause 1-2

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 1-2. And I recognize Minister Martens.

[16:30]

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move an amendment to clause 1-2 of the printed bill to:

> Strike out the definition of **"street weapon"** in Clause 1-2 of the printed Bill and substitute the following:
>
> " **'street weapon'** means any of the following:
>
> (a) a knife;
>
> (b) a sword;
>
> (c) a machete;
>
> (d) a hatchet;
>
> (e) an axe;
>
> (f) a hammer;
>
> (g) a sledgehammer;
>
> (h) body armour;
>
> (i) an explosive device;

(j) a hypodermic needle;

(k) fentanyl;

(l) methamphetamine;

(m) a wildlife control product;

(n) any other prescribed item".

Chair B. McLeod: — Minister Martens has moved an amendment to clause 1-2. Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Is clause 1-2 as amended agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 1-2 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 1-3 to 1-5 inclusive agreed to.]

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 2-1, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — No.

Chair B. McLeod: — Clause 2-1 is not agreed. The clause is defeated.

[Clause 2-1 not agreed to.]

[Clauses 2-2 to 6-1 inclusive agreed to.]

Clause 2-1

Chair B. McLeod: — I recognize MLA Martens.

Hon. Jamie Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move an amendment on the clause 2-1 of the printed bill.

Add the following Clause before Clause 2-2 of the printed Bill:

"**Street weapons prohibited in public urban space**

2-1(1) Subject to subsections (2) to (7), no person shall possess a street weapon in a public urban space.

(2) Subsection (1) does not render it unlawful for a person to possess an item that may be used as a street weapon in a private place occupied by that person.

(3) Subsection (1) does not render it unlawful for a person to possess an item that may be used as a street weapon for the purpose of transporting the item from the place at which it was lawfully obtained to a place where it may be lawfully stored or used or from that place to another place where the item may be lawfully stored or used.

(4) Subsection (1) does not render it unlawful for a person to possess a wildlife control product in a public urban space if:

(a) the person demonstrates that there was a reasonable risk of threat to the person's safety by wildlife in that public urban space at the time that the person was found in possession of the wildlife control product; and

(b) the wildlife control product in the person's possession is designed to protect persons against the threat . . . [possessed] by that type of wildlife.

(5) Subsection (1) does not render it unlawful for a person to possess a knife in a public urban space if the person:

(a) requires the knife for the preparation of food in the public urban space; and

(b) reasonably demonstrates that the knife does not constitute a threat to public safety.

(6) Subsection (1) does not render it unlawful for a person to possess a hypodermic needle in a public urban space if the person:

(a) either:

(i) requires a hypodermic needle to administer a valid and lawful medical or veterinary treatment; or

(ii) is in possession of the hypodermic needle on behalf of a person who requires the hypodermic needle to administer a valid and lawful medical or veterinary treatment; and

(b) reasonably demonstrates that the hypodermic needle in the person's possession does not constitute a threat to public safety.

(7) Subsection (1) does not render it unlawful for a person to possess fentanyl in a public urban space if the person:

(a) either:

(i) has a valid and lawful prescription for the fentanyl; or

(ii) is in possession of the fentanyl on behalf of a person who has a valid and lawful prescription for the fentanyl; and

(b) reasonably demonstrates that the fentanyl in the person's possession does not constitute a threat to public safety".

And I ask for a recorded division.

Chair B. McLeod: — All right. Minister Martens has moved new clause 2-1. Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Minister Martens has asked for a recorded division. And I will exercise my opportunity to a deliberative vote, which is the first time I've gone through this so bear with me.

All those in favour of the motion please raise your hand.

The motion is carried. Thank you. A unanimous vote in favour. Yeah. Thank you.

[Clause 2-1 agreed to.]

Chair B. McLeod: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Safe Public Spaces (Street Weapons) Act*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 6, *The Safe Public Spaces (Street Weapons) Act* with amendment. MLA Martens moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

We'll take a brief pause if any officials need to change. You're ready to go.

Bill No. 10 — *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024*

Clause 1

Chair B. McLeod: — All right, next we have consideration of Bill No. 10, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024*, clause 1, short title. And if there's any new officials we'll again ask you not to touch mikes, and identify themselves the first time they speak. And we'll ask the minister then to introduce the officials if they have changed. There's none changed, is there? One.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — I do have one additional official. Catherine Benning, K.C., senior Crown counsel, public registry administration has also joined me at the table together with Darcy McGovern, K.C., and Neil Karkut.

Chair B. McLeod: — Welcome to this time here. Minister, please make your opening comments.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I now offer opening remarks for Bill 10, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024*.

[16:45]

This bill will update our public registries including the corporate registry, land titles registry, and personal property registry. Information Services Corporation provides the public registries pursuant to a government agreement. Under the current extension agreement with the government, Information Services Corporation must update the registry IT [information technology] systems.

These amendments accommodate the IT updates in two ways. First the amendments provide registrars clear authority to verify the identities of persons who conduct registry searches, submit registry documents, or are referred to in registry documents. This will promote registry security and integrity. Second the amendments grant registrars authority to accept documents signed by digital signatures in appropriate circumstances.

Mr. Chair, the amendments also make general updates to improve registry operations. These updates include new regulation-making authorities to address requests for large volumes of information, and correcting an inconsistency under *The Personal Property Security Act, 1993* respecting security interest in crops for creditors who finance agricultural inputs.

The amendments will also update *The Libel and Slander Act* to remove the register of newspapers from the Act. This registry is obsolete as its contents are available through other portions of the corporate registry in a more accurate and up-to-date form. The register of newspapers is unique to Saskatchewan, and no other jurisdiction has a comparable registry in place. Removing the register of newspapers at this time will ensure that it does not need to be modernized as part of the new IT registry updates. This will result in cost savings and eliminate confusion in the registries.

Finally, the amendments also make general administrative updates to clarify and improve the operation of registry legislation.

With that, Mr. Chair, I welcome questions respecting Bill No. 10, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024*.

Chair B. McLeod: — I will now open the floor to questions. MLA Sarauer, please.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks. I have a few questions about some comments you made in your second reading speech. Some of them you've repeated here today.

The first one is around the amendments that grant registrars authority to verify the identities of persons who conduct registry searches and submit registry documents. Could you explain why this was deemed necessary?

Catherine Benning: — Catherine Benning. The addition is as a result of the large volume of information that is stored in the registries, and it's very valuable information for the public and for government as well, and the economy.

And that information is very much desired by bad actors. And so one of the pieces of additional security that we have the desire to institute is the ability to verify the identity of those that are accessing the information, so that if they are inappropriately potentially accessing the information, we can block them from doing that. Or if it's not apparent at the first instance, during the verification, that we can provide the information to law enforcement if a fraud or other misuse of that information were to occur.

Nicole Sarauer: — Is this in reaction to any particular event that has already occurred?

Catherine Benning: — The government as a whole is sort of an attractive target for these bad actors. And so it is part of sort of a general initiative and is in line with what other registries are doing across Canada. It's sort of the next step in security for the registries.

Nicole Sarauer: — You mentioned that this is targeting those who may be inappropriately accessing this information. Could you give some examples of what inappropriately accessing this information would be?

Catherine Benning: — Sure. So if you were to access the information, particularly in a repeated manner in which to gather information in large volumes, and to use that information that is available through the registries for identity fraud is probably the most common situation.

The other situation that you may be familiar with is if there is a fraud in the land titles registry, where they could be accessing that information and submitting documents for the purpose of title fraud.

Nicole Sarauer: — My next question was around the ability to share information with law enforcement bodies in appropriate cases. Could you provide some examples of what an appropriate case for that would be? You've mentioned fraud already a few times. Are there others as well?

Catherine Benning: — Certainly. There's the potential that, particularly for the corporate registry that the information that is contained in the corporate registry, if it were accessed inappropriately, could be used inappropriately for money laundering. So there are other opportunities that this information could be misused. It's very valuable information.

Nicole Sarauer: — You mentioned that other jurisdictions have similar provisions. Can you speak to which jurisdictions do have these provisions already enacted?

Catherine Benning: — We're sort of at the start of this, but when we meet with our counterparts in other jurisdictions, every jurisdiction is looking at ways in which to improve the security of their registries and the access to the information that is there.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. So just to clarify, we are the first who will be passing this type of provision, but other jurisdictions are looking to do the same.

Catherine Benning: — Yes. BC [British Columbia] does have some controls that are similar to this that they use for their land titles registry, and Ontario does as well. They have a different methodology, but similar, that is for the same type of purpose.

Nicole Sarauer: — No further questions.

Chair B. McLeod: — You're good? All done? Okay. Thank you very much. Seeing no more questions, we will proceed to vote on the clauses. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 12 inclusive agreed to.]

Chair B. McLeod: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 10, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024* without amendment. MLA Martens moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Thank you.

Bill No. 11 — *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)/Loi modificative diverse (amélioration des registres publics) de 2024 (n° 2)*

Clause 1

Chair B. McLeod: — There's no change of officials, so we'll move into the next consideration, which is Bill No. 11, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)*, a bilingual bill. We'll begin with clause 1, short title. Minister, please make your opening comments.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Still at the table with these same officials, and my remarks will be brief here. This bill updates bilingual legislation with the same registry enhancements that were previously discussed. In particular, *The Co-operatives Act, 1996* and *The Non-profit Corporations Act, 2022* are amended in the same manner as other registry-related legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome any questions respecting Bill No. 11, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)*.

Chair B. McLeod: — I will now open the floor to questions. MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks. As my questions were answered in our discussion around Bill 10, I have no further questions for Bill 11.

Chair B. McLeod: — Seeing no more questions, we will proceed to vote on the clauses. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive agreed to.]

Chair B. McLeod: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)*, a bilingual bill.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 11, *The Miscellaneous Statutes (Public Registries Enhancement) Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)*, a bilingual bill, without amendment.

Sean Wilson: — I will move.

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Sean Wilson moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Moving on. We will welcome any additional officials, or you're good?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — If I could, Mr. Chair, I'd just like to thank my officials for joining me on these three bills. Thank you to the committee for your patience. And we still have a long night ahead of us, so I'll leave my remarks at that. Thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — Anything to be said on the part of the opposition members?

[17:00]

Nicole Sarauer: — I just want to join with the minister in thanking first of all the minister for answering my questions and the officials for their good work both in answering my questions tonight and for all the work you do every single day. Thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — We'll just take a brief recess at this point in time to change the officials, and then we'll come right back as soon as you're ready. Thank you.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

General Revenue Fund
Justice and Attorney General
Vote 3

Subvote (JU01)

Chair B. McLeod: — Welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. And we are now going to consider the 2025-26 estimates for Vote 3, Justice and Attorney General, central management and services, subvote (JU01). And I will say that since we did take a short break and use some time, we'll just add 10 minutes to this portion of what we're doing to make sure that we complete the time requirements that are there for us.

So Minister McLeod is here with officials from the ministry, and I would ask that officials that are gathered with us — and welcome — please introduce themselves before they speak for the first time and not thereafter, just the first time. And please do not touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn them on for you when you speak.

So, Minister McLeod, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments please.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good evening again to the committee. I am pleased to provide the highlights of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's 2025-26 budget and financial plan and to answer any questions from the committee.

The Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's budget focuses on delivering greater access to justice services for Saskatchewan communities and continues our ongoing work to improve public safety and deliver safer communities and neighbourhoods. All Saskatchewan citizens rely on our justice system to maintain public safety, resolve disputes, and ensure the rule of law in our province. Our budget maintains our commitment to providing ongoing justice services through the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General and its dedicated staff.

The courts and the provincial justice system are fundamental pillars of our province, and ministry staff work every day to ensure these systems serve the best interests of Saskatchewan people. The justice system provides critical services to protect the vulnerable in our society, including victims and survivors of interpersonal violence and abuse; families that need support as a result of separation, divorce, or other difficulties; and those who cannot independently manage their own financial matters.

We also provide citizens with services they can use to resolve disputes with each other, like those offered by the Office of Residential Tenancies and the dispute resolution office. And we ensure that citizens have a voice in the justice system through agencies like the Public Complaints Commission, the serious incident response team, and the Highway Traffic Board.

Before we get into specifics of the ministry's '25-26 budget, I will introduce the officials joining us here today. Seated with me are deputy minister of Justice Kimberly Kratzig and deputy attorney general Max Bilson, K.C. Also in the room, our assistant deputy attorney general of justice services and tribunals, Kylie Head, K.C.; assistant deputy attorney general of public prosecutions, Elizabeth Hilts, K.C.; assistant deputy minister of courts and community justice, Rory Jensen; assistant deputy minister of corporate services, Brad Gurash; Chief Coroner of Saskatchewan, Jeffrey Wagner; executive director of community safety and well-being, Gina Alexander; executive director of financial services, Cindy Froehlich; and chief executive officer of Legal Aid Saskatchewan, Jayne Mallin. I will ask officials to introduce themself as they come forward when they respond to questions.

Mr. Chair, this budget aligns with our government's record investments in Saskatchewan communities. In total, we are investing approximately $271 million to maintain and enhance the justice system for Saskatchewan residents. Overall we have increased our expense budget by approximately $24.2 million over the last year. This is a 9.8 per cent increase.

This funding represents targeted investments in implementing new bylaw court hub to enhance municipal bylaw enforcement, expanding traffic safety court to improve how we handle traffic tickets and other provincial offences, undertaking significant improvements to modernize court technology and infrastructure, ensuring public prosecutions has the resources it needs to ensure

cases are resolved quickly and fairly, ongoing work to address interpersonal violence and abuse across the province, and adding capacity to the serious incident response team.

I will briefly provide more specifics on these items before we move on to taking questions, starting with the courts. For court enhancements, Saskatchewan's courts and the judiciary work every day to resolve disputes, uphold our laws, and maintain confidence in the justice system. Ministry of Justice and Attorney General staff and systems provide critical support to this work.

This year, as part of our ongoing commitment to improve access to justice through the courts, we will be making enhancements to how our courts facilitate bylaw enforcement and the enforcement of provincial offences, such as violations under *The Traffic Safety Act*.

Our budget includes approximately $447,000 to expand traffic safety and municipal bylaw court hubs in two locations. This funding will support the operational costs of expanding the courts to allow for the hiring of three additional FTEs [full-time equivalent] to manage the new court locations.

We are also dedicating approximately $665,000 for four new civilian prosecutors and two legal assistants that will support the traffic safety court expansion. These new civilian prosecutors will take over the prosecution of traffic safety Act violations and other provincial offences from municipal police officers and the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], allowing them to refocus their efforts on core front-line policing duties. In addition to making our courts more efficient and accessible to the public, these initiatives will also reduce the amount of time police need to spend in court, allowing them to dedicate their efforts again to the core front-line policing duties in our Saskatchewan communities.

Our justice system, our laws, and the expectations of the public have evolved considerably over the years, and the speed at which this evolution is occurring is only increasing. To ensure our courts can continue to keep up with these ongoing changes, this year's budget includes $3.38 million for ongoing enhancements to technology and infrastructure in Saskatchewan courts. These enhancements include the implementation of a fully integrated electronic filing system with a public-facing portal for the Court of King's Bench, which will make the court significantly more accessible. Additional infrastructure improvements being made this year include improved accessibility in jury rooms, refurbished detention cells, and standardized security desks and distress button systems throughout all courthouses in the province.

Under the fine option program, Mr. Chair, while we take steps to modernize our court processes, we also want to ensure we are investing in alternatives to court for lower level offences. With this in mind, we are investing $205,000 into improvements to the fine option program to ensure accountability for offenders and provide alternatives for people who are unable to pay off tickets and fines for minor offences.

Under public prosecutions, equally critical to the operation of our courts are the prosecutors who attend them every day and hold people accountable to our laws. Saskatchewan prosecutors are some of the best in the country. To ensure we can maintain this high level of service, we have made numerous investments in public prosecutions in recent years. This year will be no different.

In response to the expanded use of body-worn cameras by the RCMP and municipal police services, we will be investing $822,000 to hire three prosecutors and six legal assistants in our public prosecutions division. These staff will be dedicated to processing and reviewing the significant amount of video evidence that we are anticipating from the growing use of body-worn cameras by police across the province.

We are also providing an additional $239,000 to the case readiness unit, which works to address high caseloads and prioritize complex criminal cases. This investment will support the unit in its ongoing efforts to obtain disclosure as early as possible from police agencies and ensure cases are complete and ready to move forward as soon as possible through the criminal justice process.

Mr. Chair, we remain steadfast in our support for individuals affected by interpersonal violence. We know this continues to be a problem across our country and indeed across our province, as attested by the domestic violence death review report that was released earlier this year. Saskatchewan has taken major steps to address domestic violence and abuse over the last 10 years, but we know there is always more to be done.

That is why this year we will invest approximately $31.7 million into interpersonal violence programs, supports, and tools through the Saskatchewan justice system. The 2025-26 budget dedicates an additional $720,000 to community-based organizations supported by the ministry, the majority of which deliver supports and services to families affected by interpersonal violence and abuse.

We are also maintaining our commitment to second-stage housing this year by providing $328,000 in total to second-stage housing facilities across the province. This funding supports intervention and counselling services for women and their children leaving situations of interpersonal violence and abuse.

Other key investments in this area include funding to support enhanced early interventions for at-risk families, and ongoing investments in the development of programs, services, and tools to ensure appropriate responses to survivors and perpetrators of interpersonal violence. As our justice system and services continue to evolve, we understand the importance of having appropriate oversight and accountability in place to maintain public confidence in the rule of law, and particularly in those we have entrusted to keep the peace.

[17:15]

In January of 2023, we took a major step to reinforce police oversight and accountability through the launch of the serious incident response team, or SIRT for short. Since it was established in 2023, SIRT has experienced high demand, opening 45 files in its first year alone. This has put pressure on existing resources. To address this pressure, we are increasing funding to the SIRT by $188,000 in the 2025-26 budget, for a total of $1.1 million overall. This new funding will be used to hire an additional investigator to expand the team's capacity, ensuring timely and thorough reviews of serious incidents involving

police. This investment reaffirms our government's ongoing commitment to strong police oversight in Saskatchewan that maintains accountability, transparency, and public confidence in our police services.

In conclusion, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General is well positioned to meet its goals and mandate in 2025-26. We look forward to continuing our work with other ministries, the courts, and our community partners to promote access to justice services, accountability, and public safety. The funding for the 2025-26 fiscal year will ensure a fair and equitable justice system for everyone in Saskatchewan.

I would now be pleased to answer your questions about the budget and business plan for the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. Thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — Yeah. Thank you, Minister McLeod. I will now open the floor to questions. MLA Sarauer, please.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks. Before I get started I just want to first of all acknowledge and thank all of your officials for being here this evening. Really appreciate you taking the time to be here with us.

Let's start by exploring the hub program expansion that you have spoken about and that's included in the budget. Can you talk about what that is going to look like in those new locations?

Rory Jensen: — Rory Jensen, assistant deputy minister of courts and community justice. So the ministry is working with the Provincial Court to make sure that they have the resources in place to expand the number of sittings dedicated specifically to municipal bylaws and traffic safety matters. We're working with the court to establish additional sittings in Fort Qu'Appelle and Rosthern to hear bylaw matters and traffic safety court.

One of the things that the minister and ministry has been hearing from SUMA and SARM is their communities' abilities to have their bylaw matters heard before court can be limited when they go on a regular docket, as it can be quite full especially in Regina and Saskatoon. So by working with the court to give them resources to have additional sittings, we can ensure communities can have more confidence that their bylaw matters are being enforced, as well as the courts can ensure that resources are being heard by the appropriate matter, where the bylaw matters on a regular docket will be heard by a Provincial Court judge. When it's on a bylaw court, dedicated bylaw sitting, it's a Justice of the Peace sitting.

So by expanding the bylaw courts, you allow Provincial Court judges time to focus on those more serious and complex legal matters. So it's really about having the appropriate level of resources and expanding capacity of the Provincial Court.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. It's a concern that has been raised with myself as well. I'm just curious what the additional resources will provide. Will it be access to additional space? Are you thinking that this court will sit at times of day that court isn't currently sitting? I'm just curious to see how that's going to address the pressures that already exist within the Provincial Court.

Rory Jensen: — So by expanding to communities near Rosthern and Fort Qu'Appelle and shifting some of the surrounding matters from the communities outside of Regina — typically these communities will have their matters come into Regina or Saskatoon — by shifting some of the bylaw traffic safety matters out of the courthouses in Regina and Saskatoon, we're actually freeing up capacity in Regina and Saskatoon to allow matters to move more quickly, to free up courtroom time in those larger communities as the Provincial Court has already established circuit points.

So we're working with the Chief Judge and the Provincial Court to make sure that they have the resources to expand the number of sittings in those circuit points to hear those non-Regina and -Saskatoon matters in a different circuit point to free up courtroom time and resource time in the larger communities.

Nicole Sarauer: — I've also heard some concerns about pressures within the circuit points as well. I suppose my question is again how will these resources address the needs within these particular communities? I understand how it's going to be shifting the pressure away from the Regina Court House, which is quite busy, but how will it also be addressing some of the pressures within the circuit points that already exist?

Rory Jensen: — So these resources will help provide the Provincial Court additional sitting days. It would also free up on a typical circuit those dockets. Right now the dockets would receive all matters — bylaw matters, traffic safety matters. The additional resources will allow for those sittings to be freed up, the regular sittings to be freed up for more criminal matters, traffic safety matters to be heard at traffic safety court, and bylaw matters to be heard there.

We also, as part of our investments into court technology and court modernization, we continue to invest in videoconference conferencing technology to continue to expand that to help alleviate pressures in some of those more remote communities. And typically that would be where we would see a lot of benefit from expanding the video court technology and being able to hear more matters on a docket and have resources available to those remote communities.

Nicole Sarauer: — Are you able to share what communities will have their bylaw matters moved to these two hub locations?

Rory Jensen: — So we're working closely with the Provincial Court and the Chief Judge to identify exactly which communities, as the catchment areas and where certain matters are heard are the decision of the Provincial Court. We're compiling the data to make recommendations of possible communities, but ultimately that decision is a decision of the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court.

Nicole Sarauer: — I know there are many First Nations across the province who are keen to be able to access bylaw courts once the summary offences procedure amendments that we passed about a year ago come into force. What is the plan for addressing that need as well?

[17:30]

Rory Jensen: — The ministry is working with a number of First

Nations. We're consulting with a number of First Nations on ensuring that we have a municipal bylaw ticket, a First Nations bylaw ticket format that will meet all their needs as well as the needs of the Provincial Court.

We've also been in consultation with the Provincial Court about ensuring that First Nations would have access to a bylaw docket or a regular docket, and that work continues. And we have confirmed that when they are ready and First Nations are ready to come on board and issue tickets and provide prosecution for those tickets, that they would be able to have access to a docket in Provincial Court.

Nicole Sarauer: — Will additional funding be required for Provincial Court to be able to accommodate that need than what is already contemplated in this budget?

Rory Jensen: — So as this is not in place yet, we're still working with the Provincial Court to collect data and show kind of what anticipated needs would be and what anticipated additional volume of traffic would be on this. So we're working closely with the Provincial Court to provide data analysis on items that they require, but as we are not implemented yet, it's difficult to determine what that additional volume would be on the court right now.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Do you have any timelines you can give to the committee on when that particular piece will be implemented?

Kimberly Kratzig: — Just a point of clarity. Is that a question about the First Nations element or the actual municipal bylaws?

Nicole Sarauer: — First Nations.

Kimberly Kratzig: — Okay.

Rory Jensen: — At this point we do not have a firm timeline on when that will be implemented.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. You also mentioned a traffic safety court expansion. The minister provided a little bit of information at the beginning. Could you provide some more detail as to what that will look like?

Rory Jensen: — So with the expansion of traffic safety court, really, we're working with the Provincial Court to help them establish additional sittings to alleviate some of the pressures that are being experienced in Regina and Saskatoon as a number of communities in the surrounding areas go into there.

We're also looking at hiring additional civilian prosecutors, so non-lawyer prosecutors, to prosecute traffic safety matters in the new hubs — the expansion in Fort Qu'Appelle and Rosthern — as well as to replace policing resources prosecuting tickets in Prince Albert and North Battleford.

So this will help free up policing resources to focus on policing matters and be out on the front lines instead of prosecuting tickets. This'll also help alleviate some of the large dockets that are happening in Regina and Saskatoon as those go quite lengthy. And by helping the court open these additional sittings, they'll be able to provide better service to both the surrounding communities around Regina and Saskatoon, as well as in Regina and Saskatoon.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Now, Minister, your officials will know that I can't let a conversation go by around the expansion of traffic safety court and the need to free up police resources without asking about the e-justice project which, for I believe the last two years, I've been told by the ministry, is not cancelled; it's paused.

Minister, can you give us an update on that project? Will it be un-paused this year?

Rory Jensen: — The e-justice project continues to be paused. The ministry has identified other areas where we believe could receive more . . . beneficial for investments. Part of that is part of the court modernization projects which continues to be implementation of the J-STAR [judicial scheduling, tracking and amalgamated reporting system] project which we were hoping . . . We targeted to design and implement and fully integrate the electronic filing system with our public-facing portal. So the general public, the legal community can file documents, identify what has all been filed in matters that they are involved with, as well as a fully integrated case management system for the Court of King's Bench.

There was also funds for enhancements to eCourt, which is the Court of Appeal system. We're also making additional investments in judicial IT and courtroom technology. That's going to address software and licensing, enhance IT security, add additional IT infrastructure and, as I mentioned earlier, continue to expand and enhance video courts technology as well.

[17:45]

Nicole Sarauer: — How much was spent on the e-justice project to date, including staff time and infrastructure?

Kimberly Kratzig: — In the ministry's '25-26 budget there is about $10,000 spend to maintain the IT infrastructure of the project.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. I did ask total to date; can you give me that number?

Kimberly Kratzig: — Pardon me?

Nicole Sarauer: — I asked total to date. Could you give me that number?

Kimberly Kratzig: — We don't have that information with us, but I could endeavour to look into that for you.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Can you commit to tabling that for the committee in the next 30 days or so?

Kimberly Kratzig: — I can endeavour to look into it for you and see how long that might take. I don't think I would give a time frame at this point because I just don't know where that information would lie.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay. Minister, this question is for you. In light of the information your officials have provided around the

e-justice project and the decision being made to focus on other projects that have been described but are not the e-justice project, are you prepared this evening to conclude that the better description of the status of the project is now cancelled?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thanks for the question. No. Given that we're continuing to invest in maintaining the IT system, I would describe it as being paused.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Moving on to the domestic violence death review report that you had mentioned in your opening comments, Minister, could you provide a timeline and a plan for implementation of the recommendations within the report?

Gina Alexander: — Good evening. Gina Alexander, executive director of community safety and well-being. We have a number of things going on with the domestic violence death review, and I'm going to refer to the recommendation that's corresponding with it as well as the work that we have already started and will continue to work on.

So for recommendation no. 1 . . . You'll know that there's recommendations and then you'll know there's opportunities for action. I won't go into the opportunities for action unless there's a follow-up question. But for recommendation no. 1, which is prioritizing education awareness initiatives aimed at supporting all Saskatchewan residents to recognize, address, and prevent domestic violence in all its forms, we have the public awareness campaign continuing. So we're in our third year of the public awareness campaign and we're making efforts to carry on in the next phase of the public awareness campaign. So that's the first element of that.

Still following on recommendation no. 1, we have a national action plan project titled natural supports program, and this is an agreement with a community-based organization through an RFP [request for proposal] process where the intention is to develop and coordinate the delivery of training that allows people to learn what to do and when their friend, family member, client, parishioner, and so on is in a domestic violence situation and needs assistance.

And then the third element for recommendation no. 1 is a healthy relationships program, also supported through national action plan funding in an agreement with a community-based organization. And this will be to develop and implement healthy relationships training for youth that focus on preventing violence, including online communication.

There's more. Shall I just keep going?

Nicole Sarauer: — Please, yeah.

Gina Alexander: — Okay. Recommendation no. 2, then: focusing efforts on evidence-based intervention and programs that target people who perpetrate domestic violence with an emphasis on accountability and behaviour change. The Re:Connect provincial crisis hotline continues in '25-26, and it is there to support individuals and families at risk of violence.

The next one is an enhanced early intervention support for families at higher risk for violence, also part supported by the national action plan funding. And this is an agreement with two community-based organizations, one in Regina and one in Saskatoon, to pilot an outreach support to those at risk of using violence, regardless of charges, and provide individual interventions that aim to increase emotional regulation and change behaviour.

The next one is the family intervention rapid support team, which are similar to the one that I just talked about. It's a relentless outreach project for community-based organizations in Kindersley and surrounding area, Nipawin, Moose Jaw, Estevan, Weyburn, and Carlyle, also in their surrounding areas, where these individuals are connected with other service providers in these communities and they use a relentless outreach approach with family members and individuals who are at risk of domestic violence. And then there is . . . I'm just going to move on to the next one.

In response to recommendation no. 3, which is to broaden victim-centred approaches in systems to better support individuals affected by domestic violence, including family members and victims, there is a group who are working on a project titled Adverse Childhood Experiences, again with the national action plan funding. And their role — again most of these, almost all of them are through an RFP process — is to develop and implement a response to adverse childhood experiences, increasing understanding and awareness of the connection between adverse childhood experiences and interpersonal violence and abuse.

Another project is a universal domestic violence assessment tool, and a community-based organization is also working on this. And they are working to collaboratively develop a common risk-assessment tool to be used by all professionals that interact with those at risk of domestic violence. And the idea behind this tool will be to create some awareness across service provision but also to reduce the times that a victim may need to tell their story.

We have ongoing programming with regard to recommendation no. 3, children-exposed-to-violence programming across the province. We have ongoing programming for second-stage housing and ongoing programming for the family intervention support teams which I talked about.

And then with regard to recommendation no. 4, which is to enhance legislation and policies to strengthen domestic violence prevention efforts and improve support for victims, in conjunction with Social Services, we're piloting a Safe & Together program in two communities. And the idea is to increase knowledge and coordination among human services professionals of the impacts of intimate partner violence on the family. In these two particular communities, training on the Safe & Together program has been completed, and now we'll be working with the communities on the next steps of this service, this connection across service providers.

As you are aware, there is the legislation around 10 days of entitlement of leave. We continue with the victim advocate case reviews, Clare's Law, and the fixed-term tenancy.

And then two more recommendations. Recommendation no. 5 from the domestic violence death review is to prioritize accessibility, availability, and appropriateness of domestic violence services in northern, rural, and isolated communities. So

we have a transportation program specific for northern Saskatchewan and then a transportation program for other parts of Saskatchewan as well. That's ongoing. The provincial crisis line, 211, the ministry continues to provide funding for that and also for work that we're doing around the northern alcohol strategy.

And then recommendation no. 6 also speaks to the transportation program, which is to enhance accessibility and support of victims of domestic violence through infrastructure development initiatives.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for that lengthy list. I greatly appreciate all the work that you do and providing that information to us. I believe — and you can correct me if I'm wrong — I believe the report was released in January of this year. The programs you mentioned, some of them have been around for a while; some of them sound new to my ears. Can you specifically focus on which programs were created after the publishing of the report and what provincial dollars are allocated to that program and what federal dollars are allocated to that program?

[18:00]

Gina Alexander: — So earlier the minister in his opening comments talked about the $31.7 million, the investment in the Justice ministries for interpersonal violence and abuse. Specific to the domestic violence death review recommendations, they and the national action plan recommendations were developed based on Saskatchewan's specific context, the data, and the feedback from stakeholders, resulting in some alignment between those recommendations and the initiatives.

So with that I'll talk about the investment, the 31.7 million investment for '25-26. In terms of the federally funded programs and services, 4.65 for the national action plan; 630,000 for the family information liaison unit; 300,000 for the Re:Connect gender-based violence crisis hotline; 243,000 for The Listen Project; 219 for missing persons liaison program; and 173 for victim services responders in Saskatchewan for two child advocacy centres to provide support for children and parent clients of the child advocacy centres in Regina and Saskatoon; and 105 for support of families of missing persons to provide specialized counselling and support for groups focusing on ambiguous loss.

Those are the federal numbers. And we can do some quick addition to give you the total.

Nicole Sarauer: — Sorry to interrupt. I don't mean to interrupt you, but I just want to clarify. Those programs that you're talking about now, were those not in existence prior to January of 2025?

Gina Alexander: — So in response to your question, what I was referencing for the federally funded programs and services is additional funding to support ongoing programs.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. This question is for the minister. Other jurisdictions have declared intimate partner violence in their province an epidemic — Ontario, for example. What is the ministry's position on this? Are you prepared to declare it an epidemic tonight?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thanks for the question. I would say that we will continue to make investments and work towards ending interpersonal and domestic violence continually. The investments need to continue to be made, and we need to continue to focus on this problem until there are no further incidents. So we'll continue to make strides and investments and work on programs, and we will continue to do that until there's not a single case left.

Nicole Sarauer: — I have further questions in this area, but I'm going to pause them because I'm seeing what time it is on the clock, and I want to get to a few other things as well this evening.

Minister, could you provide for the committee the total cost to date for counsel for the UR Pride and Government of Saskatchewan litigation?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — You're talking about an ongoing litigation?

Nicole Sarauer: — Correct.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Yeah. No, we would assert solicitor-client privilege on any ongoing litigation cases. Certainly any costs in budget years for past third-party counsel or things like that are certainly open to disclosure, but an ongoing specific case we would assert solicitor-client privilege for that.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you explain why you're asserting solicitor-client privilege?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Because the matter's ongoing. It's an open litigation, and so we would protect any information relating to solicitor-client privilege on an ongoing matter.

Nicole Sarauer: — Has the ministry made any payments on that matter to outside counsel to date?

Max Bilson: — Thank you for the question. Max Bilson, deputy attorney general. As you're probably aware, there are kind of four basic baskets that we use to analyze whether to retain outside counsel or not. We retain outside counsel if we lack expertise; if we lack capacity; if there's a conflict, you know, for some reason we have a conflict on the file; or for administrative convenience. And an example of that would be maintenance enforcement chambers, that we retain counsel in rural areas of the province and in Saskatoon because it's easier for us to manage that than to have a lawyer on staff.

[18:15]

That said, the matter you're referring to, we determined fit into a couple of those areas. So yes, we've retained outside counsel in that matter. And I think it's a matter of record that that's MacPherson Leslie & Tyerman. And again, we're not going to speak to the amounts paid in that litigation until the matter is concluded. And yeah, we'll leave it at that.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. I'm not disputing the why of retaining outside counsel; I'm merely inquiring about the cost. And as you well know, Minister, the matter is currently on reserve at the Court of Appeal on a preliminary issue. King's Bench hasn't even heard the substantive application yet. It will

likely be years before this litigation is concluded — years of expenditure of money on this litigation.

Again I ask the minister why the people of the province should wait years to find out what the costs of this litigation have been when, as you and I both know, likely the outside counsel is paid on an ongoing invoicing. And there have, I'm sure, been expenditures paid to date.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Again I would restate that the matter of a retainer for ongoing counsel in an ongoing matter is a very tightly held matter of solicitor-client privilege in any litigation that I've ever been involved in. So while we're certainly happy to discuss the estimates for this year's budget, divulging something beyond solicitor-client privilege is not something that we're comfortable doing at the table tonight.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. But just to be clear, the government is the client. The ministry is the client. So as the client you have the right to waive solicitor-client privilege at any point that you deem necessary.

But I see I'm not going to get an answer, so I'm going to move on to ask about the Economic Impact Assessment Tribunal, which I have not seen any mention of in the business plan or in the estimates or in your opening remarks. Can you give some information to the committee about the status of that tribunal?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thanks for the question. So the Economic Impact Assessment Tribunal doesn't currently have any referred matters to it, and so it stands ready and waiting for a referral. The tribunal members that have been appointed are certainly prepared to receive any referrals, but given that there are none currently before the tribunal, there's no staff on a day-to-day basis. It would be staffed and receive a referral in the event that one was provided.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay, thank you. That was going to be my question. Last estimates there were two FTEs allocated to the tribunal. Are you saying at this point in time there are no FTEs?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Currently we have funds budgeted for the tribunal in the event that it's necessary, but there's no positions currently filled because there are no matters before the tribunal.

Nicole Sarauer: — How much is budgeted for the tribunal for this year?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — 212,000.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Are there any plans to utilize the tribunal in this fiscal year?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — So we won't speculate whether or not the tribunal will be necessary, but it certainly stands ready in the event that cabinet direction was provided and they were engaged.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Can you explain for the committee what the CBOs [community-based organization] that receive funding through Justice will receive in terms of an increase to funding in this fiscal?

Brad Gurash: — Brad Gurash, assistant deputy minister, corporate services. So for '25-26, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General includes 26.215 million for community-based organizations. This includes an increase of $720,000, or 3 per cent. As a government, we're committed to working with communities and community-based partners to make life better for everyone in Saskatchewan. And the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's investments in CBOs support organizations that work to address the impact of interpersonal violence and abuse and contribute to the delivery of the Aboriginal court worker program.

Some of the areas that we fund are family violence intervention, sexual assault transfers, transition houses, the family intervention rapid support teams, transportation transfers, second-stage housing, enhanced residential services, victim advocate case reviews, and other interpersonal violence and abuse programming.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. So just to clarify, I believe you just said that all organizations, all CBOs, would be receiving a 3 per cent increase.

Brad Gurash: — Correct.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. I want to ask about second-stage shelters in particular. There was mentioned in remarks at some point that this represents additional funding for second-stage shelters. Are you referencing the 3 per cent increase? Or is it an increase that was reflected in the . . . I believe it was a three-year plan for funding? Or is it additional funding on top of what I've just mentioned?

Brad Gurash: — For the second-stage housing it is just the 3 per cent this year, as all CBOs get.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Do you know how much that amounts to on a per-unit basis?

Brad Gurash: — The funding would be 4,000 per unit plus the 3 per cent.

Nicole Sarauer: — You can correct me if I'm wrong. Last time I checked, Alberta provides funding for their second-stage shelters at a rate of $10,000 per unit. Is there any plans for expanding our supports for second-stage shelters to match what other jurisdictions do? I understand, from speaking to second-stage shelters, that the money currently provided by the province is not adequate to meet the needs.

Kimberly Kratzig: — We work with our second-stage funding partners to understand the needs to ensure that they're able to deliver these very important services and that they're funded accordingly.

In terms of the comparison to other provinces, without really doing a sort of jurisdictional scan to ensure that we are comparing apples to apples, understanding what another province might fund within that bucket . . . We might fund it a certain way through Justice, and maybe another ministry in the human service sector is providing a different level of support to those same clients. So we don't really comment on sort of the interjurisdictional comparison without understanding exactly

what the various funding regimes are. But we do work closely with our partners to understand what their funding needs are.

[18:30]

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Moving on to another topic, I understand that there has been some work on an Indigenous court project based out of Saskatoon. Can you provide a status update on that project?

Rory Jensen: — The Chief Judge of the Provincial Court is interested in exploring the potential for having an Indigenous court in Saskatchewan. She's asked the ministry for support in completing that analysis. Once she has that documentation and analysis done, that would be a decision of the Chief Judge to establish a new court similar to other therapeutic courts where it's the purview of the court.

But the ministry is working with the Provincial Court and the Chief Judge to complete analysis on the potential for Indigenous court in Saskatchewan.

Nicole Sarauer: — Is there a timeline to completion of that analysis?

Rory Jensen: — I know that Chief Judge is interested in this and I know that she would be looking for this work to begin this year and if possible to be completed in the fiscal year, but within the next 12 to 18 months.

Nicole Sarauer: — Do you have a certain amount of dollars allocated to assisting with this project?

Rory Jensen: — Right now we do not have funds specifically allocated to this project, but we're working with the Provincial Court to identify what potential costs could be.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — If I could just add, I think it's important to note that we're exploring interest here. It's not something that has been budgeted because it hasn't gotten far enough along that conversation yet.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Being cognizant of the time, I want to ask a quick question around the Aboriginal court worker program. Last time I had the opportunity to talk about this, which I believe was two years ago, I don't think I had time to ask questions about this last fiscal. The program expansion that was planned was actually put on pause to review the program as a whole is what was told to me in last estimates. What's the status of this review, and what's the status of the program as a whole?

Rory Jensen: — So the Aboriginal court work program, it enhances access to justice by helping Indigenous people receive fair, just, equitable, culturally sensitive treatment for the court. Right now it serves over 5,000 clients annually.

In 2023 we completed a review of the program. The primary focus of the review was to ensure that there were accountable provisions, that there was consistent service across the province, that there was verification that the programs were operating effectively, and to ensure that there was equitable access and similar services across the province so each area of the province was receiving similar services throughout the province.

This program continues to operate, and we also provided additional — it's subject to the CBO lift — so there's additional fundings going through as part of the CBO lift that other community-based organizations are receiving.

Nicole Sarauer: — How many Aboriginal court workers are there currently?

Rory Jensen: — The Ministry of Justice works through 10 carrier agencies. I don't have the number of FTEs or employees with each agency with me, but we do contract with 10 agencies throughout the province.

Nicole Sarauer: — The ministry has been able to tell me how many in the past. Has there been a change in how this program is operating from previous years?

Rory Jensen: — No, I just don't have the number of employees with me.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you commit to providing that information at a later date?

Rory Jensen: — Yeah. Yes.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. I have a few questions — I have many questions — for the coroner's office. I'm going to have to condense them. But I'm wondering if the coroner could provide some information on statistics that their office is experiencing and how that's changed from last year.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Sorry, was there a question?

Nicole Sarauer: — Yes, I was asking for stats. Office stats of . . .

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Stats on what? Specifically.

Nicole Sarauer: — Deaths and amounts that those have changed. Usually in . . . sorry, I understand that there's a few new folks around the table. But typically the coroner's office has a plethora of stats that they are willing to provide the committee in terms of where the pressure points are at their office, amount of deaths they've had to investigate, all that sort of thing. If you need further details than that I can dig them up and provide them.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — I guess we're just . . . We want to be accurate in terms of the stats that you're looking for. Like the 2024 . . .

Nicole Sarauer: — Yeah, the most currently available stats and how they compare to the year previous.

Jeff Wagner: — Good evening. Jeff Wagner, Chief Coroner for the Saskatchewan Coroners Service. So for cases, there are approximately 11,000 deaths that occur in Saskatchewan every year. In 2024 the coroners service investigated 2,958 cases, which was 35 less than we saw in '23. It represented a 1.2 per cent decrease.

[18:45]

For deaths involving children from 2020 to '24 there were 723

deaths of children and youth from birth to the age of 18 in Saskatchewan. Of those deaths, 409 were without underlying medical causes. The average number of children dying from preventable deaths — unnatural causes, which would be accident, homicide, or suicide — on average is 47 between 2021-24.

So for '24 we had 65 deaths that were between the ages of 0 to 18 and deemed to be children. This was a decrease of 37 less than the previous year of 102. And out of those 65 deaths, 20 were from natural causes, 45 were from unnatural causes — again, accident, homicide, or suicide — and five of those would have been in the care of Social Services. We still have eight cases that are pending.

Drug toxicity deaths, in 2024 we had 346 confirmed and suspected drug tox deaths. This was 112 less than in 2023 and represented a 24 per cent decrease. For post-mortem examinations, in 2024 we conducted 834 post-mortem examinations, which is a decrease of 109 or 12 per cent from 2023. The body transports, for 2023-24 fiscal year we conducted 2,090 body transports. This was 142 less than the previous year and represented a 6.4 per cent decrease. We're projecting a 10.3 decrease for '24-25. And then for inquests we had, in 2024 we conducted 12 inquests.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Those are the stats I was looking for. I really appreciate that. You went over one really quickly that I was keen to learn about. I think you answered it, but can you repeat it for me? How many of those deaths that you had mentioned were children in care of the Ministry of Social Services?

Jeff Wagner: — There's five that were in care, and we still have eight cases that are still pending.

Nicole Sarauer: — Five for the last year?

Jeff Wagner: — That's for '24, yeah.

Nicole Sarauer: — For '24. And eight still pending. What is the status of the child death review proposal?

Rory Jensen: — So Saskatchewan investigates child deaths through a variety of unique mechanisms. The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth investigates deaths of children in care as do ministries responsible for the care of those children. SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] and police services investigate traffic-related fatalities. The health care system investigates the death of some children in hospitals. First Nations and Inuit health branch, a federal government organization, investigate death of children on-reserve from communicable disease. And the coroners service investigates sudden and unexpected deaths.

Over the next year, the ministry is going to conduct a jurisdictional scan to compare how Saskatchewan investigates the death of minors in comparison to the other jurisdictions across the country to determine if there's any gaps in the investigations completed and the communication between various organizations within government. Once that investigation and jurisdictional scan is completed, we will then make determinations on our next steps for any further . . . We'll make determinations on our next steps.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for that explanation. This is a recommendation that has been on the books for several years now. Can the ministry explain why implementing this recommendation has been taking so long?

Kimberly Kratzig: — Thank you. This is a matter that the ministry has been looking at and considering for the past several years, as my colleague ADM [assistant deputy minister] Jensen mentioned. There has been a child death review stakeholder committee that has looked at this issue as well. And I think, as ADM Jensen outlined, we have a variety of mechanisms that are looking at child deaths. What we're trying to understand now, the provinces that do have review committees, do they have the same connections that we have as a small province that works closely together? So we really want to understand are there any gaps before we make that next decision to determine if there are gaps that we have that we need to close.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for that. Being cognizant of the time, I do have a few questions for Legal Aid. I will have to condense the questions that I do have, but I'm wondering if Legal Aid could provide some information on readily available, most recent file amounts, clients, usage of the program for Saskatchewan.

Jayne Mallin: — Apologies for the delay. Jayne Mallin, CEO [chief executive officer], Legal Aid Saskatchewan. As of 2023 we've had an increase in full-service files handled by Legal Aid Saskatchewan. Last year we had full-service files of 14,707. This year we took on 17,972 full-service files. 15,388 of those files were assigned to staff, 2,584 assigned to the private bar due to conflict and other operational requirements.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Has the increase in demand for your services been felt across the province and across the board in terms of matters? Or are there particular pressure points that you're experiencing?

Jayne Mallin: — We have seen pressure points in different locations. Certainly we're noticing increases in some of our rural points. Meadow Lake in particular, we're seeing increases. We are seeing increases in youth files in Saskatoon. And we are seeing increased numbers generally in Regina and Saskatoon, in the urban centres. Overall I think we were looking at about a 12 per cent increase across the board, with some regional variation.

Nicole Sarauer: — Has your staff complement also increased by 12 per cent?

Jayne Mallin: — I don't have the percentage increase. Our staff complement has increased. I can get that number for you.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. I was also wondering about Legal Aid's current financial eligibility guidelines. How do they compare with other jurisdictions?

Jayne Mallin: — I would have to get that to you. I don't have it in front of me, how they compare. But we certainly look at our financial eligibility guidelines as they compare to other jurisdictions from time to time. I don't have that information in front of me.

Nicole Sarauer: — No, I appreciate that. Thank you. If you can provide that at a later date, that would be lovely. I forgot to ask, in your pressure points that you're experiencing, is it criminal or is it criminal and family that you're experiencing?

Jayne Mallin: — The pressure point's mainly in the area of criminal. Where we are finding pressures in the area of family law is with respect to finding private bar lawyers who can take on the work. So the pressure is being felt by our staff, but the pressure in numbers is more prominent in the criminal law services.

Nicole Sarauer: — Historically there have been instances where Legal Aid is able to provide the committee average file load numbers per lawyer. Are you able to provide that information to the committee tonight?

Jayne Mallin: — I'm unable to provide exact numbers. The reason for that is we have a new vice-president of operations and administration, and she is currently working through our data and our data framework and looking to update those numbers.

[19:00]

We used a point scale to determine our file numbers and weighted them based on whether it was criminal, family, or duty counsel file. And we're looking at better ways to evaluate. I can tell you that, based on the way we did calculate our numbers, there hasn't been a significant increase in file load for individual lawyers.

Nicole Sarauer: — From Legal Aid's perspective, have there been any challenges with file delay within the court system? And if the answer is yes, are there any indications of what the challenges are a result of?

Jayne Mallin: — I have not had it brought to my attention by legal directors or staff lawyers that there has been any increase in delay. And I can again ask, but it hasn't been brought to my attention.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Are you able to provide any information to the committee on access to counsel in terms of client is approved and then their first meeting with counsel? I understand that varies from location to location — it has historically — and of course varies from matter to matter. Do you have that information available tonight?

Jayne Mallin: — So I can tell you generally overall our average wait times have improved quite significantly. Our goal is 85 per cent of our clients to speak with a lawyer within three weeks. That does not include individuals receiving duty counsel services, as they typically speak to a lawyer on the date of service provided.

And so what I can tell you is our average wait time, based on location, varies from a low of four days to a high of 40 days. And in youth that varies from a low of six days to a high of 40 days. Family is a range of 5 to 27 days.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you provide to the committee where the high stress points are in the numbers that you just provided?

Jayne Mallin: — Yeah. The highest wait time in adult criminal was in Regina rural. That's down significantly from 90 in previous years. And in youth criminal, it is a delay . . . The 40 days wait time is in Swift Current. And in family, the highest at 27 is Saskatoon city.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for that information. I appreciate it. The ministry has in the past been able to provide to the committee information as to how many criminal matters were stayed due to delay in the previous fiscal. Is the ministry able to provide that information this evening?

Elizabeth Hilts: — Good evening. Elizabeth Hilts, assistant deputy attorney general for public prosecutions. I don't have a year-by-year breakdown. I think that's information that we could get, and I can certainly, you know, make arrangements to provide that information to you for 2024.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you so much. I greatly appreciate it. At this time I know my colleague has questions about human rights, so I'm going to pass the baton on to her. I do want to take this opportunity though to thank the minister for answering my questions and in particular thank the officials for all of their work every single day, but in addition, answering my questions this evening. Your passion for your work is noted and very much appreciated, and just a heartfelt thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — Minister McLeod, just a response? Go ahead.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Yeah, if I could. Thank you, and thank you to Ms. Sarauer for her very thoughtful questions and patience as we endeavoured to provide the answers the best we could. I will return to my chair to give some closing remarks at the end of this committee's sitting, but for the next round of questions I'll ask my colleague, Minister Ross, to take this chair.

Chair B. McLeod: — And as Minister Ross comes to the table, we'll open the floor for questions. MLA Roy.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you. So just a few questions to begin on the Sask Human Rights Commission. What is the percentage breakdown in the budget or in full-time equivalents, actually both, between the proactive work that that commission does, like education and outreach, and the reactive work that it does, like investigations, adjudication?

Kylie Head: — Thank you. Kylie Head, assistant deputy attorney general. We do have a breakdown here of the percentage of staff that are allocated to each sort of business line that they have. So the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission has an intake process, and 14 per cent of their staff costs are allocated towards that intake. From there, if you move on in the process, you move on to a mediator. Twelve per cent of the staffing cost is allocated towards mediation. If the matter is not resolved at mediation, then you move on to an investigator, and that makes up 16 per cent of the staffing cost at the Human Rights Commission.

If the matter then is proceeding on — and actually throughout they can receive legal advice — legal advice is 11 per cent of the staffing costs. And then the systemic initiatives piece that you were speaking about, the educational proactive piece, is 8 per

cent of the staffing cost. And then there's a small, little sort of miscellaneous administrative services type cost as well, which is 5 per cent.

Jacqueline Roy: — Perfect, thanks. I know in speaking to some of the SHRC [Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission] officials late last year, they had expressed an interest in making it more of a 50/50 balance between those two. Has that been taken into account during this budget?

Kylie Head: — So we have had ongoing conversations with the Chief Commissioner at the Human Rights Commission. And we are aware that there is an increased interest in their part on working on systemic initiatives and that they would like to spend more of their time and resources on that work.

We are in conversation with them about what that would look like in the future potentially. We're always looking at what are the needs of the Human Rights Commission and what do they need in order to achieve their mandate. They have not specifically said to me the 50 per cent that you've raised, so that was new information. But I would say we are alive to the issue that they would like to see that area increased over time.

But the answer for the coming fiscal year would be the numbers that I provided to you. That would be the breakdown of the budget for '25-26.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay so sort of that 8 per cent, yeah. And don't quote me on 50/50. I just know that they were looking at making it more equal across the board. So thanks for that explanation.

[19:15]

In terms of in-scope versus out-of-scope personnel, what's the current percentage of in-scope versus out-of-scope? And has that changed over the past two or three years, or wherever you have that data?

Kylie Head: — So there can be slight, you know, changes as one individual leaves the office because it's a small office. It's not a huge amount of people. But typically what we have seen there is it's 25 per cent out-of-scope and 75 per cent in-scope.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, and has that remained stable over the past two years or three or five years?

Kylie Head: — Yes.

Jacqueline Roy: — Yes? Okay, thanks. In terms of the use of non-disclosure agreements, what percentage of the resolved complaints result in a non-disclosure or a confidentiality?

Kylie Head: — We don't have that statistic for you tonight, but we can endeavour to get that for you.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, that would be great. What would be a reasonable time frame for that? Would 30 days be enough?

Kylie Head: — I probably would have to speak with the Human Rights Commission. Just . . . I wouldn't want to commit them to something that then they can't live up to. But we would endeavour to get it to you as soon as we reasonably can.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, and could we add to that? Just sort of look at whether the number of . . . whether those number of non-disclosure agreements have been going up over the past year or have been going down. If we can get that info.

Kylie Head: — Okay. We'll endeavour to do that as well.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you. In terms of the timelines for adjudication, what is sort of the median or average time in months that we're looking at for adjudicating complaints before the commission?

Kylie Head: — There can be a lot of variation in terms of what "closed" means. So when I was talking about the percentages earlier, I kind of walked you through the stages of the intake and then the mediation and then the investigation and then proceeding into the legal hearings, like if you were actually to proceed on to court.

So the hope always is that each individual file is closed as early as possible, but if it closes obviously during the mediation phase, it's going to be much quicker, faster than if it proceeds through to litigation. You know, it's very rare that a file would proceed all the way through to King's Bench, so it's not . . . I don't know that I can give you a breakdown in terms of like how long does it normally take for a file to proceed because they would each be so different in terms of where they finish in the process.

But when I look at the Saskatchewan human rights annual report, last year they reported that on average the time to close a file was eight months. So recognizing that some would proceed to litigation and the vast majority would not.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. So would we have a breakdown for the time for those that stop at the mediation level?

Kylie Head: — They try to get to mediation within 45 to 90 days from receipt of the complaint. And I'm just checking on whether there's a statistic around closure.

We'll have to undertake to get you that information.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you. When we look at the public confidence and the complaint withdrawal rates, what percentage of complaints are withdrawn by the person before we actually get to mediation? And what are the most frequently cited reasons for that?

Kylie Head: — We don't have that specific statistic, so we'll have to get back to you on that as well.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, thanks. And does the commission have in place a strategic plan for helping members of the transgender community and for consulting with NGOs [non-governmental organization] in that area?

Kylie Head: — The Human Rights Commission is actually in the process of refreshing their strategic plan, and their four-year strategic plan is expected to be available about mid-May.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. In their previous strategic plan, did

they have anything in place?

Kylie Head: — So looking at the most recently available annual report, it does talk about a number of different initiatives that they had with members of, or organizations involved in, the LGBTQ+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, plus] community. And it also talks about all the other areas that they work.

So I would say it's one of many areas of course alongside disabilities and others. But there are specific examples of systemic partnerships and work that they have done with LGBTQ community.

Jacqueline Roy: — And have they done any work around Bill 137?

Kylie Head: — "Since the passage of Bill 137, the Commission's work has focused on listening to the experiences of students, parents, and teachers about the effects of the new legislation." That's straight out of the annual report.

Jacqueline Roy: — Does the annual report mention anything about advocating on behalf of parents and teachers and students?

Kylie Head: — No.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you.

And of course one that's near, dear, close to my heart — last year in speaking with the Sask Human Rights Commission, I had told them that a petition was coming to hopefully get funding and things in place to address other various literacy and numeracy and behavioural needs in terms of equity access in education. So they had done that study on behalf of the 30 parents who had complained about a lack of access for dyslexia. Is there money that's been put aside this year to take into account that petition and the needs of other students with classroom complexities?

[19:30]

Chair B. McLeod: — I'm just going to just suggest at this point in time that I think we're moving into areas that are not related to this estimate, and I'd like the questions to be more focused and centred on the estimates that are in front of us. Some comments in regards to that are fine, but I'm going to ask MLA Roy to move to estimates in their entirety in that regard. Please answer at this point.

Kylie Head: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We actually were going to recommend that this question be posed to the Ministry of Education because they would be better resourced to answer the question than we are.

Chair B. McLeod: — I appreciate that response and I would agree with that assessment. So MLA Roy, I'll ask you to move to another question then.

Jacqueline Roy: — Perfect, thank you. Regarding the number of complaints that come in, how many are related to workforce versus how many are related to non-workforce incidents?

Kylie Head: — So we have statistics here that are collected by the Human Rights Commission, and they're broken down into a number of different categories. They break it down by . . . Education, so complaints received through education are 2.7 per cent of the overall complaints received. Complaints received through employment are 73.3 per cent of complaints received. Complaints related to housing are 0.7 per cent of complaints received. And complaints related to public services are 23.3 per cent of the complaints received. And that adds up to a total of 100 per cent.

Jacqueline Roy: — And have there been any health care accessibility complaints brought to the human rights council last year or the previous year?

Kylie Head: — Health care services would be embedded as part of public services. It's not separated out into its own separate category, so it would be within the 23.3 per cent of complaints received overall that relate to the public services.

Jacqueline Roy: — That's what I was thinking would be the case. Is it possible then to get a breakdown of the categories of public service and of employment?

Kylie Head: — I can endeavour to do our best. I can't say off the top of my head if the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission keeps statistics to that level, so if we have them I will find them for you.

Jacqueline Roy: — Perfect. Thank you. In terms of interpersonal violence, did the commission have in their last strategic plan and is it looking at putting in their next strategic plan in mid-May, consultations around interpersonal violence . . . or sorry, intimate partner violence?

Kylie Head: — So I have been told — I've just reached out to the Human Rights Commission — that it will be one of the outreach initiatives that they want to focus on in the future for the new strategic plan.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. I'm guessing by that answer then that intimate partner violence was not included in their past report.

Kylie Head: — There's nothing in the annual report that I can see, but I am communicating with her by text, and so I wouldn't say that 100 per cent it's not in there. It's just she's focused on the future. If you'll indulge me, I'll just text her one more time here. We are not able to answer that at this time.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. Could I maybe get that tabled then, or if it comes back in a text?

Kylie Head: — Sure.

Jacqueline Roy: — Perfect. Thanks. That's all I have for . . .

Chair B. McLeod: — Right. And we've reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates for Justice and Attorney General, and we're going to adjourn at this point with these estimates. And I'll just invite Minister Ross if . . . I know that Minister McLeod said he'd have some closing comments, but thank you for your participation and involvement with this committee today. And if there's any further comments at all, Minister Ross.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Just thank you, MLA Roy, for your very well-thought-through questions, and thank you to the officials who were here for support.

Chair B. McLeod: — And thank you so much. And I'll offer the same opportunity for you, MLA Roy.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thanks. So yes, just thank you. I know this is hard work, and I know there's people behind you that are putting in weeks and weeks into those large binders that you bring. And you're spending time away from your kids tonight and your families, and we do greatly appreciate that. Thank you, and thank you of course to Minister Ross as well.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thanks so much, everyone. Then we will adjourn until . . . not adjourn. We will recess. My apologies. I will give Minister McLeod the opportunity for some closing comments in regards to what we've discussed thus far.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to very briefly . . . Again, thanks to MLA Sarauer, and thank you to MLA Roy and the rest of the committee for the first half. And I specifically wanted to say a heartfelt thanks to all of the officials who have joined us here this evening and given very graciously of their time. And they've been just a tremendous support through this process. So before we swap officials, I wanted to make sure that we acknowledge and thanks very much to all the officials that have joined us here. And I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — And thank you for each one of you that were here as well, from me for my part, the expertise and the thoughtful answers that have come. I've been very much appreciative of them. The committee will now recess. You're good? Okay, I want to make sure everybody's covered here. The committee's going to recess until 8 p.m. I'm going to be a bit of a task driver tonight and make this work. Thank you.

[The committee recessed from 19:41 until 20:00.]

General Revenue Fund
Corrections, Policing and Public Safety
Vote 73

Subvote (CP01)

Chair B. McLeod: — Welcome back to all our committee members. And we have a new group of officials with us as well, so welcome to Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. And we're going to move on to the consideration of 2025-26 estimates and 2024-25 supplementary estimates no. 2 for Corrections, Policing and Public Safety and for Firearms Secretariat.

We'll begin with vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, subvote (CP01). Minister McLeod is here with officials. And I would ask that officials please introduce themselves before they speak for the first time, and please don't touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn them on for you when you speak.

My name is Blaine McLeod. I'm the MLA for Lumsden-Morse, and I just appreciate you all being here. And Minister McLeod, please introduce your officials, and we'll welcome your opening comments as well.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good evening to the rest of the committee as well. I'm pleased to introduce the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety's budget for the fiscal year 2025-2026, and I look forward to answering your questions.

This year's budget focuses on how we will continue to support Saskatchewan's Growth Plan by delivering on our commitment to enhance community safety through new and continued investments.

I'm joined tonight by deputy minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, Denise Macza; and Marlo Pritchard, president of Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency; Robert Freberg, commissioner of the Saskatchewan firearms office. Also with me in the room are officials from Corrections, Policing and Public Safety and SPSA [Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency]. We have to my right, Wanda Lamberti, assistant deputy minister, strategy and corporate services. In the room, Corey Zaharuk, assistant deputy minister, policing and community safety; Josh Freistadt, assistant deputy minister, supervision and rehabilitation services; and Scott Harron, assistant deputy minister, custody services.

We have Steve Roberts, vice-president, operations; Laura Debassige, vice-president, corporate services; Michelle Broda, executive director, finance and corporate services; Noel McAvena, executive director, provincial disaster assistance program; and Chief Marshal Rob Cameron. I will ask other officials to introduce themselves if they are required at any time to answer any questions.

Mr. Chair, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety provides supervision and rehabilitation services for adult and young offenders, promotes appropriate and effective policing, and supports community and public safety services throughout the province. SPSA's highly trained personnel protect the people, property, and resources of Saskatchewan from hundreds of wildfire events, flooding, and other types of emergencies.

This budget aligns with our government's record investments in Saskatchewan communities, and it supports our priorities to deliver on community and public safety. In total we are investing $798 million in policing, community, and public safety services for Saskatchewan residents, which includes $118.9 million for the SPSA. Across the ministry this is an increase of $79.3 million over the 2024-2025 budget. The '25-26 budget will invest in policing and community safety; custody, supervision and rehabilitation services; and emergency programs and services. I will now expand on each of the investment areas.

Under enhanced policing and community safety, the first area that I will touch on is policing and community safety. Government provides funding for RCMP operations, First Nations, municipal policing, and the Saskatchewan marshals service. These investments in policing enhance public safety and bolster law enforcement across the province to ensure our communities are safe and secure.

This law enforcement presence extends to Saskatchewan's border with the United States. To enhance security and safety at

the border, the government introduced the Saskatchewan border security plan in January of this year. This plan mobilizes provincial protective service officers, including Highway Patrol, conservation, and canine-handler teams, to work in partnership with provincial policing services and federal agencies to boost law enforcement's presence at and near the border.

One of the largest areas of investment is the funding that we provide for RCMP operations through the provincial police services agreement. This year's budget provides an increase of $7.8 million for RCMP operations, bringing the total investment to $260 million. This funding is used to deliver RCMP policing services to many Saskatchewan rural and First Nations communities.

The First Nations policing program will see an increase of $1.7 million for a total investment of $23.7 million this year. This investment includes continued support for initiatives delivered under the First Nations and Inuit policing program, including community tripartite agreements with communities policed by the RCMP, the Prince Albert Grand Council's self-administered policing feasibility study, the Saskatchewan First Nations community safety officer pilot project, File Hills First Nations Police Service, and community consultative groups in CTA [community tripartite agreement] communities.

Funding to continue public safety commitments that were announced last fall are also included in this year's budget. These include $6 million to hire 50 officers as part of the $11.9 million commitment to hire approximately 100 new municipal police officers; $2.7 million to hire 14 new safer communities and neighbourhoods, or SCAN, personnel to reduce crime by targeting nuisance properties and social disorder; and $1.6 million for the Saskatchewan Police College as part of the government's $2.5 million, three-year commitment to ensure we have the necessary training to support the additional officers that are being hired across our province.

For municipal police services, $22.7 million was allocated to fund 160 municipal police positions, including 17 combined traffic-service positions and additional public safety initiatives through the municipal police grants program. Municipal police grants fund initiatives such as the crime reduction teams and the Saskatchewan trafficking response team, or STRTs.

To give some perspective on the significant impact these teams have on our crime in our province, I will share a few statistics. In 2024 and early '25, these specialized municipal and RCMP policing teams seized more than 62 kilograms of illicit drugs, including over 12 kilograms of fentanyl. This is potentially millions of doses of this dangerous drug that did not make it into any community in our province.

Municipal trafficking response teams investigate the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and people, and they operate out of Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina. Between September and December 2024, these teams opened 110 human trafficking files and initiated 67 human trafficking interventions. These are just a few of the many examples of how these strong policing partnerships help deliver on safer communities.

The Saskatchewan marshals service, or SMS, will commence operations in the coming months with the deployment of 17 fully trained officers. This is a full year ahead of schedule. $12.4 million is provided in this year's budget to operationalize and prepare the SMS for its launch. This includes hiring approximately 50 new officers and support staff for the SMS. The SMS will focus on provincial policing priorities, including gangs, illegal weapons, and drugs, along with apprehending prolific and high-risk offenders that pose a public safety risk.

The SMS will support RCMP and municipal police operations and engage with First Nations and other communities to address high-impact, high-risk crimes. Once operational, the SMS will also provide specialized and emergency enforcement as needed.

$666,000 has been earmarked in this year's budget to hire six weigh scale operators. These operators will enhance the frequency our weigh stations are open to conduct commercial vehicle inspections focusing on safety standards and the transportation of contraband and illicit substances. The addition of the weigh scale operators will allow Saskatchewan Highway Patrol officers to focus on patrolling highways across the province, including near the border and other public safety priorities.

This year's budget invests $835,000 for deputy sheriffs to increase their capacity for prisoner transport. RCMP officers are currently responsible for some prisoner transport in specific locations. The initial support from deputy sheriffs will allow RCMP who have traditionally taken these duties to focus on other core policing duties.

For custody and community corrections services, the 2025-2026 budget also represents a significant investment into our provincial correctional facilities and services to support individuals in successfully reintegrating back into their communities.

Last year we expanded our partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society from 88,000 to $165,000 annually to help women leaving custody navigate existing community supports such as housing, mental health, addictions supports, employment supports, income assistance, and family reunification. This year we are continuing that investment and adding another $280,000 annually to help the Elizabeth Fry Society provide wraparound services at a 10-unit residence they recently acquired.

These services and supports are key to the reintegration of female offenders housed through the Elizabeth Fry Society. Many of the women in custody are repeat offenders. Working with community partners to help them successfully reintegrate back into their communities is key to breaking that cycle and helping reduce capacity pressures at our custody facilities.

As part of our commitment to working with our Indigenous partners, the ministry is proud to continue its relationship with the Saskatoon Tribal Council to bring their expertise, energy, and efforts to support offenders. This partnership is productive, and we enjoy working alongside our partners to help people improve their lives and find success.

The 2025-26 budget continues investments of $1.6 million for STC [Saskatoon Tribal Council] for the delivery of culturally appropriate reintegration and healing supports. This funding includes a program to provide female offenders with safe and

successful reintegration services. The program has a strong focus on gendered and culturally responsive approaches to reintegration, and it provides up to 18 months of intensive supports to female offenders who are reincarcerated on minor offences.

This strong partnership with STC includes the sîhtoskâtowin program at Urban Camp for male offenders to support their reintegration efforts. This program was introduced in 2024 and sees correctional workers and the STC jointly creating tailored case plans for men who are leaving custody. The STC helps by providing culturally relevant reintegration services such as access to cultural ceremonies, housing, and income assistance; support to attend court and abide by court conditions; training and education; as well as mental health and addiction referrals.

In 2024-25 we implemented a single addictions recovery support model for all opioid agonist therapy in correctional facilities. This has tripled the number of people accessing this important therapy. In 2025-26 we will continue to invest in this and other addictions programs. We will continue to invest $1.3 million in the delivery of dedicated substance abuse treatment units and 814,000 for the Saskatchewan Health Authority addictions counsellors in adult custody facilities to deliver counselling and programming.

Custody services staff also deliver in-house addictions education programs and arrange for volunteers to run Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Further we will continue our work to reduce repeat offending and associated violence by helping gang-affiliated individuals exit gangs through programming and community supports such as our $1.1 million funding partnership with Str8 Up. These programs demonstrate our commitment to giving people the opportunity to start their recovery journey within and beyond the correctional facilities.

In corrections, to ensure that our correctional facilities are safe for offenders, staff, and public, this year's budget includes $11.7 million to complete and open the Saskatoon Correctional Centre expansion this summer. Once opened, it will add 312 beds for male offenders to help alleviate overcrowding pressures in the system. It will also provide an enhanced ability to manage our inmate population and free up space for programming to help offenders find a better path in life and ensure our infrastructure is maintained to necessary standards.

This year the ministry will also receive funding to begin work on a new 312-bed women's centre on the grounds of the Regina Correctional Centre. This facility will alleviate the pressures we have been experiencing at Pine Grove Correctional Centre and across the system, but it will do more than this. By having a facility in the south of the province, we'll be able to keep offenders closer to home and closer to their families. It will also provide more space in the facility to provide programming to help these individuals find a better path in life.

[20:15]

As part of our effort to continue building capacity for the supervision of offenders, we are also investing $1.1 million this year into the electronic monitoring program. This investment will allow us to add the staff and equipment necessary to place an additional 50 offenders released into communities on constant GPS [global positioning system] surveillance. That brings the capacity of electronic monitoring up to 360 offenders. Expanding this program ensures increased public safety through more stringent monitoring of individuals that judges can decide should be managed in the community. It also helps address custody pressures while ensuring public safety.

To ensure a safe and supportive work environment for our front-line staff, the ministry uses recruitment and training initiatives to ensure that we have the workforce in place to help keep Saskatchewan people and communities safe. In 2024 the workforce and planning development team used targeted recruitment strategies that resulted in more than double the number of corrections officers and facility youth workers that were recruited and hired across the province. The ministry is setting these new recruits up for success through effective training to ensure they are confident in their skills.

These focused recruitment strategies have and will continue to prioritize Indigenous candidates, increase female representation, and enhance workplace diversity. The ministry will continue to strengthen its efforts to be an employer of choice in the current labour market.

Under the SPSA, the 2025-26 budget provides the SPSA with a $40.5 million increase for the grant to the agency, including $3.8 million for operating and $36.7 million in capital for the next-generation air tanker fleet. As you may recall, the 2024 response season was extremely busy with 595 wildfires, which is well above the five-year average of 393. Approximately 942,000 hectares burned.

Due to the intensity of the wildfire season, the SPSA requested assistance from seven other provinces and its international partners. However the agency was also able to assist 11 other jurisdictions across North America by supplying personnel and equipment.

Last year the SPSA needed to deploy two separate incident management teams to address five major fires that posed a direct threat to several communities. The agency is busy preparing for the upcoming wildfire season by assessing moisture and runoff conditions, recruiting and training crews, as well as preparing equipment and aircraft. SPSA is also about to launch its annual awareness campaigns to encourage residents and youth to prevent wildfires.

The budget includes a $36.7 million investment in SPSA's four-year plan to purchase four air tanker aircrafts to enhance our response to wildfire emergencies and assist in evaluation and patient transports.

In conclusion, as highlighted in my comments, the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety continues to deliver on policing and community safety services for residents across Saskatchewan. The funding in this fiscal year will ensure Saskatchewan remains safe and secure for all of our citizens to live, work, and raise a family. I'm now pleased to answer any questions about the plan or the budget for the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you, Minister. I will now open the

floor to questions. MLA Sarauer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. And I just first want to thank all of the many officials for being here this evening. Greatly appreciate your time as well as your service.

I feel like I always start with policing when we do CPPS [Corrections, Policing and Public Safety], so I'm going to switch things up and start with corrections this time around. Could the ministry provide point-in-time counts for all of the adult facilities?

Scott Harron: — Scott Harron, assistant deputy minister, custody services. You're looking for point in count. I assume you're looking for utilization percentages as well.

Nicole Sarauer: — It's almost like we've done this before.

Scott Harron: — Almost as if this happens every year.

Nicole Sarauer: — Yes.

Scott Harron: — And do you want last year's number at this time as well?

Nicole Sarauer: — I would love percentage change if you have, or whatever's easiest for you.

Scott Harron: — I can give you the point-in-time count and the utilization for both years, if that helps.

Nicole Sarauer: — Perfect. I'll do the math. Thank you.

Scott Harron: — Okay. So these are the numbers for April 14th, 2025. I pulled the numbers off this morning. Total adult count today was 2,260 in the adult system. That's about 104 per cent capacity. Last year at this time it was 2,295, or 108 per cent capacity. I think it's worth noting this is probably the first year in quite a long time that our custody count is actually down compared to last year by approximately 1.5 per cent. Which, you know, we're too early in the year to see if that's going to be a trend but it's a hopeful sign.

At the Regina Correctional Centre there are 679 inmates, or 87 per cent capacity. Last year at this time there were 780, or 100 per cent capacity.

At the Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford, 65 inmates, or 68 per cent capacity compared to 46 last year, or 64 per cent capacity. Now that's because we opened those contingency units, which is why the utilization is a little bit different . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Which one?

Nicole Sarauer: — Pine Grove contingency?

Scott Harron: — Yes.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay, thanks.

Scott Harron: — There are 20 in the impaired driver treatment program, or 67 per cent capacity compared to 26, or 87 per cent capacity last year.

White Birch, which is a female unit based out of Paul Dojack Youth Centre, has 36, or 106 per cent capacity. Last year there were 16, or 100 per cent. This is because a couple months ago we opened a second unit at White Birch, transferring the women who were in the overflow unit at Prince Albert Youth Residence down to Paul Dojack. It was just a better setup. That also allowed us to move the secure youth back to Prince Albert so they could be closer to their families. So it was kind of win-win.

Whitespruce training facility — that's the one out in Yorkton — has 30 right now, or 77 per cent. Last year it was 19, or 49 per cent capacity. The team did a really good job this year at making sure that we're keeping our reduced custody facilities up and running, and in particular out there in the community helping the local area clean up parks or do construction, that sort of thing. Besnard Lake, our other reduced custody facility, is at 18, or 72 per cent. That's the same as last year.

Saskatoon Correctional Centre is at 599, or 118 per cent as compared to 547, or 108 per cent last year, so it is up. As the minister mentioned, of course we have the new Saskatoon expansion opening up in the summer. We actually have some staff up there right now kind of doing drills, getting prepared for opening, getting to kind of know the building, which will add 312 beds to the system.

Prince Albert Correctional Centre is 587, or 119 per cent right now. That is down from 615 this time last year, or 124 per cent. PACC [Prince Albert Correctional Centre] will be another one of those places we'll probably likely transfer some people out of when the new expansion opens up, just to give them a little bit of space that we can convert back to programming space. And finally Pine Grove is at 224, or 135 per cent capacity compared to 228, or 137 per cent capacity last year.

Moving on to the youth system, we have 100 youth in custody right now. That's 72 per cent capacity. We had 109 last year at 78 per cent capacity, so again we're a little bit down, which is nice to see. Paul Dojack is at 51 youth, 64 per cent capacity compared to 74, or 93 per cent last year. Kilburn Hall is at 35, or 78 per cent capacity compared to 25, or 56 per cent capacity last year. And Prince Albert Youth Residence is at 14, 100 per cent capacity — that's that opening of that secure wing backup — compared to 10 last year at 71 per cent.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Are you able to provide the percentage of remand versus sentenced offenders per facility as well?

Scott Harron: — I don't have it per facility on me. I can probably run the numbers while we're here, but I can give you the full system remand.

Nicole Sarauer: — Global would be great. Yeah, thank you.

Scott Harron: — Pardon?

Nicole Sarauer: — That would be great. Thanks.

Scott Harron: — Sure. Right now today we are at 61.6 per cent remand. This is compared to 60 per cent remand last year at this time. Now the important thing to note is the range over the last three months of remand has been between 58 and 62 per cent,

which has held more or less status quo over the last three years. Also important to know, that with the exception of PEI [Prince Edward Island], we are best positioned in Canada when it comes to our remand numbers. The national average is about 73 per cent. On either side: Alberta, at least according to the Stats Canada — this is 2022-23 — data, Alberta is at 79 per cent and Manitoba's at 75 per cent. Ontario is at 80 per cent. So we're sitting one of the best in Canada when it comes to our remand numbers. And holding steady over the last couple of years is certainly a good sign.

Nicole Sarauer: — You've mentioned that this reduction in numbers, it's too soon to determine it as an actual trend. I'm talking about the point-in-time counts in particular. But I'm curious to know, when you're looking at the numbers, if you would describe what's happening right now as an anomaly or if it's pointing towards something significant that's happening in the system.

Scott Harron: — It's still probably too early to conclude. It'd be speculation at this time. We'll monitor the numbers over the next year — we monitor it quite closely on a daily, weekly basis — and we'll see how the trends come out this year before we can draw any conclusions.

Nicole Sarauer: — Do you know if other jurisdictions are experiencing something similar?

Scott Harron: — No, I'm not sure.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay. Now it's late, but I did catch that the Saskatoon . . . It's now being rephrased a little bit, what the Saskatoon Correctional Centre expansion is. It used to be called a new remand centre, and it was going to house men and women offenders. Can you explain, is this not simply for remand anymore? Is this going to house sentenced offenders as well as remand inmates?

This is a bit of a change from last year, so just catch me if I'm reading too much into the change in wording here, or if there has been a change in direction for what this new facility will be.

Scott Harron: — So the remand centre was the working name of the centre at the time. It was always the case that this was likely going to be used for both remand and sentenced as the case may be. We don't want to box ourselves in to one or the other. You know, there's pressures throughout the system. We want to make sure we're addressing those types of pressures.

[20:30]

It will also be the front face of the building now. So it will be a brand new spot where people come in, so we didn't want to kind of box that in. In terms of women, the women's wing wasn't part of it as of a couple of years ago. I think we mentioned that at estimates before.

We expect that if it's necessary there will be a wing in the old SCC [Saskatoon Correctional Centre] building that can be converted to women in order to provide space. But of course as the minister mentioned in his opening speech, we received funding in this budget cycle to begin the design and planning of a new 312-bed women's facility on the grounds of Regina corrections centre, and that will be the long-term capacity solution for women.

Nicole Sarauer: — When is the projected opening date of the Saskatoon expansion?

Scott Harron: — We will have staff in there likely June 2025 with the first offenders moving in in the summer once we get everything kind of sorted out.

Nicole Sarauer: — How many additional FTEs have been or are being hired for the centre expansion?

Scott Harron: — So the total FTE for the building is 130 staff. Of course it's a 24-hour facility, so you need a fair number of people to run these things. We received 45 FTEs in the '24-25 fiscal year, and we received 71 FTEs in this fiscal year. Hard to say how many of those have been hired. We will be hiring those 71s over the course of the year, and I believe all 45 were hired last year. There won't be 300 offenders that appear overnight, so we will be hiring those kind of as we go over the course of the year.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. And are you targeting for this expansion facility any particular type of offender, or is it more to relieve geographic hot points that you currently have in your facilities?

Scott Harron: — Saskatoon or the new women's build?

Nicole Sarauer: — Saskatoon. Not Regina yet. I'll move into that soon.

Scott Harron: — All right.

Nicole Sarauer: — Saskatoon first.

Scott Harron: — So no specific use of it. We don't want to box ourselves within it. And oftentimes units need to move around based on operational requirements, what the custody population looks like at the time, gang involvement, and that sort of thing. We'll be looking to empty out some of the contingency spaces that are used so that we can convert them back into programming space.

Nicole Sarauer: — Now the Regina facility project. Can you speak a little bit about timelines for that?

Scott Harron: — So the Saskatoon expansion took about four years. This year for the women's build there's going to be the planning and design phase. We won't know what the timelines are until that process has been completed.

Nicole Sarauer: — Apologies if you've already mentioned this. How much money is dedicated for this phase of the Regina project?

Scott Harron: — For this fiscal year?

Nicole Sarauer: — Correct.

Scott Harron: — 7.2 million.

Nicole Sarauer: — Are you already at the stage where you can say where within the current Regina Provincial Correctional Centre footprint the new building will be?

Scott Harron: — Not quite. I think we'll probably leave that to the designers. We've got kind of a notional idea within our head, but of course that's when the designer comes back and tells us that we're out to lunch. So I'll leave that to the professionals.

Nicole Sarauer: — Moving on to Sask Hospital in North Battleford. You had mentioned that there are still some units that are dedicated to Pine Grove inmates. Can you speak a little bit about how many women, Pine Grove women, are currently at Sask Hospital?

Scott Harron: — I've got the numbers from March 31st if that works.

Nicole Sarauer: — Sure.

Scott Harron: — So there were nine women in B; that's the psychiatric unit. There were 20 in both C and D, which are the Pine Grove overflow units.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay, 20. And nine women. I was just about to ask for the non-Pine Grove corrections inmates. So I think you just mentioned nine women on that side. Is that correct? And how many men?

Scott Harron: — 17.

Nicole Sarauer: — 17. What is the percentage utilization for that side?

Scott Harron: — Each one of those is 24 beds. I can do the quick math if you like, but it's pretty easy calculations.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Are there still any units that are not open?

Scott Harron: — No, they're all open now.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay. It has been expressed in the past that there have been some challenges in terms of fully operationalizing the corrections side of Sask Hospital North Battleford. I see that it's still not at capacity and that there are two units being used for Pine Grove inmates. So it seems like it's still a challenge. What is the challenge at this point in time in fully utilizing that space for corrections?

Hon. Tim McLeod: — So the challenge largely remains consistent with previous years. It's a lack of psychiatrists in that particular facility. But as you know, we have the most ambitious health human resources action plan in the country, and we're actively working on recruiting those psychiatrists into the system.

Nicole Sarauer: — Another challenge that had been expressed in years previous, in addition to access to psychiatrists, is the threshold for being qualified to be admitted in, in that you have to be at fairly low risk for violence to be admitted to SHNB [Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford], at least it was at one point. Is that still one of the requirements to be admitted into the hospital?

Scott Harron: — At the end of day, it's up to the psychiatrist who gets admitted to the facility. We can and we do refer people who do have violent offences.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Moving away from Sask Hospital and toward the other adult facilities, could you provide for the committee wait times for inmates to be able to access mental health counsellors?

Joshua Freistadt: — Good evening. Dr. Joshua Freistadt, assistant deputy minister, supervision and rehabilitation services. The short answer is, that's not data we track. The long answer is, there are sort of two predominant ways people get access to mental health care. That is, they may be working with a provider and have insurance, which we'll arrange through a professional visit. And the other will be referrals to the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Nicole Sarauer: — So just so I understand, an inmate, to get mental health counselling, will have to seek either outside counselling to come in on their own, through their insurer, or be referred to SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] and have that SHA employee come in to provide that counselling?

Joshua Freistadt: — So the answer to your question is yes, basically. Our staff aren't trained or qualified psychologists, but they are skilled in a number of case management practices. But if you're looking for formal counselling that is delivered by that sort of profession, then that's delivered through the Health Authority and not through our staff.

Now our staff are skilled and trained in using trauma-informed case management tools including relapse prevention planning, cognitive behavioural therapy approaches, motivational interviewing, and core correctional practices that really work on building rapport with individuals so that they establish comfort talking about issues and so we can determine if they need that sort of referral. We would also employ registered psychiatric nurses and registered nurses who have specialized education to address mental health, substance abuse, and neurodevelopment disorders.

[20:45]

Staff are trained in ASIST, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, and suicide screening is conducted on intake. For high-complexity cases we have the psychiatric option that we just spoke of through Sask Hospital North Battleford. And when offenders are in the community, they access those same community resources that are available to other folks. Having said that, we do have a contract with a forensic clinical psychology post-doctoral fellow that assists with particularly complicated cases.

On the adult side, for serious violent offenders we have a program called the serious violent offender response, which includes a partnership to help deliver cases with mental health professionals from the Canadian Mental Health Association. So there's a contract with that association that places a health worker in each area that has that program, and it costs us about $517,000 for that contract.

Nicole Sarauer: — You mentioned registered psychiatric nurses on staff. But just to clarify, those are only operating out of the Sask Hospital North Battleford. Correct?

Joshua Freistadt: — No, we'll hire registered psychiatric nurses across all of our correctional facilities, as well as RNs [registered nurse].

Nicole Sarauer: — Do you have wait times for accessing registered psychiatric nurses in your facilities that you can provide the committee for any facility other than Sask Hospital?

Joshua Freistadt: — Thank you. There is no wait-list in that those folks are regularly scheduled. So any time during clinic hours, if you're having an acute issue or when you go to see the medical clinic, you'd have access to the registered psychiatric nurses.

Nicole Sarauer: — What about average wait times for psychiatrists or psychologists?

Joshua Freistadt: — So similar to the previous comments, we don't have psychiatrists on staff. We rely on the Sask Health Authority. There is a shortage of psychiatrists across the province that the province is working diligently on addressing, so those wait-lists can range upward on the high end to six months. But the important context there is, as we have psychiatrists coming in to do clinic, they're triaging those cases depending on the acuity of needs.

So some of that wait may be because it's not seen as a particularly urgent issue with the psychiatrists that we have coming in. We do have psychiatry offered at a minimum of four hours a week at each facility, and again, sometimes that's dependent on the availability of psychiatrists in the Health Authority.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Has the ministry ever considered hiring mental health counsellors on staff to address some of these needs?

Joshua Freistadt: — Our preference has been to use community providers in order to ensure that there's continuity of care for those offenders. If we had them on staff, that service ends. And to Scott's comment before, we've got lots of folks in and out of remand on short durations, so connecting them with a community provider is our preferred option.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Moving on to the dedicated substance abuse treatment unit, I don't — correct me if I'm wrong — I don't think I heard anything about expanding the program in this fiscal. Can you tell me what the plan is for the units, whether or not they're going to be expanded this year?

Joshua Freistadt: — So if memory recalls, I think we talked about this a little bit last year too. At that point we indicated, instead of expanding the program, we were going to look to see if we could make some more efficiencies by dealing with the downtime.

Typically that's a five-week program, and there are two to three weeks between cohorts where we're trying to see if we can tighten that up. We looked into those two to three weeks after clients move off the unit and found that there's actually some pretty important work that the SHA-employed addictions counsellors and our own staff do at that time. That includes sort of some closeout paperwork, ensuring there are referrals to the community after someone leaves.

So it's probably not strictly downtime. It's more accurate to think of the whole program as probably seven weeks. Nonetheless we encouraged our staff and our contracted partners with the Saskatchewan Health Authority to make things as efficient as possible and ensure that program moves as many people through as possible.

And I'm pleased to say we saw about a 20 per cent increase in the number of people completing that program, and every facility saw more completions. So we had a total of 360 inmates complete that program last year. We will continue to work with the SHA to see if we can further get additional efficiencies out of there. There's still going to be challenges when you're cohorting and treating it like a classroom, so we'll work with our partners to see what continuous intake may look like and if that gets us even further.

Nicole Sarauer: — That's great news. Can you provide to the committee what the current wait-list is for each unit?

Joshua Freistadt: — So these wait-lists are as of March 1st: at Regina Correctional Centre, 55 inmates; at Pine Grove Correctional Centre, 11 inmates; at Prince Albert Correctional Centre, 28 inmates; and at Saskatoon Correctional Centre, two inmates.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you so much. Could you tell us how many offenders died while in custody in 2024?

Scott Harron: — Scott Harron, assistant deputy minister, custody services. There were four deaths in custody in the '24-25 fiscal year: April 16th, a male at Regina corrections centre; August 17th, a male at the men's Saskatoon Reintegration Unit; December 2nd, a male at SCC, Saskatoon Correctional Centre; and March 23rd, a male at the Saskatoon Correctional Centre. There were also two who passed away in hospital after their charges were withdrawn, so they're not technically deaths in custody, but I want to include them in the list anyway. That's a female at Pine Grove on April 14th and a male at Prince Albert Correctional Centre on July 4th.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Are you able to provide the committee how many individuals are currently being detained in a correctional facility awaiting deportation or facing detention review?

Scott Harron: — No, we don't have any. I believe that contract with the federal government ended back in 2023. We're not essentially in that business anymore.

Nicole Sarauer: — Would they have all been transferred out of province then?

Scott Harron: — That would probably be a question for the federal government.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay. Could you provide the annual cost for the ministry on the contract with Synergy, the inmate phone

service?

[21:00]

Scott Harron: — So the Synergy contract, for anybody who doesn't know, provides telephone services for inmates who are in custody. It also has some specialty features; it's a very specialized type of program to allow monitoring and that sort of thing, so there's no criminal activity and whatnot going on.

I don't have an answer for whether or not it costs us anything. I don't believe it does, because they earn their income directly from their inmates. I do know, as part of that contract, 10 per cent of Synergy's profits actually go back into an inmate trust fund so that the inmates are able to use that fund to provide new equipment or whatever they happen to want on the unit.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Are you able to provide any information as to what the cost is to inmates, and whether or not that has been at the same level over the last five years or whether that's increased or decreased?

Scott Harron: — So the contract was renegotiated back in 2024. There were some changes to the pricing there. Inmates used to receive one free 20-minute local call or free personal call every day. After hearing from the inmates that one 20-minute call wasn't really conducive to what they wanted to do, we negotiated with Synergy to get two free 10-minute calls, which seems to be working a lot better for the inmates.

The local prepaid 20-minute costs $1.25 for an inmate. I believe that's about a 50 per cent reduction from the previous contract. And a local collect call for 20 minutes is $1.75. I believe that's also a 50 per cent decrease from the previous contract. Long distance prepaid 20 minutes per call is $3.25 per 20 minutes. I believe that's up from what the contract was before. And long distance collect calls, the 20-minute maximum is $5.50 for 20 minutes, which is also a little bit up.

So higher on the long distance but lower on the local calls. There's also bundle pricing available to make it cheaper for the inmates if they want to do that. So $20 for 15 calls, $35 for 30 calls, or $60 for 60 calls.

Nicole Sarauer: — Is there a fee associated with putting money into an inmate's account to utilize that service?

Scott Harron: — There's not a fee that I'm aware of. I know back in August 1st, 2023 they also implemented a new online trust deposit method which makes it easier for family and friends to make deposits on behalf of an inmate rather than of course having to come into the centre each time and use the ATM [automated teller machine]-like machine. So a lot more convenient for people to do it through the online portal.

Nicole Sarauer: — You mentioned that the contract was renegotiated in 2024. How long is this current agreement for?

Scott Harron: — Five years and then a possibility of a five-year extension.

Nicole Sarauer: — Could you table the contract for the committee?

Scott Harron: — We'd have to talk with SaskBuilds before we can make a commitment like that. So we're not in a position to answer that today.

Nicole Sarauer: — Do you know how much Synergy has made in profit off of the previous contracts?

Scott Harron: — We don't know the answer to that question. We're not privy to Synergy's internal financial information.

Chair B. McLeod: — I'm going to ask that MLA Sarauer move on from that line of questioning as they're a third-party provider. I don't think that's appropriate. Thank you.

Nicole Sarauer: — Minister, you're well aware of a recent Supreme Court decision, John Howard Society in Saskatchewan, 2025 SCC 6 where some new requirements were placed on the ministry. I'd like to know what the ministry's plan is for implementing those new requirements pursuant to the decision.

Scott Harron: — Thank you. So the impact of that decision was essentially, under current processes, we're not able to use disciplinary segregation or loss of remission anymore. In the short term we'll have to make some changes. We're in the process of evaluating what the impact of that is and what changes may be required in order to be able to use those methods once again.

In the meantime, we've been able to take some things through the minor discipline process, which wasn't touched by the Supreme Court of Canada decision, as well as use our standard tools to move around inmates to minimize conflicts and that sort of thing. The team's highly adaptable. It was certainly a switch, but the team's quite used to being able to pivot on the fly as we need to.

Nicole Sarauer: — There was also, the decision also talks about the role of the decision maker, and there's a requirement in the decision that the decision maker must be independent and impartial. How will the ministry ensure the independence and impartiality of the decision maker, as is now required?

Scott Harron: — So we know we do need an independent adjudicator now for that sort of thing. We also know we need to hit beyond-a-reasonable-doubt standards as required by the Supreme Court of Canada. How we get there is currently what the team is looking at. It's still a fairly recent decision. We are moving as quickly as we can.

Nicole Sarauer: — Will this require the drafting of new regulations or will it be in policy? And in any event, what is the timeline for implementation?

Scott Harron: — So the changes required will depend upon the direction that we go. So whether it's policy changes, regulation changes, is all stuff that our team is currently looking into. The timeline will depend upon similarly which path we decide to take, but in any case we are going to try to get this done as soon as possible. The disciplinary segregation and the loss of earned remission are tools that we do want to have to help control behaviours in the facilities.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for that. I had other questions in

corrections that I wanted to get to, in particular the reintegration work that you're doing. However I'm cognizant of the time. I'm going to move on to policing. Thank you for answering the questions that I've had so far.

And I'm just going to cut to the chase and get to some questions around the marshals. Could you provide some information as to the breakdown in costs to date? In particular I'm thinking assets — vehicles, weapons, uniforms, equipment leased or purchased. We'll start there.

Robert Cameron: — Good evening. Rob Cameron, chief marshal. So what I can do for you is — I've got a list here — I can go through a variety of different items.

Nicole Sarauer: — Great. Thank you.

Robert Cameron: — So we'll start with vehicles. So total spent since the creation of the organization is 1.398 million. The police equipment is 153,534. These are rounded numbers I'm giving you, by the way. Firearms and ammunition, 934,751; office equipment and furniture, 271,872; contribution to the police college is 205,000; firearms accessories, $52,069; uniforms, 171,264; tools, $13,437; storage facilities, 8,500; office supplies, 59,224; training, 1,800; communications, 68,592; and then salaries . . . Well you've asked just about equipment, I guess, at this point.

[21:15]

Nicole Sarauer: — Feel free to give me salaries. I'm going to ask anyways.

Robert Cameron: — Well salaries is 1.776 million rounded.

Nicole Sarauer: — Could you provide a further breakdown in the expenditures on vehicles? And is that all leased or owned?

Robert Cameron: — So the way it works for us is the vehicles are all owned by CVA, so central vehicle agency. They're in essence leased back to us, and we pay a fee to them. So the cost of what I've given you includes equipment and installations that would happen for the vehicles to bring them from, you know, an empty truck to a fully equipped police vehicle.

Nicole Sarauer: — What kind of vehicles are in this 1.398 million that you've mentioned?

Robert Cameron: — You're speaking about make/model kind of vehicles?

Nicole Sarauer: — Trucks? I think you mentioned snowmobiles at one point. Just that kind of level.

Robert Cameron: — Okay, so for our fleet right now we have a variety of SUVs [sport utility vehicle] and trucks as well as we have two snowmobiles.

Nicole Sarauer: — How many SUVs and trucks?

Robert Cameron: — I believe it's six SUVs and the rest are trucks.

Nicole Sarauer: — How many trucks then?

Robert Cameron: — In total we have 42 police vehicles and six of them would be the SUVs and then the rest are trucks.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay, gotcha. What about IT?

Robert Cameron: — Sorry?

Nicole Sarauer: — IT.

Robert Cameron: — IT?

Nicole Sarauer: — Yeah.

Robert Cameron: — Well we use the Saskatchewan government infrastructure for IT, so that would be the network. We also have a variety of other IT components which are not inside the Government of Saskatchewan. For example, CPIC [Canadian Police Information Centre], the intelligence database system through CISS [Criminal Intelligence Service Saskatchewan], as well as the SGI access to the motor vehicle database.

Nicole Sarauer: — How many FTEs do you currently have hired?

Robert Cameron: — At this point we've got 17 officers and then 26 civilian staff at this point.

Nicole Sarauer: — Twenty-six. And correct me if I'm wrong, are those officers currently going through the college?

Robert Cameron: — So 10 of them are at the moment. Those officers are experienced police officers so they're doing our seven-week training program. And then the others are already in a position and trained.

Nicole Sarauer: — So are they already on the ground?

Robert Cameron: — They include myself as chief, as well as my deputy chief, and superintendents and inspectors that started at the organization first. And so they were already in place. So that was seven of them. And there's 10 new EPOs [experienced police officer] that are currently going through training.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you tell me what EPO stands for?

Robert Cameron: — Oh sorry.

Nicole Sarauer: — It's okay.

Robert Cameron: — Experienced police officer.

Nicole Sarauer: — Oh, okay. So are any of those ones who are not currently going through the college, are they currently working on operations or are they doing front-line work?

Robert Cameron: — The seven, they're supervisory or management staff. So they're building the service; they're coordinating the training; they're part of the recruitment process for other police officers and various management and functions within the organization.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay, thank you. You have mentioned there is a building in Prince Albert that is currently being leased. Can you provide the cost of that lease?

Robert Cameron: — One second. So the cost for the provincial headquarters building for us which is in Prince Albert is 242,834 and 46 cents.

Nicole Sarauer: — A year?

Robert Cameron: — Annual cost, right.

Nicole Sarauer: — Annual cost. And how long is that lease for?

Robert Cameron: — I beg your pardon, sorry?

Nicole Sarauer: — How long is that lease for?

Robert Cameron: — So the lease is a five-year lease with an option to extend annually.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. I believe it's been mentioned that there will be a location in North Battleford as well. Can you speak to what the status is of that facility?

Robert Cameron: — So we have announced that we are moving to North Battleford for our first regional headquarters, which is our terminology for, in essence, an operational location that would house a contingent of marshals. At this point in time, we haven't come to where our actual physical location will be inside of that community, and that's still a process we're in right now is to determine that.

Nicole Sarauer: — Do you know how many marshals will be there?

Robert Cameron: — Our initial crew would be around 10. We're looking towards putting 20 in total in that area.

Nicole Sarauer: — Okay. And with P.A. [Prince Albert] being the only facility you have right now that's up and running, is that where all of the 17 officers will be located at this time?

Robert Cameron: — So the majority of the officers are in P.A. right at this moment. I'm the only officer that isn't in P.A. I'm here in Regina.

Nicole Sarauer: — Now I had a question based out of . . . This is the business plan for the Ministry of Corrections, and the budget highlights mentions, at no. 4, that there is $3.6 million to hire 50 positions under the Saskatchewan marshals service. And then right underneath it it says that there'll be 2.7 million to hire 14 SCAN personnel. I'm just wondering how it only costs $1 million more for 36 more marshals than SCAN officers. I must be missing something here, and I'm wondering if you can explain it to me.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thanks for the question. So the 3.6 million for the 50 marshals positions, that's essentially the salary and expenses that Rob had talked about. The 2.7 million for the SCAN personnel also includes the salaries and the capital and accommodations when that team is deployed wherever they may be. So that's the budgeted amount for the SCAN personnel, including the capital costs and the accommodations.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for the clarification. What is the average salary for one of the newly recruited front-line marshals?

Robert Cameron: — So I don't have it as an average. But what I have is a salary range, and then I can probably provide you that. So it ranges from step 1, which is about 95,000 a year, and then it goes up to a maximum of step 6, which is 117,700 a year.

Nicole Sarauer: — Does that include the wage supplement?

[21:30]

Robert Cameron: — That's right.

Nicole Sarauer: — Of the 17 officers that you mentioned are hired in this budget, can you provide information as to where those officers' most recent previous places of employment are?

Robert Cameron: — Of the seven that are currently . . . That's what you said?

Nicole Sarauer: — Seventeen, I believe you said.

Robert Cameron: — Oh, the 17? I couldn't do that today. I would have to go back and look at that.

Chair B. McLeod: — I would ask that the relevance of that question back to the budget . . . I'm questioning the relevance of that to the estimates that are before us.

Nicole Sarauer: — I always know when I'm getting to the good stuff, Mr. Chair, so thank you. I will move on. Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Cameron. I really appreciate it. It's always good to see you, and I appreciate you answering my questions.

I have a question about Highway Patrol officers. Minister, could you provide me with the number of inspections done in the last calendar year?

Corey Zaharuk: — My name is Corey Zaharuk. I'm the assistant deputy minister for policing and community safety services. To give you some context and answer your question, in October 2023 the Saskatchewan Highway Patrol implemented a weigh scale pilot project in Beverley, Saskatchewan, which increased the scale operating time by over 75 per cent. This ensured that we were open 183 days out of the last 283 days of the pilot project.

So I can give you the number of inspections during that pilot period. In those inspections, commercial vehicle safety inspections amounted to 1,471 inspections. The officers issued over 657 tickets at an estimated value of $150,000. CPPS absorbed the cost of the pilot project and the project was concluded in the summer of 2024.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you give me numbers of vehicle inspections previous to that?

Corey Zaharuk: — This evening I'm just prepared to speak to the estimates. I don't have that historic data with me.

Nicole Sarauer: — Could you commit to providing to the committee that historic data leading up to the last four years?

Corey Zaharuk: — So to give you some context, Saskatchewan Highway Patrol came under the provincial protective services branch within the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. But prior to that, me making a commitment tonight, I can't do that because the Saskatchewan Highway Patrol has been under the purview of multiple ministries during the four-year time period that you're asking for.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you commit to providing that information since it's become under the purview of the Ministry of Corrections?

Corey Zaharuk: — I can work to find that answer for you. Some things that are involved here is, I would have to consult with some of my colleagues, extract that information from our records managements system, and we would do the best with it that we could and let you know.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for that. I appreciate that. Let's talk about the Saskatchewan Police College. It's indicated that there are some plans for expanding the work that they do. Can you provide some details?

Brent Penner: — Good evening. My name is Brent Penner, executive director of the Saskatchewan Police Commission. With respect to your question, in this year's budget there is an additional 1.6 million allocated to the police college. Roughly speaking, that is to be allocated about 50 per cent towards increasing our FTE capacity and the other 50 per cent on operating.

Nicole Sarauer: — Can you provide some further details to what that's going to look like?

Brent Penner: — Sure. So one of the things we're trying to do is increase our own instructor complement at the police college. And through that process, we'll be looking to add another seven FTEs. We've already been able to increase that by four, and as the year progresses, we'll be looking to add another three people.

We're trying to bring in that instructor expertise into the police college to make us less reliant on borrowing and paying for police officers to instruct from other services, which is expensive. It also reduces the complement of officers that are able to work at their respective police services because they're at the police college instructing.

Nicole Sarauer: — Is there a current wait time to be able to access a seat at the college?

Brent Penner: — I'm not sure how best to answer that question. Can I ask you to rephrase it?

Nicole Sarauer: — I don't know how best to ask the question. Maybe let's start by . . . How about you provide some context as to how forces are able to utilize the police college?

Brent Penner: — Sure. So traditionally the Saskatchewan Police College has had, on the recruit-training side, two recruit classes per year, and that pretty much has gone on for the last 50 years since it opened in 1974. What we are working on right now is a plan to change how that training occurs, such that we'll be able to increase that capacity and number of recruit-training classes from two, has been the current. Into 2026, looking at either three or four classes, which will increase the number of seats that will be available for municipal and First Nations police services to attend for recruit training.

Nicole Sarauer: — Why was it determined that an increase in seats was needed?

Brent Penner: — Just with respect to the amount of hiring that is going on in policing in our province. Tomorrow morning, for example, I'm at a meeting at the college where we'll be going through the seat requests for our next intake which will be happening in July. We'll make determinations on how many seats are allocated to the various police services in the province and be communicating that to them next week.

Traditionally the police college has, I think, done well to adapt to those needs. We're working on a plan to streamline the number of seats that will be available per class. There's a couple reasons that we're looking to do that. One, it will provide more certainty to the police services on the number of seats available. And it'll also allow us to do a better job in budgeting and forecasting the cost per recruit class with instructor needs as opposed to fluctuating up and down, I guess, as it has been over the years.

Nicole Sarauer: — How often are you unable to accommodate the seat requests made by varying forces?

Brent Penner: — Yeah, to my knowledge — and I've only been in the position less than a year — it happened during COVID or a few years back where Saskatoon and Regina made determinations to send a small number of recruits to be trained at Depot. I think that number is under six in total. And I guess tomorrow we will be starting to pare through those numbers. And we're also, I guess, looking at not only what training seats will be allocated for the rest of this year but then working that into the plan for 2026.

Nicole Sarauer: — Great, thank you. Minister, could you provide some further information as to the additional funding for the electronic monitoring program?

[21:45]

Joshua Freistadt: — I thought I was done. No, it's all good. Thank you. So as the minister mentioned in his opening remarks, this budget sees $1.1 million go towards salaries. Lease of the equipment, we're required to do GPS tracking; that includes all the units, the ankle bracelets, etc. It allows us to put 50 additional people under this form of monitoring. Who gets put on it is determined by the courts. It tends to be people on bail and that the courts are deeming on the lower-risk end of the spectrum.

The additional being the total electronic monitoring use of 360; and of the 1.1 million, 669,000 is for salaries; 329 is for operating — that's the lease agreement; and 85,000 is for accommodations and IT.

Nicole Sarauer: — You mentioned that there are 360. Is that available across the entirety of the province, or is it just specific

geographic locations?

Joshua Freistadt: — The entire inventory is available across the province and distributed on a sort of first come, first served basis based on the court orders.

Nicole Sarauer: — And how much is this budget expanding that number?

Joshua Freistadt: — So previously there were 310 units, not all of which were GPS units; 190 of those were what we call RF [radio frequency] units. They're basically just bracelets that tell you if you're at home or not. Kind of more like Bluetooth technology. And then there was 120 GPS units added in '23-24, and this then brings the additional amount up another 50 for the GPS only.

Nicole Sarauer: — And you mentioned this equipment is leased. Who is the third party that this contract is with?

Joshua Freistadt: — So we lease this through a Canadian company called Jemtec. They have a subcontract with a company headquartered out of Tel Aviv, Israel, and we've confirmed that like none of the components are manufactured in the United States.

Nicole Sarauer: — What is the name of the company in Israel?

Joshua Freistadt: — Allied Universal.

Nicole Sarauer: — And how long is the contract for?

Joshua Freistadt: — I don't have that information in front of me right now. I know that it does not expire in the calendar year at which we intend to do this expansion. I'd have to check in with SaskBuilds and Procurement.

Nicole Sarauer: — That would be great. And if possible if you could table that contract, that would be appreciated as well.

Joshua Freistadt: — Our response there would be the same as your previous request to table a contract. I mean I don't know if I can commit to that. I'd have to check in with SaskBuilds and Procurement.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you. Hopefully you are done now.

Joshua Freistadt: — No, happy to stay.

Nicole Sarauer: — I do want to ask about the P.A. Grand Council feasibility study for self-administered policing that you had mentioned. Minister, could you provide some further information about that?

Matthew Mirasty: — Good evening, committee. It's a pleasure to be here this evening to speak to, related to, the Prince Albert Grand Council feasibility study for self-administered policing. tânisi, my name is Matthew Mirasty. I'm the executive director of First Nations Indigenous policing for the ministry, and I'm based out of Prince Albert where the feasibility study is also headquartered.

In the wake of the James Smith tragedy in the fall of 2022, there was a universal call by PAGC [Prince Albert Grand Council] Nations, to which James Smith is a member Nation, to do a serious exploration of self-administered policing in the territories of Prince Albert Grand Council and look at new ways of addressing the public safety needs of these Nations and the communities that are part of them.

We partnered with PAGC, the ministry, Public Safety Canada and began some arduous work to get to a place where we could officially begin the feasibility study in the end of the '23-24 fiscal year. That work is continuing in this budget here. We are in our last year of a two-fiscal-year project specifically aimed at the feasibility of this project. There's been significant work done by officials hired by PAGC for this work and by PAGC employees, as well as myself and members of my team and colleagues from different branches within the ministry. The RCMP have had a significant role in this work and the partnerships that have expanded and grown and the understanding related to public safety needs for PAGC communities has been extensive.

In the first year of this feasibility study, officials from PAGC went out to communities and did significant community engagement, in a manner going to communities, sitting with Elders. Having town halls if you will; band halls, somebody said to me recently. But meetings and discussions related to the project and the work being done, and I guess identify issues as related to how do we get to a place where we can make an informed decision related to our public safety needs as it relates to self-administered policing development.

Within that, these engagements are happening, and actually I'd say are also evolving as the project is under way. It's not just a one-and-done visit to a community like Hall Lake, Lac La Ronge Indian Band member community. It may actually be several visits to the community.

I'm paraphrasing here, you know. When we get into the communities and PAGC does speak to members of the Nations, the questioning really is about, you know, the basic needs related to policing before getting into more specific issues that people may want to bring up as it relates to their policing. And of course, you know, what would the future look like, and how can we get there collectively?

It's in a manner, you know . . . What's going well? What's not? What can be better? This is what we're proposing. This is the work involved. How does your community feel about public safety? Are you engaged in the current services that you're getting? And how can we work together, in one regard not only from the self-administered development but also in the day-to-day current reality and the relationships that exist with our various enforcement services in Saskatchewan, and of course primarily the RCMP as the police of jurisdiction in Saskatchewan.

This year there's going to be a lot of work, I guess, compiling the data as it relates to the project, sitting down again with member Nations collectively, the province, the federal government after the federal election and having more thorough discussions around some of the data elements and research elements that have been under way in this past year. Various branches in our ministry are involved in that work, as well as the RCMP as I've mentioned before, and in some manner the Saskatchewan Police

Commission and other related partners.

We're getting to a place that I hope where the member Nations of PAGC by March of 2026 are going to be in a position with the report to take time, to go back to their Nations, and over the summer of '26, get to a place where they can make that informed decision about the future of their Nations and communities and also how we can fit in into that reality.

And by the end of the fall of '26, again it's really about the completion of the report. PAGC will have an annual assembly, and that work will be talked about, and then the delegates will make a decision whether or not to proceed and move forward with the province and the federal government in I guess self-administered development.

Nicole Sarauer: — Thank you for that fascinating work going on in this space.

Matthew Mirasty: — It is fascinating. Yeah, it is. It's amazing actually.

Nicole Sarauer: — It is. I'm curious to know, in the consultation that's happened so far . . . I understand you haven't completed the report, but are there themes that are emerging? What's striking you as interesting in the feedback you're receiving from the community?

Matthew Mirasty: — Well I think the most interesting insight for me is, you know, I'm from Saskatchewan. I'm a proud member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. I'm a third-generation RCMP officer, retired, and I've been working with the ministry for six years. And the conversations I'm having through this work, through this lens, is opening in a whole other realm for me as far as really showing that communities have such a strong understanding of public safety and justice in their communities and really looking for a place to have a better discussion.

And I believe this project has facilitated that with PAGC, but also it's informing other tribal councils and other large First Nations in Saskatchewan who are looking at the exploration of self-administered policing and giving a lot of people pause to, you know, look and say, okay, we're seeing what our partners at PAGC are doing; we're seeing the headway that they're getting. They're also seeing the difficulties and complexities related to public safety in their communities, and they're having good conversations about it.

And for me that's the big takeaway: a large, significant endorsement of the RCMP as our provincial police service. But at the same time, they're able to look for and go, okay, how does that partnership change? And how can we work together with the redcoats, so to speak, and get to a place where we can take over the baton of public safety in our communities and our Nations and continue that work together in the future?

Another big part of it is the interest in the First Nation community safety officer program and other civilian-related roles in public safety that might enhance, you know, their community safety and justice-related initiatives.

Nicole Sarauer: — I know after the tragedy at James Smith the Nation did create a — and I'm forgetting the name; what it's called? — civilian-led community response officers. How is that work going within James Smith right now?

Matthew Mirasty: — So the community safety officer program, I think, is what you're referring to. James Smith, we've been doing a lot of work with them lately. Actually we have a meeting, might be tomorrow. But we've been working on a number of areas as it relates to their relationship with the RCMP. Improving the relationship was a big thing for them, getting a better understanding of their public safety.

Obviously there were initiatives related to some of their local security that were very important to them, and feeling safe and secure, you know. With the scale of the tragedy at James Smith, you know, we can only all really be observers to that — unless we're from that community — to understand what they went through.

And currently we are engaged with consultants from James Smith and looking at CSO [community safety officer] program and working with them through the summer to see how it fits their needs. Without speaking on their behalf, they're doing a number of initiatives related to public safety and health that they do also prioritize. And so we are looking forward to doing more work with James Smith in particular.

[22:00]

And also with their inclusion within the PAGC project they've gained valuable insights as well as to the future of their specific needs for public safety. So it's the work collectively at the PAGC level, but also the work we're doing with them and the federal government. And some of their consultants will also, I'm sure, benefit the Nation in the future.

Chair B. McLeod: — We've reached the end of our question time, and it's been . . .

Matthew Mirasty: — I was just getting started.

Chair B. McLeod: — It's actually been very, very fascinating to hear this conversation, and I thank you so much for that information that we've received. And we wish you all the best in the endeavours down the road.

Matthew Mirasty: — Thank you very much.

Chair B. McLeod: — Minister, I'm going to ask if you have any closing comments for this evening.

Hon. Tim McLeod: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do. I want to thank the committee for their attentiveness, and Ms. Sarauer for her very detailed and thorough questions. And I hope that the committee is able to appreciate, given the context of all the great work of these great officials, who I can't thank enough for the support that they provide both myself, and the people of Saskatchewan more broadly, each and every day.

But the work that they're doing and the investments that are being made in that work really do flow across the entire continuum that I hope the committee was able to see tonight, where on one end, you've got the policing and the investments that we're making in more SCAN officers and more municipal

officers, more marshals, investments in the police college, freeing up police from other duties, allowing them to be more front-line.

And also the legislative and the regulatory changes that we're making to try and give our officers more tools to use. The safe public spaces legislation, the SCAN legislation, the trespass to property legislation: all of those changes working at that front end of the entire continuum, which of course is going to lead to the middle part of the continuum that we started the evening with, in Justice, and the investments that then will need to be made there — expanding the traffic courts, municipal bylaw hubs, more prosecutors, additional supports for case readiness.

On the firearms side, the new ballistics lab that unfortunately we didn't get to talk about tonight; we ran out of time. And then moving further into the corrections, which we did have an opportunity to spend quite a bit of time on, but the investments in the new Saskatoon Correctional Centre expansion, the electronic monitoring that we discussed, and certainly the excitement around the new 312-bed unit for women in Regina.

All of those, when you invest in one piece of that, you have to invest in all. And I hope that the committee was able to see the great work that these teams are doing each and every day to make sure that the entire continuum stays in balance. And we're providing great service to the people of Saskatchewan through both of these ministries that the committee saw tonight.

So again, my thanks to the committee. My sincere thanks to all of the officials who joined. I'm sorry if some of you didn't get a chance to come to the microphone, but we do appreciate you nonetheless. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thanks to Madam Clerk and to Hansard for sticking it out throughout the entire evening. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you, Minister McLeod. Opposition MLA Sarauer, you've any comments to close for this evening?

Nicole Sarauer: — Yeah, of course. I'd like to first thank the minister for answering the questions that I had this evening and echo the sentiment that you've already spoken so well about. The continuum of the justice system was laid out bare, I think, for all of us this evening. And I, like you, am filled with so much gratitude for the work that your officials do all the time, not just in preparation and in sitting for this evening, but in every single day in keeping our communities safe.

I have so many questions that I didn't get the chance to get to, so my deepest apologies for those who weren't able to come and speak about the work that you do. Please know that I'm genuinely very interested in every aspect of this ministry, and all of it is so incredibly important.

So just thank you so much for being here this evening and spending your late evening with us and for answering all of my questions. I am very, very grateful to all of you.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you so much everyone that's been involved tonight. It's been really a joy to be the Chair tonight. Committee members on both sides, you've just been very, very good to work with, so I appreciate that so much.

The last conversation around electronic monitoring I couldn't help but think I've got 350 dairy cows at home have much the same technology attached to their legs, or to their necks I should say. And I know it's an Israeli company that provides that as well, so maybe even the same one. And it's not because they have a court order to be kept in line, but it provides a great management tool for us as well.

So thank you so much. We've got some lucky officials in the crowd that get to go home. Committee members, we do need to stay, and we have some conclusion that needs to happen. But thank you very much for the officials, and we'll allow you to be dismissed. And don't go anywhere, committee members please; we have to finish with the resolutions.

Right. We're going to vote off now on 2025-26 estimates. Vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. Central management and services, subvote (CP01) in the amount of 57,653,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency, subvote (CP06) in the amount of 118,918,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Saskatchewan Police Commission, subvote (CP12) in the amount of 3,789,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Custody, supervision and rehabilitation services, subvote (CP13) in the amount of 254,100,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Policing and community safety services, subvote (CP15) in the amount of 363,901,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of 8,653,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be voted.

Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, vote 73 — 798,361,000. And I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

> Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2026, the following sums for Corrections, Policing and Public Safety in the amount of 798,361,000.

MLA Sean Wilson. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

General Revenue Fund
Firearms Secretariat
Vote 92

Chair B. McLeod: — Moving on. Vote 92, Firearms Secretariat. Central management and services, subvote (FS01) in the amount of 3,034,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Chief Firearms office support, subvote (FS02) in the amount of 3,098,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Saskatchewan firearms ballistics laboratory, subvote (FS03) in the amount of 1,551,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Client services, subvote (FS04) in the amount of 1,074,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of 881,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for information purposes only. No amount is to be voted.

Firearms Secretariat, vote 92 — 8,757,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

> Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2026, the following sums for Firearms Secretariat in the amount of 8,757,000.

MLA Martens. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — No. 2
Corrections, Policing and Public Safety
Vote 73

Chair B. McLeod: — 2024-25 supplementary estimates no. 2, vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency, subvote (CP06) in the amount of 58,177,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Saskatchewan Police Commission, subvote (CP12) in the amount of 100,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Custody, supervision and rehabilitation services, subvote (CP13) in the amount of 11,216,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Policing and community safety services, subvote (CP15) in the amount of 8,920,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, vote 73 — 78,413,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

> Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2025, the following sums for Corrections, Policing and Public Safety in the amount of $78,413,000.

MLA Patterson. Is that agreed?

[22:15]

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — No. 2
Firearms Secretariat
Vote 92

Chair B. McLeod: — Vote 92, Firearms Secretariat. Central management and services, subvote (FS01) in the amount of 1,463,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

Firearms Secretariat, vote 92 — 1,463,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

> Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2025, the following sums for Firearms Secretariat in the amount of $1,463,000.

MLA Martens. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

General Revenue Fund
Government Relations
Vote 30

Chair B. McLeod: — All right, we're getting there. Vote number 30, Government Relations. Central management and services, subvote (GR01) in the amount of 7,930,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Saskatchewan Municipal Board, subvote (GR06) in the amount of 2,021,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Municipal relations, subvote (GR07) in the amount of 649,656,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs, subvote (GR12) in the amount of 113,843,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Provincial Capital Commission, subvote (GR14) in the amount of 7,471,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of 100,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for information purposes only. No amount is to be voted.

Government Relations, vote number 30 — 780,921,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

> Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2026, the following sums for Government Relations in the amount of 780,921,000.

MLA Wilson. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

General Revenue Fund
Justice and Attorney General
Vote 3

Chair B. McLeod: — Vote 3, Justice and Attorney General. Central management and services, subvote (JU01) in the amount of 45,084,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Courts and civil justice, subvote (JU03) in the amount of 54,917,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Legal and policy services, subvote (JU04) in the amount of 85,401,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Boards, commissions and independent offices, subvote (JU08) in the amount of 62,541,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of 3,752,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be voted.

Justice and Attorney General, vote 3 — 247,943,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

> Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2026, the following sums for Justice and Attorney General in the amount of 247,943,000.

MLA Patterson. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

General Revenue Fund
Parks, Culture and Sport
Vote 27

Chair B. McLeod: — Vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport. Central management and services, subvote (PC01) in the amount of 9,306,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Parks, subvote (PC12) in the amount of 30,821,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Resource stewardship, subvote (PC18) in the amount of 10,630,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Community engagement, subvote (PC19) in the amount of 49,680,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of 8,230,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be voted.

Parks, Culture and Sport, vote 27 — 100,437,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

> Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2026, the following sums for Parks, Culture and Sport in the amount of 100,437,000.

MLA Martens. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

General Revenue Fund
Tourism Saskatchewan
Vote 88

Chair B. McLeod: — Vote 88, Tourism Saskatchewan. We're almost there. Tourism Saskatchewan, subvote (TR01) in the amount of 19,278,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried.

Tourism Saskatchewan, vote 88 — 19,278,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

> Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2026, the following sums for Tourism Saskatchewan in the amount of 19,278,000.

MLA Wilson. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. Just handing out the report here. We need to move a motion to present the report to the Assembly, first report of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice for the thirtieth legislature.

Committee members, you have before you a draft of the first report of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice for the thirtieth legislature. We require a member to move the following motion:

> That the first report of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice for the thirtieth legislature be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

MLA Wilson.

Sean Wilson: — Yes, I'll move that motion. Do I have to read it?

Chair B. McLeod: — Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair B. McLeod: — Carried. That concludes our business for today. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair. Thank you so much for the participation everyone. Have a great evening.

[The committee adjourned at 22:27.]