



**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

**BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY**

**HANSARD VERBATIM REPORT**

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No. 1 — January 21, 2025

## **BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY**

Hon. Todd Goudy  
Melfort

Hon. Lori Carr  
Estevan-Big Muddy

Matt Love  
Saskatoon Eastview

Hon. Tim McLeod  
Moose Jaw North

Nicole Sarauer  
Regina Douglas Park

Kevin Weedmark  
Moosomin-Montmartre

Sean Wilson  
Canora-Pelly

[The board met at 09:00.]

**Chair Goudy:** — All right. Well it's 9:00 and I'd like to call the meeting 1/25 to order at 9 a.m. And joining us today from the government are Hon. Tim McLeod, Hon. Lori Carr, MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Sean Wilson, and MLA Kevin Weedmark. And from the opposition we have MLA Nicole Sarauer and MLA Matt Love. Thank you all for making it out this morning on the cold weather day, although it warmed up a bit. We're all glad for that.

So on our agenda we have approval of proposed agenda for meeting 1/25, and could I please have a mover and seconder for that? Ms. Sarauer and seconder Lori Carr. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried.

So approval of the minutes for meeting 3/24, could I please have a mover and a seconder?

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — I so move.

**Chair Goudy:** — Tim McLeod and Matt Love. All in favour? Carried.

So item 1, I would like to table the *Mid-Year Report on Progress* for the period of April 1st to September 30th, 2024 for the Legislative Assembly.

#### **Ombudsman Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner**

**Chair Goudy:** — Item 2, review of the 2025-26 budget for the Office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, vote 56.

I would like to introduce and welcome Sharon Pratchler, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner. Welcome today, Sharon, and all of your officials. Would you, once they have settled in there, would you mind introducing your officials for us this morning?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Well good morning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the focus of our budget this year is on the members of our team, I will just spend a few more minutes than usual introducing the representatives from our office that are with me today to give the board an appreciation for the range of their talents and the work that we do.

With me today is Charlene Mouly, our manager of corporate services. Ms. Mouly is responsible for the financial and human resources functions in our office. Charlene has previous experience both with treasury board and in the Minister of Finance's office.

Kathy Willerth is also with us. She is one of our assistant deputy ombudsmen, and she manages the part of our team that does all of the intake of complaints or inquiries to our office. Kathy comes to us with a background in mental health and addictions, having worked in both the Ministry of Health and with the

Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Jim Pratt, to my left, is the Knowledge Keeper-Carrier and Elders' Helper for our office and joined us this past year. He provides cultural leadership and advisory services to our office along with engaging with Indigenous communities to foster collaborative relationships. He is a retired police officer who is well known in the community.

Finally, Ryan Kennedy joins us from our Saskatoon office. Ryan is our manager of outreach. He coordinates requests to our office for information and education about our services. He also works on our annual report and covers off in many areas as well, including mentoring and supporting other members of our team. Ryan comes to us with a background in human rights.

As I mentioned at the outset, the focus of our budget this year is on the members of our team and ensuring the necessary appropriation to implement the economic salary increases which the government has initiated. We also are asking for an increase to cover off the accommodation increase for our Regina office.

The heart of our office is our team. Given the focus of our budget submission, I'll also highlight a number of their achievements over this past fiscal year. Our office is sometimes described as a unicorn because of the nature of the work we do. We have a very wide legislative mandate which covers all of the municipalities in the province, every ministry in government, Crown Corporations, and agencies like the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

This makes for very interesting work for our team as they are never quite sure what they will be dealing with on any particular day. For example, calls may range from a farmer with a crop insurance issue due to an elk eating his berry crop to a family member who is concerned about the care their loved one is receiving in a care home.

The most difficult calls we receive are from family members who have lost a loved one during their stay in a facility in the province. Each day our team deals with challenging issues and calls including heightened emotions. These interactions require highly skilled staff who are trained to deal with de-escalation and conflict resolution.

We say that it takes at least a year for a member of our team who does intake to be fully trained in all of the areas we deal with. Even then a large part of our work every day is to learn about different provincial government programs and services and their accompanying legislative and policy framework.

Our legislative mandate covers both receiving inquiries or complaints from the public as well as an education function. It is a constant challenge to balance both of those functions, as the demands on our office are heavy. We have a high volume of inquiries from the public every year, and this past calendar year in 2024 we experienced a significant increase in our workload. We went from 3,660 files in 2023 to 4,067 in 2024. This represents an 11 per cent increase or 407 additional files. Our office has not received over 4,000 files in a year since 2017. Despite those high numbers, our team continued to resolve files on a timely basis, with 96 per cent of the files closed within 90

days and 98 per cent of our files closed within 180 days.

In 2023 we resumed our flagship education program, the Fundamentals of Fairness, which had been paused since 2019. This year we were able to deliver this two-day program to 104 participants which is a 73 per cent increase to the previous year. Our primary focus was to deliver this program to social workers as it is a requirement of their onboarding, but we also expanded to Inclusion Saskatchewan and the workers in the Piwapan Wellness Centre in La Ronge this year. Credit for the work in building this program back up goes to Christy Bell, a member of our team from Saskatoon. She refreshed the program and trained other members of our team on how to deliver the program.

Samples of the feedback we received on this course included “This workshop changes your view on how you should communicate to clients, the tone you use, and how listening can change the outcome.” “Appreciate the effort you guys took. It is a game change in my decision making and conflict resolution matters.”

As we are a relatively small office with 30 employees, members of our team both deal with complaints and also provide education and training. Early on in my term I was asked by a public servant if we could provide a tool that focused on how to make administratively fair decisions. In response we developed a series of online presentations titled the Toolbox Series that covered topics such as active listening and non-defensive communication. This past year we were able to create a literal tool box from that series which provides a desktop tool for public servants.

We would not have been able to take that extra work on without the assistance of Ryan Kennedy, our manager of outreach. We’ve given away 861 tool boxes over the past year and feedback has been very positive, including this comment:

I wanted to take a moment to thank you for the decision-makers’ tool kit, cards, and holders sent out to our administrative team who attended these workshops last fall. Each of us found the courses incredibly helpful, engaging, and I’ve highly recommended them to our ministry colleagues. If future training courses are offered, our team would be very interested in participating.

We also provided a training session this past year to designated officers under *The Public Interest Disclosure Act*, which is the other piece of legislation we are responsible for.

We engaged in outreach in the North as well this year and reached the communities of La Ronge, Stanley Mission, Missinipe, Ile-a-la-Crosse, La Loche, and Buffalo Narrows. We’ve provided a presentation to all of the victim services groups in the North on what our office does and how to resolve conflict when dealing with escalated individuals. We met with housing authorities and attended a friendship and wellness centre.

This year we will have one of our long-service employees retire in the spring, and I want to end my submission by recognizing her work. Kathy Upton joined our office in Saskatoon in 2011. During her 14 years with our office she responded to 6,972 inquiries from members of the public, or an average of almost 500 files a year. Once she took over management responsibilities,

she also started to do a quality control function. In terms of reviewing the coding for public entities for each of those thousands of files we receive each year, our succession plan had us hiring her replacement a year early because of the transfer of knowledge that had to take place. I want to acknowledge Kathy Upton’s tremendous work with our office.

Before concluding, I also want to thank all of the staff in Legislative Assembly Services who provide assistance and responses to our questions, as well as the staff in the Speaker’s office, who we very much appreciate.

Mr. Speaker, we respectfully request that the board approve our requested appropriation to continue to support the hard work of our team in delivering on our legislative mandate.

**Chair Goudy:** — Well thank you very much for that presentation. The box looks smaller in real life than in the picture. That’s great. Are there any questions from the board?

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Thank you very much for your presentation. Thank you to your staff and all the great work that you do.

Just a couple of questions, if I could dig in. I’m trying to find the total ask and the breakdown. And I see the numbers; I want to make sure that I’m looking at the exact bottom line difference. So on page 10 of your submission, it says total increase compensation cost is 328,000. But the total increase ask is greater than that. It’s three . . . help me out.

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Sorry. So the total, the bottom line is the 4,942. And the increases are the three amounts: the economic salary increase for 328, the statutory funding increase for 23, and the goods and services for the Regina accommodation increase of 28.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — For a total increase . . .

**Sharon Pratchler:** — 4,942. The total increase is the difference between 4,942 and 4,563.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — It’s 379, is that right?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — I think so. Yes.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Can you help me out? When we’re looking at the breakdown at the statutory salary increases compared to the compensation increases, can you draw the distinction between the two for me, please?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Yes. The statutory is for the legislative officer’s salary, and Legislative Assembly Service asked us to include, recommended that we include that increase. The calculation of what our actual salary is won’t take place until May, and it’s based on the average of all of the deputy ministers. So that distinction is between my salary and my staff’s salary.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Thank you.

**Sharon Pratchler:** — And to be transparent, we break it out so that you’re clear what component is for that and for the other.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Just one further question if I might, Mr. Speaker. Also on page 10, you anticipate a 4 per cent increase for eligible non-union staff at an estimated cost of 84,000. Looking at the historic increases, we see 3 per cent, 3 per cent, 3.4, 1.6. Can you explain how you arrived at the 4 per cent anticipated?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — These are their yearly performance increments. So 4 per cent is sort of the average, like meeting expectations. So we will absorb the cost of anybody who's exceeding or outstanding. So that's where that 4 per cent comes from. That's for the performance increment that we have to do every year when we review, you know, IPPs [individual performance plan] and talk to our staff about their performance over the year.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Chair Goudy:** — Any other questions? Ms. Sarauer.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Thank you, Ms. Pratchler, for your presentation and for your breakdown on these numbers. Some of my questions have mirrored what Mr. McLeod was asking and you've already answered. I just have a few more questions just to clarify a few things in my mind.

Now this 84,000, this 4 per cent increase, that's a required performance program through the Saskatchewan Public Service Commission? Is that correct?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — We use their program, although we're legislative officers so we're given the ability to use, you know, alternative programs. But we follow the PSC's [Public Service Commission] IPP program. So that's really a yearly assessment of performance and sitting down with the staff. So here we've just asked for the . . . You know, our staff are very well qualified so they all tend to meet the "meets expectations," but we will absorb the cost of anything beyond that.

[09:15]

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Sure. So the 237,000, that's required pursuant to the CBA [collective bargaining agreement] — the 7,000 is also required pursuant to the CBA — because the 237 is the out-of-scope matching the CBA increases, right?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Correct.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — And then the 84,000 is a little bit more flexible but . . .

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Yes.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — It's matching what you've done in the past in terms of performance pay?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Yes. Yeah. We have very highly qualified staff, so we always have somebody in the "outstanding" or "exceeding" category, but we'll absorb the costs of that. We're just asking for the basic sort of average "meets expectations."

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Thank you. Could you walk me through the increase to the Regina accommodation costs that you have been

talking to SaskBuilds about?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — I don't have much more detail than what's set out on page 10. So every year SaskBuilds, if there's an increase, will tell us what that increase is and will explain to us the reasons. So in this instance they've indicated that our accommodation in Regina is anticipated to increase by \$28,000. This factors . . . include utility increases and parking costs which escalate each year as well as contractual increases to security costs. And we have two-thirds of our staff in Regina, so we have more parking spaces in Regina than we do in Saskatoon.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — So this is the number that SaskBuilds has asked you to build into your budget.

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Well they don't ask us to build it in. But yes, that's the number they've given us that we're going to have to absorb.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Gotcha. And then you have mentioned in your report that you are starting the process of looking for new accommodations in Saskatoon. Can you speak a little bit about that as well?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Yes. We have a third of our staff in Saskatoon, so 10 of our staff. So we will work with SaskBuilds. We will go through the RFP [request for proposal] process, the procurement process. And part of the reason we use that process is because we have a heavy workload, so we don't undertake lease discussions ourselves. But we also get complaints about procurement in government. So because we're the fairness office we follow the procurement process.

And we rely heavily on SaskBuilds. They also deal with any issues that we have during the year. So that just takes a lot off our plate, not having to deal directly with the landlord. And we really want to ensure that we're consistent with how the rest of government operates with taxpayers' money for our procurement of space.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Do you have any ideas for timelines of how this process is going to unfold?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — No. I mean you know, it really depends on the priority that is assigned to other projects that SaskBuilds has. But sometime this year is probably the best I could say, and it's entirely dependent on SaskBuilds.

We're pretty patient. Like, we are a problem-solving office, so we'll do what we need to do to make the system work. And we have a good relationship with SaskBuilds, so we're comfortable that it'll be done as quickly as they can. But they've got a backlog of things to catch up as well from the writ period and so on. So we're patient, and we'll make it work. We always do.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — But in the meantime, if I read your report correctly, your Saskatoon employees are working remotely?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Yes. In the last year, we basically upgraded our phone system to a Webex system, so basically we can work from our laptop. So we have a full office on our laptop. Our phone is on our laptop, so we're fully portable. And they're quite used to it. And we check in on a regular basis, as well as go

up to Saskatoon to visit with them and just see how things are going.

There's always challenges with having a remote office, but we try to ensure that we're a one-team approach because that's really important in how we deliver services to the public so that we're seamless and consistent in our approach.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Ms. Carr.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — So on page 2, you touched briefly on the comparison of the request of assistance that your office has received. It's interesting that in 2007, it was over 4,000 — I wonder what was happening that year — and then it went down drastically. And now it's just slowly crept back up. But the "outside of your jurisdiction" number, what do you do with those? Are they just . . . you just don't do anything? You say, "We're not responsible; go somewhere else"?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — No. It's very hard for us to say we're not responsible when somebody calls in distress, and usually they will be in distress. So an example might be somebody is talking about a difficulty they have with a private landlord, or an issue they have with the federal government. So we always try to help be pathfinders to refer them to something.

So when I talk about our staff being knowledgeable about provincial programs, they are, but they also have a much broader knowledge of other systems as well. So because these are taxpayers and members of the public, we try to help them find their way. So we can't always, but we try to either refer them to a federal ombudsperson, an appeal process, or some agency or entity so that they aren't just told, we can't help you.

But we also have to be careful about our boundaries as well. So we don't provide legal advice, and you know, we have to be careful about how far we go in that. But I think we always remember the members of the public, they're lost in a system, and anything we can do to help them we'll try to do. We're problem solvers at heart. We would be the people who run to the fire and try to help if we can.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Great. And just one more question about your new position, the Knowledge Keeper. So welcome to the table, Jim. Pleased to meet you. I'm just curious, is the position full-time? How is he called upon if it's not full-time? Yeah.

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Jim works in our office three days a week, and so he's present in the office but he's also often in the community. And I sort of want to hand it over to him to speak to it if he wants to add anything. And we're feeling our way. So we've had a number of Elders, he's invited a number of Elders into our office to speak. But I'll give him an opportunity to say anything he'd like to say, if that's all right, Mr. Speaker.

**Jim Pratt:** — Thank you, Sharon. I'm humbled to speak in this beautiful building, to thank the Creator for your beautiful day today. Yes, I was retired for a while. I retired from two jobs, policing and Sask Polytech. I worked 17 years there. I'm a retiree from there. But due to health issues, I was wondering what I was going to do. I was going to stay home and play with the

grandkids, and somehow Sharon got my number and the rest is history. So I've been there since last September, working three days a week. I've had some health issues so I've been looking . . . That's why I asked for it, right.

So trying to do my best to make things run smoothly in understanding Indigenous communities, who we are and all through our own staff, you know. I'm not trying to change everybody in one day — it takes time when people accept what I'm trying to teach or what I'm trying to do there, right — because if you go that route then you get turned off by everybody, right. So I try and do it in bits and pieces so that people grasp the understanding of who we are as we're working together, and to make it I guess an understanding workplace.

And also I call it working with the community, which I'm still a big part of the community. I do a lot of community stuff. I'm not an Elder; I'm an Elders' Helper. I haven't got promoted yet. Just like the trades, right. I'm an apprentice, but I haven't got my journeyman yet, right. So maybe I'll never get that because I'm too silly and too crazy sometimes to be working with Elders, eh.

But it's something that I always wanted to be part of or been part of. And that's why I accepted to come and work with Sharon. I knew her from before in policing, so I thought it fit. And to be there for anybody that wants to know something about some thing in our communities, right. I know I've seen some of you in our communities. I've seen this gentleman here. I've seen you. I've seen him, eh. I've seen Nicole. I know Nicole and, yeah, that lady there. But some of you I haven't seen, right. Because I've been here on teas in the rotunda, eh. So yeah. And some of the guys that work here, I worked with before. The security staff, eh.

So I tend not to yell out who I am because I'm very humble. If you ask me, I'll tell you, but I try and stay . . . I don't want to be that loud-mouthed schnook that everybody knows, right. I don't want to be that person and so I stay silent. And sometimes I do funny things with my wife. She hates me because I'll wait for her outside of Costco, but everybody thinks I'm begging, right. So I have a lot of fun there. So I'm banned from going to Costco, right, by my wife.

But I'm glad to be helping out . . . [inaudible] . . . or anybody here that needs help, right. You know, give me a call and we'll sort something out and that's what I'm here for. I don't mind meeting someone to talk things over or seeing you at an event, right. So that's me. I'm all over the place. So if you see me, say hello, but if you walk by me, I'll give you a little push, right. So yeah, that's me.

So I'd better shut up because if my wife was here, she'd be going like this, right? "Shut up, Jim, all right?" So thank you very much for letting me talk and say a few words. I really appreciate that. And for everybody to have a good day and look favourably upon our submission. So thank you very much. Have a good day. Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Ms. Carr.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — So just to get back to the dollars and cents of it, in the package we didn't actually get included, so I had to go look on the website to look at your audited financial statements that have been filed. And I see that within there,

there's a bit of a surplus that you have at the year-end. So I'm just asking, I guess, what is your surplus sitting at, at this point in time? And I know you talked about some of the absorbs you might have to do if someone overachieves in your grid. So that's my question.

**Sharon Pratchler:** — I'd like to say a fairly exact number because Ms. Mouly and I have been looking at that number really closely. Right now we're probably looking at 200. But there's a number of variables, and so I'm cutting it as close as I can this year because I recognize that we've had quite significant surpluses in past years.

So this is going into my second, third year in office, so I have a better feel for our budget. So I really want to pare that down to maybe a 10 per cent at most average. In this quarter we always get a little bit nervous because we don't know what might come up, but I'm trying to thin it down as much as we can. And certainly aware of that issue of not asking for money that we're not using.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — And my last question is, as I read through the submission, you noted that the call was for zero. And so the number you're asking for, I think equates to approximately 8.3 per cent. Now I do understand a lot of those are salary adjustments, but I guess when you ask for zero and it comes in at 8.3, how do we bridge that delta?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — I mean, we're always at your decision making. Fundamental to government is that the government, the elected government is the one who decides on the apportionment and allocation of money. All we can do is make sure you're aware of the pressures that we face. And at the end of the day, you make that decision.

And we're respectful and we always make it work. We can't reduce our staff or things of that nature, but we'll always find a way to make it work. Might mean that we can't go up north. May mean we have to not do as much travel, as much education, but even those numbers are sort of nickel and dime.

So you know, I very much am respectful — as a former constitutional lawyer in particular — of the authority of the elected officials to decide how to allocate the budget. That's one thing that the Supreme Court has always said is the function of the elected government. So we'll find a way to make it work, but it might mean a few anxious nights for Ms. Mouly and myself trying to make it work, you know. But really we haven't asked for any increase for the Saskatoon. So we have that risk factor already, which does make us somewhat anxious, but we're comfortable if we have these dollars we can make the rest work.

So we're trying to follow that request as best we can, but we also have to be realistic about the demands on our service. And one thing that makes me nervous as a legislative officer is when we have a 400, you know, increase in our files. I'm not asking for new staff; I've asked my staff to absorb all of that. But you know, the kind of extra stress that brings on any staff member who has to absorb an 11 per cent increase in their work at the same time that we're doing a lot of education.

So all I can do is, you know, humbly and respectfully make the ask. What you decide ultimately is what we'll implement.

[09:30]

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Mr. Weedmark.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Thank you. I just have one question, Ms. Pratchler. Can you explain just what the overall impact is on your operation having the Knowledge Keeper as part of your team now?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — I'm glad you asked that question because I was going to add to Jim's comment. I guess, you know, a lot of what happens in our office is making sure that we're all calm because we have a lot coming at us every day and we have to be really regulated when we do our calls, the tone of our voice, the way we engage with the public.

So having Jim in the office, as you walk past his office, you can smell the sage coming out of his office. If you have an issue on a file, you can walk into his office and just sit down with him and talk to him about it. He regularly goes through the office talking to different staff. And somebody might be having a hard call that day; like it's not uncommon for people to yell at us even if we set the boundaries. So having a wise person like Jim in the office is huge for us internally. But it also has a huge impact externally because it sends a message to the Indigenous community that, no matter how many keynote speeches I do or how much grassroots engagement or out in the community I do, kind of walking the talk. And so we actually have a Knowledge Keeper in our office, which is the only office in Canada as Ombudsman that has one, and so we're still learning exactly how that works.

But his presence, which is hard to quantify, is really significant. And it's really powerful for me to go and talk to him about, you know, okay we're working on this file. What should we keep in mind? What are we missing that we can't see from our lens? Because our lens and our life experience is different than his. I hope that answers your question.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Thank you very much.

**Chair Goudy:** — Any other questions? I just had one question. So it says now that you have a full complement of staff. The Ombudsman, I haven't been to your office, haven't sat in on, you know, any meetings. Who are you looking for? Like what are the qualifications, the attributes of somebody that the Ombudsman's office is looking to fill those 30 positions? What does that person look like?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Yeah, we're looking for flexible, fair but firm in terms of having good boundaries because problem solving and helping people is wonderful, but taking care of yourself while you're doing it is also important. We're looking for really balanced people who are able to check their unconscious biases. We're looking for people who are good collaborators, who support each other, provide good peer support because collective care and self-care in our office is really important to be able to do the work that we do because it can be a really heavy load for people on any given day.

And I think the overall characteristic that we look for in terms of the work itself is problem solvers. So I'm always amused by my

team because they are constantly absorbing information. So they'll come to me and I always have to keep them engaged and give them challenging things because they're inherently problem solvers. So some of them are working on sudoku expert level. They like to tell me challenges during their breaks.

And people who can relate to others. So when you have a government official who may have made an error in decision making, you have to have a really good quality in how you engage in that discussion because we're not trying to blame and shame anybody. Our overall goal is the same with government. We want to improve services continuously and improve our services continually. So we need somebody who's fairly understanding of the situation that public servant is dealing with. And we're coaching, so we really want to coach and effect change because that has a more long-lasting impact.

I think the media often would like to get a picture or a video of me shaking my finger, is the example that I use. And I've always resisted and sometimes put my hands behind my back to make sure I don't shake my finger or be seen because I talk with my hands. But we really need to be seen as coming alongside and supporting, but yet effecting change if it's needed. But not sort of presuming that we know better than elected officials because what we're really doing is implementing the legislative direction.

And sometimes there's grey areas, and so we are interpreting and providing advice. So I know that's a long answer, but there's a lot on their plate and there's a lot of expectations on them.

So we have a range of people from social workers to psychiatric nurses to people from municipal because we have that whole municipal sector. So we have somebody who's recently come over to us from the city of Regina. We have a lot of newcomers that we've hired because we have a lot of newcomers who call our office. So when my member of my staff who's from Nigeria is talking to somebody who's immigrated from Nigeria, that's a whole different conversation. So we need a really diverse workplace as well.

**Chair Goudy:** — Thank you. Sean.

**Sean Wilson:** — Do I press it or do you press it?

**Chair Goudy:** — You don't . . .

**A Member:** — Do not touch the microphone.

**Sean Wilson:** — Okay, I will never touch it again. So '23 to '24 for requests for assistance is about 15 per cent of an increase. Was there any kind of a common theme of that 15 per cent, or was it just a little bit of everything?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — It was a lot of everything, yeah. And I would flag probably municipalities as really increasing. I would say increasing maybe by the actual numbers not so much, but the number of or the nature of the questions that we're getting and the complexity associated with it. So it's not just the numbers but what we're being asked as well that is an extra sort of load on our plate.

But no, I did track it. Really starting in around July we started to see the numbers go up. And initially it seemed to be coming from

correctional centres initially across the province, but then it really was across the board and I couldn't pin it to any particular sector. I think partly it was having a Knowledge Keeper and having our outreach and lots of different factors sort of contributed.

**Sean Wilson:** — It's interesting that you'd say it's municipalities because it looks like 2019 was at 3,000 and 2024 was at 3,200. And that's pretty close to your election years, so some people might have been getting a little sick of their councillors and reeves.

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Because I'm that person who deals with those people, I probably won't comment. And I do actually have a member of my team that's at a SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] session today providing information about our services so we do get an uptick.

I guess one of the things we do see is . . . And I say "request for assistance" because I think that's a more generic term than "complaints" because sometimes people are just looking to talk. So we might get a call from an administrator or a councillor or reeve wanting to talk to somebody who understands the pressures they're facing. So we also get that type of call as well.

**Chair Goudy:** — Your mike is on, Mr. Wilson. Would you have any other questions there?

**Sean Wilson:** — No.

**Chair Goudy:** — All right. Mr. Weedmark?

**Kevin Weedmark:** — All right, if I could ask one more question. With that increase in the number of cases from 2023 to 2024, was there any impact on the time required to close those cases?

**Sharon Pratchler:** — So those are those stats about our 90-day and 180-day. The impact was there was a 1 per cent shift. So last year we closed 99 per cent of our files within 180 days. This year it was 98 per cent within 180 days. So service delivery, no. Impact on my staff, probably yes. You know, we have a lot of tired staff. But they are pretty dedicated to their positions so they supported each other to work through that workload. But we tried to ensure that our service was still as timely as it had been in previous years.

Can I sustain that long term at that level? Probably not. You know, we'd have to look at extra staff at some point if it's continued. But we have been able to turn the files over.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Thank you very much.

**Chair Goudy:** — All right. Well we appreciate you coming in this morning and presenting. And Sharon and your staff, we appreciate you taking time for us and I appreciate the board's questions. And we will see you again.

**Sharon Pratchler:** — Thank you very much.

#### Information and Privacy Commissioner

**Chair Goudy:** — For item 3, Ron and his crew are getting ready. Well item no. 3, review of the 2025-2026 budget of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, vote 55. I would like



to introduce Ron Kruzeniski, Information and Privacy Commissioner. Ron, I think this will be your last presentation, and we really appreciate your work through the years and we look forward to this. Would you mind introducing your staff for us here before you get started?

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my left is Tristan Hungle, who is executive director of corporate services and responsible for the numbers that make up this request. And to my right is Diane Aldridge, who is the deputy commissioner, who will be doing part of the presentation when we talk about accomplishments and goals for the future. And Diane is suffering under a significant cold, and I thank her for being here. I hope her voice stands out, or I'll have to pick up in the middle of her presentation.

Mr. Speaker, as you said, this is the last time I believe I will be appearing in front of the board, but I told the board that about a year ago — that it would be the last time — and here I am again. So I want to go on record to thank previous members of the board and the current members of the board for their consideration and support. And an example of the new board, their consideration on December 10th when looking at salaries and budgets.

Since it is my last appearance in front of the board, when I reflect back on the last 10 years, we've really made significant progress, and I'm very proud of some of the things that we've been able to achieve. You know, one of our main functions is resolving access requests and disagreements that applicants and public bodies have and investigating breaches of privacy whenever they occur to a public body or a trustee.

And over the 10 years we have opened and closed over 3,400 files, and in the process we've issued over 1,200 reports all of which are on our website and available for the public to review. In addition to that we have given advice to residents that phone up and have an issue that comes within our scope of knowledge and authority. And we have given advice in over 12,300 matters or instances. So that kind of gives you a broad 10-year perspective.

What I'd like to do now is ask Diane to update you on some of the accomplishments that we achieved in 2024. Diane.

**Diane Aldridge:** — So good morning. I intend to highlight some of our accomplishments this past year. But before I do that I just want to make sure we're on the same page so that everybody understands the kind of work that we do and the kinds of files that we open.

So the first are review files. A review most commonly is when access is denied and an applicant is dissatisfied and comes to our office, but it could also involve a request to correct personal information.

[09:45]

The second is an investigation, and in particular we're talking about privacy breaches which results often from employee snooping or a fax that goes to the wrong recipient or it could even be a ransomware attack.

The third kind is a little bit unusual. It's called a disregard. And

when an applicant, an individual, makes an access to information request, the organization, the public body, or the trustee has 30 calendar days in which they have to respond. During that process the public body can actually make an application to the commissioner for consideration to have that access to information request or a correction request disregarded. And if that's granted, then it is as if it had never been made. And in those particular cases there isn't even a course of second appeal to the Court of King's Bench.

Finally our office opens consultation files, and these are our attempts to be proactive. Because it's not complaint driven; it's not someone coming to us necessarily that's aggrieved. It is proactive, and that's looking specifically at, well to what extent does this draft policy, procedure, a privacy impact assessment, the system, the draft legislation, how does it stack up or measure up when it comes to the access and privacy legislation itself? And we can't give advance rulings, but what we do try to do is to really look at everything and to let them know where there's gaps, omissions, or to say, you know, well it looks like you're moving in the right direction on this one.

So now to shift to some of the accomplishments of this year, and of course, there will be a full consideration in the annual report that comes up at the end of June, but some of them. So if you look at the board package, specifically on page 7 chart 1, you'll see that our office opened 308 files in the 2024 calendar year.

On page 8 chart 3, you will see the time it is taking our office to resolve a matter by report or otherwise. And "otherwise" just means it could be discontinued for another reason. Maybe there was some sort of informal resolution; there was some mediation that occurred. And that has continued to drop over the course of the last number of years. And in particular just the reviews and the investigations are outlined, not the other types of files, because we do have different timelines in terms of what we're targeting to try to close those matters.

And because those timelines have continued to drop over the years — because we've really made a concerted effort to achieve shorter timelines — is we have reduced the target, which I'll talk about in the goals section coming up.

When you look at the consultations and the disregard decisions, however, our targets are much lower than the ones I'll talk about soon. And those are only 30 days, and that's calendar days. What we achieved on average was 12 days for the disregard decisions and 14 days for the consultations. So for instance if a ministry came to us and they had draft legislation, on average we're returning and providing our feedback within 14 calendar days.

On page 8 chart 2, we've also reduced the time it takes to conclude a review or investigation, and we ended the calendar year with only 85 active cases. In comparison we had a backlog of 245 active case files at the end of 2019, which took us considerably longer to close. So we think this is a great accomplishment.

Though not included in the board package, I'm also pleased to report that our office closed in total 316 files. 119 you'd find on our website because it's a public report with formal findings or recommendations. And in terms of compliance, again it's not in the board package, but we had . . . And there could be one

recommendation, there could be 20 in the report. It all depends upon what the issues were. But on average what we're looking at, there was 34 per cent of our recommendations that were fully complied and 53 per cent that were partially complied, which also I think is very positive because at the end of the day the commissioner does not have order-making power. We can only make recommendations, so we must have been fairly persuasive in those particular cases.

Also not in the board package, but our office provides yet another service, as the commissioner alluded to, which is offering that summary advice. And the commissioner indicated it was over 12,000, and those are individuals that are calling, emailing, coming down to our office to meet with one of our analysts or even myself and just to get some advice in terms of anything from what's your role, the mandate. As the Ombudsman mentioned, well sometimes they come to us and, you know, we're not the ones that are here that can actually address the particular concern, but we will refer them to whoever we research and find that might best suit their needs.

But when they come to us, we have provided this particular . . . 1,541 times. So it definitely keeps us busy and on top of all of the file work that we do do, and that timeline is the shortest of all. Our goal is to provide that feedback within three business days, but we've exceeded that and I think we're about a day and a half on average replying back. Now back to you, Ron.

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — Thanks very much, Diane. So that's a bit of a snapshot of what happened in 2024, and we now want to talk briefly about goals for 2025. And I wanted to acknowledge at the outset that, you know, setting goals when you know a new commissioner is coming in is a little bit tricky. But we acknowledge that the new commissioner, you know, can come up with new goals, can amend the goals that are there, delete some of them, maybe come up with a totally different vision, and obviously make adjustments to those goals.

On the other hand, many of the goals link back to what the legislation says in terms of what our office is expected to do. So with that caveat that we know a new commissioner may change things, we think this is a good starting point for him or her to look at and say, you know, which ones do I want to run with, which ones do I want to change? So Diane, we have worked on it and we've shared some of it with managers and staff as to possible goals subject to commissioner change for 2025.

**Diane Aldridge:** — You bet. And so the goals you'll find in the package on pages 2 to 5, and as the commissioner indicated, they are subject to change. And please consider these at the 30,000-foot level. There are a lot of really granular goals that each individual is tasked with in the course of a year, and we actually have a full goals document that everyone works at. And pleased to say that, in addition to all of the file work that we do, the summary advice presentations, we also always achieve about 85 per cent of our other goals. So it's something that we really try to make sure that we're well-rounded and offering as much as we can, even in terms of educational resources.

So the first one I want to highlight is the need to update the website and our resources to ensure they're timely. So for instance legislation changes, so we have to make sure that what we're putting out there is accurate and reflects whatever those

changes are.

But to give you a sense of what we did this past year is that we updated 13 resources, updated 12 blogs, and added 8 more. And some of the topics were MLA guide to protecting personal information; contracting with government; cybersecurity threats, how you can prepare and what to do after; and of course and I think was timely, elections and responding to access to information requests. That one we always get a lot of questions around election time when the writ drops. And many more are on our list for updating this upcoming year.

The second is promote amendments to municipal legislation to enhance residents' rights to access and to protection of privacy. With respect to this goal, I'm pleased to say that we are actively involved with the Ministry of Government Relations. There's this open consultation process that's been going on. They received stakeholder feedback, came back with a summary of what they've heard. We've also considered that and we have already responded with a letter, and we will be following as that process continues throughout the year.

And lastly in relation to the timelines for concluding a review and investigation by report or otherwise, because of the success that we've had in continuing to reduce those timelines over the last couple of years, we think we can safely move that target from 150 days to 130, even though at this point we're already exceeding that. Back to you, Ron.

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — Thank you very much, Diane. So that gives you an idea and, in your package, more details about the goals for 2025.

I would now like to turn to our financial request. And it starts at page 12 in your package, and the first heading there is "Security." We're quite nervous and anxious about security, and in our presentations we talk to people not about if a breach occurs, when a breach will occur. And I think the last thing in the world I would want is the Privacy Commissioner's records to be breached. We have some very sensitive records, but I think that would make a very interesting, attractive headline.

So over the last two years we've come to the board with various requests to keep upping and improving our security, and this year is no exception. We've felt it's important to implement a Microsoft product called data loss protection. And it's part of their MS 365 [Microsoft 365] program, something we didn't have before and thought it was pretty important that we have.

Now as we do these things, we know that the hackers out there, whether they're in our country or in other countries, will adjust and find other ways. So I see this — for our office and for any other government organization or private corporation — kind of a cat-and-mouse thing, is that as you take protection, somebody else will figure a way around it. And I'm sure all of you have read lots of headlines nationally or internationally where breaches occur. So our step forward, in addition to the steps we've taken in the last two years, is the Microsoft module which will give us further protection.

The second request is Adobe Acrobat Pro. I think many of us are familiar with Adobe Reader. Our office relies significantly on this particular program. I would say almost every ministry or

municipality sends us documents with the PDF [portable document format] format, which is what is organized and run by Adobe. Our staff, if they get records of 1,000 pages or 2,000 pages, will work in Adobe to go through those records and determine the exemptions.

Now Adobe, like some other organizations out there, have changed their approach. At one point we used to be able to buy a licence, and you could use the product for a long time or forever until the company started to not support it anymore. They have changed their fee model to one of a monthly subscription per user. And again we felt we had no choice to basically adapt to their different system of charging us so that we have the most updated version of Adobe Pro.

Third point is translation into French. We've encountered situations where it was necessary to produce our reports in both French and English. That's occurred this year. We expect it will occur in 2025. We know of two files already where that in fact will be the reality, that the report will be made available in French. We're hosting a webinar on January 31st, and there is a need for full participation for simultaneous translation. And we expect that that will be the case in the future, that there will be other needs through webinars or through reports.

On the next heading of operating costs, inflation is a factor in the services we get. The dollar declines in comparison to the US [United States] dollar, and some of our security services are affected by that. So we have used the factor of 2.6 per cent to contemplate that certain services are just going to cost more. Now in there is not accommodations and accommodations, based on the last notices from SaskBuilds, are staying at last year's level.

[10:00]

The next item is salary increases. On December 10th this board considered the situation of salary increases and approved a special warrant for us of \$140,000, also impacted other officers and the LAS [Legislative Assembly Service]. And that covered back pay for 2023-24 and '24-25. Now those increases have implications for the upcoming year, 2025, plus in addition there's a 1.6 per cent April 1st increase. So our most significant request before you is \$131,000, which is basically adjusting to the salaries which basically follows what executive government, what out-of-scope salaries have been and been provided for.

In-range movement is historically when people are engaged, hired by an office, there's a minimum salary and a maximum salary. And while they're employed, they're entitled to annual adjustments as they proceed and make their way to the maximum. Once they hit the maximum, they are not entitled to any in-range movements. The Public Service Commission has a performance plan. We try to follow it as best we can. They come out with guidelines as to what the percentages of increase should be for developmental staff, for staff that meet expectations, or staff that exceed expectations.

And then the next heading is salary realignment. From time to time, minor reorganizing has to occur and it results in reclassifications of an individual's salary. And sometimes that creates compression, and we put in an adjustment for some reorganizing and reclassing efforts that occurred in this year.

I do want to note, and I think this is true of the last two years, we have not asked for funding for more staff. And as Diane has outlined, I think we have significant control on our performance in getting back to the residents of the province in an efficient and quick way with the staff complement that we have.

So basically our total non-statutory request is 216,000, and that would result if this board approved it in a non-statutory budget of \$2.919 million.

So I think I want to leave matters there. I want to thank the board for listening to Diane and I today. I ask that you consider our request, and we're certainly open to answer questions. And depending on your complicated questions, Diane or I will answer those questions. So, Mr. Speaker, we're open to questions.

**Chair Goudy:** — Well thank you, Ron and Diane, for that clarification on a lot of what we have looked through. Are there any questions? Mr. McLeod.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Commissioner and your team, for your presentation today but also for the work that you do on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

I'm going to apologize at the outset because my question was around the translation services, and I largely coughed through your presentation. So I'm sure you maybe answered this and I just didn't hear it. But can you expand on the number of translation services that you would provide in a year and how you're anticipating that moving forward?

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — Well last year we translated two reports. And I don't have the exact numbers, and it depends on the number of pages that you translate. So a 10-page report is different than a 30-page report, but on average it costs about \$1,200 per report on average. We know already for the upcoming year we have two files where translation will be necessary, so applying the average of \$1,200, about 2,400. We also have this webinar coming up and the translation services are about \$3,000.

What I don't know and what we tried to anticipate a little bit is, how many more reports might we have to translate in the coming year? Is it two? Is it three? Is it four? We don't know until the complaint is filed with us or individuals make requests or create the expectation that they do expect the report to be out in two languages. So I would say our costs, you know, if we have another webinar in the coming year — say the new commissioner decides to do that — our translation costs are probably in that range of 5,000 to \$10,000.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Any other questions from the board? Ms. Carr.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — I just have one question. And I'm just curious, as I did in the previous presentation, I looked through the audited financial statements and I saw that you do have a bit of a reserve. So I'm just curious what your reserve is at this point in time. And I guess that's a leading question for everybody else sitting there watching — you need to be prepared; I'm going to ask everybody.

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — I'm not sure if you mean a reserve in the sense that we have an asset where we have cash on hand that carries forward from year to year, or you mean where we're going to end up in terms of a surplus or deficit this year. So which area are you kind of interested in?

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Yeah, I'll be a little more . . . An accumulated surplus of cash that you might have on hand.

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — Basically, accumulated surplus doesn't mean much to me at all, frankly. I guess the auditor and the LAS staff do the financial statements. But as we come to the end of March we will either have, you know, be bang on zero or have a bit of a surplus, which means money we didn't spend. But we never get to carry that over to the next fiscal year.

So I'm not sure I'm answering your question, but whatever is on those financial statements, we literally don't have a bank account. So if coming up for the next year, when you approve the non-statutory of \$2.919 million, that's all we have. There's no savings account or reserve fund that we ever have access to.

**Chair Goudy:** — Mr. Love.

**Matt Love:** — Yeah, thank you for the report to the board and for your work. Just a quick question on some of the non-statutory budget increases. You gave excellent detailed information on the Adobe licensing, and security increases, and some of those other items. I guess just a question of clarification. Those amounts requested, are those increases over and above what was spent last fiscal year? For example, the Adobe licensing in the written report says that that's the total cost. So I guess my question is, what was spent last year? As well as with the security and the translation services, are these total costs or are these over and above what was spent last year?

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — The reason I flagged those, those are over and above what we basically have been spending this year on security. So in a sense we're asking, because of Microsoft and their data loss prevention module, for an extra 5,000 which we'll spend on security. The translation cost is an extra cost that, you know, we are anticipating we'll have to spend. So the 216,000 is the increase; 131,00 of that is salary dollars, similar to what out-of-scope people in executive government have or will be receiving.

**Matt Love:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Mr. Weedmark.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Thank you. Can you just walk us through in a little bit more detail the salary realignment that's part of the increase in the salary line item? You say you went through a restructuring process and reclassified some employees. Can you walk us through how that process worked?

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — Well we found we had a need to create a position of a senior analyst. We have certain situations that are more complex than the usual, and we needed very experienced people to fit into that particular position. As a result of creating that position at a level 8, it started to have the impact on supervisors and managers who would be managing that person as a senior analyst. So as a result of that basically is what I call a

realignment to sort of keep the organization functioning where the senior analyst makes a bit more money than the analyst. The director of compliance makes a bit more money than the senior analyst.

What we do when we have these things, because I've never pretended to be really, really smart when it comes to human resources, is we engage a person — someone who worked for the Public Service Commission, retired — to give us an evaluation of each step that we do. And we have on file, and in particular the Provincial Auditor always seems to be very interested in this process which they should be, and we have an evaluation as to whether each step is reasonable and meets the system that the PSC has already created. So only with that report in hand do we then adjust the salaries and write our letters to payroll. So that's kind of the process. I hope that's what you were kind of getting at.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Yes. Thank you. And one other question. Just in chart 3 on page 8, it shows a very significant decrease in the average response times. And I'm just wondering how you achieved that, what tactics you took to bring those response times over a couple years down to about a third of what they had been.

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — Well I'm going to give you half an answer and let Diane finish it off. I would say this started a long time ago. For me it was 2014, and was concerned that from the time that a person makes a complaint to us that they get a report, the timeline was just too long, whether it was two years or two and a half years or whatever.

So we started to map our processes and find out where our bottlenecks were and where we could snip out little steps in our process so that it would all go faster. Part of that was saying . . . And in order to do this we've got to say, "What's our goal? What's our target?"

So we first set a target of 180 calendar days, which is six months. And if you compare that across the country to other commissioners' offices, that still was pretty ambitious. And as we worked on that — and we had staff meetings; we would report on these numbers every Monday morning — we realized at a certain point that we got rid of the backlog and that we were starting to eat into that 180 days. It was lower.

[10:15]

So last year we adjusted it to 150 days, and we found out we still could be lower than that. And we basically are in the range of 100 days to 110 days, which is slightly over three months. We've adjusted our target to 130, and you might say, why did we do that? Are we kind of chicken to go all the way? The reality is people come and go — people retire, people go on maternity leave — all kinds of things happen when in the public service. And it felt it was just safer to go to 130 days even though we're performing better than that. I'll leave it to the next commissioner to go to 110.

So I think it's persistence, focusing on the target. And as I said to staff yesterday — it's really interesting and I've read some books in psychology — that if you pick a number, for example, if you say, on this test I want to make 80, you will probably hit 78, 79, maybe 81. The human brain has a real tendency to like to

meet the numbers that you set for it.

So I've got to get off my pedestal on this particular topic. Tristan and Diane have heard much too much about this although . . . What would you add to that, Diane?

**Diane Aldridge:** — And it's a lot more than just that. When you look at the refinements to our processes, there have been many. We've examined where we're slowing down and looked at why. And in some cases, what we've done is come out with new tools and training for our staff so that we can anticipate those problems.

And we have a case management system where we now have different sequences of tasks that need to be accomplished on particular files, whether it be review or investigation or what have you. And it reminds them, okay, well this actually should be done within 14 days, this piece, and then you can click it off. And the managers have access to other reports within the system. They can also look where something is over, under. They can actually see the inboxes of what their staff are working on, and they regularly meet with them.

We meet as a whole team. We talk about some of those challenges. If things need to be escalated, something needs to be brought to my attention or to the commissioner's attention, we book those meetings immediately. And we strategize in terms of well, what do we need to move this forward? And sometimes it's going back to the applicant. It could be the complainant, a third party, the public body. Maybe, you know, we have to have a meeting. Maybe there has to be a clarification provided. Sometimes, you know, we have to remind organizations of why it's important that we get certain pieces of that puzzle in doing the work.

And we find that putting that all together and being better in terms of communicating what we need within our own timelines and setting that in advance, we're more likely to get responses within those timelines. And even when we know a timeline is coming up, we will send reminders, and then, you know . . . because everybody's busy. And it's really easy for these things to fall by the wayside. So I think it's that combination of setting goals, knowing where things may fall down a little bit, putting strategies in place, and ultimately better communication.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Excellent. Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Any other questions? So I think you answered most of . . . My question was, in 2019 you'd mentioned earlier that you had dropped your — how was it worded? — your active files. 2019, you really . . . Is that with the efficiencies that you put together as an organization?

**Diane Aldridge:** — Yes.

**Chair Goudy:** — So just in curiosity, in future, I don't know whoever did the timeline for today if they were thinking . . . In terms that you had mentioned that you just say it and think it and . . . Because we're a little behind. But I would love to hear more about that, and you know, if one organization can reduce the case files to such a degree without increasing the staffing, that's incredibly impressive. So anyways, I look forward to hearing possibly in the future and visiting about that. But appreciate very

much your time this morning.

Ron, all the best in your retirement. Very clearly you have a sharp mind. As our ears and eyes decrease in effectiveness, your mind, just listening to you talk, is very, very clear. And I'm not sure if you were reading your notes there but it seemed like you knew all the details of every point that was coming up, and we just appreciate your service. How many years have you served the government?

**Ron Kruzeniski:** — Well it's about ten and a half years as the Information and Privacy Commissioner. And I do thank you for those kind words. And if you want to hear more about it, maybe this isn't the last time I appear in front of the board.

**Chair Goudy:** — Well you just threw it out there. This is your retirement, real retirement and then that will push that a little further back. But appreciate your time here this morning with all of us, and all the best in your future. Take care. And we will see you again.

#### Advocate for Children and Youth

**Chair Goudy:** — So we are all settled in. Well item no. 4, review of the 2025-2026 budget for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, vote 76. I would like to introduce and welcome — I think Dr. was added — Dr. Lisa Broda, Advocate for Children and Youth. And before you give your presentation, would you mind introducing your officials and those who are here with you today.

**Lisa Broda:** — Sure, good morning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, hon. members of the board. I'd like to introduce you to Caroline Sookocheff on my right, manager of finance and administration; Leeann Palmer, our deputy advocate on my left. And I'd also like to introduce Marci Macomber behind me on my left — she's our director of investigations and systemics — and Jacki Peters who is our director of advocacy who is with me here today.

And I just want to say to the new members of the Board of Internal Economy, welcome. I appreciate the opportunity to introduce you to our office and look forward to answering any questions that you may have regarding the work we do. And I'd also like to extend a sincere thank you to the board and to the Legislative Assembly as well for their ongoing support over the past five years.

Just prior to getting into the details of our submission, I'd like to make some remarks regarding the work our office has been engaged in in the past year.

The Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth is dedicated to helping children and youth have their voices heard — their voices are often the most silent — and to ensure their rights are considered in the decisions that impact and shape their lives. As an independent office of the legislature, we're responsible for monitoring children and youth services and support programs, ensuring such services and programs achieved are for the desired outcomes of young people.

This past year has been extremely challenging for Saskatchewan children and youth who continue to face deeply rooted and multi-layered issues. Our staff work diligently and effectively to ensure

that this most vulnerable population can receive the acute and long-term services required to assist them.

I extend my sincere gratitude to our staff for their perseverance and dedication to providing these high-quality services in support to children, youth, and families who call our office. The commitment of our entire team is evident in the results achieved in supporting and effecting system change for the well-being, safety, and protection of all children and youth in the province. It's a distinct honour to work with such a passionate and committed team.

Our work is with young people who are particularly vulnerable, have complex concerns and needs, and the majority of which do not have strong natural advocates to help support them in navigating the much-needed services from ministries, agencies, or other publicly funded services. Given the impact of the broader social and economic conditions and the complexity of existing systems and programs, achieving improvements to services is not an easy undertaking. Solutions aren't simple and often require change at the broader systemic level.

In 2024 we continued to see these persistent challenges, with young people struggling to access the support services that they need. This is evidenced by the volume of files and the substantive increase in issues specifically related to the advocacy arm of our mandate. These cases are often acute, complicated, and at times require an urgent response. Priority and resolution to ensure a child gets the service they need is key. The complexity of these cases requires this time to unpack the core elements of the specific concerns and address the full spectrum of issues, which most often relate to issues like neglect and abuse, intergenerational trauma, food insecurity and poverty, homelessness and lack of housing, transitions to adulthood, family struggles with high-conflict separations, mental health, substance abuse and misuse, addictions, suicide ideation, and other issues faced by young people, just to name a few.

Their situations are at times devastating or so challenging due to the multitude of issues present in their everyday lives. The implications for these children can be serious. As we know, poor access leads to an overall poor quality of life, which does not allow a child to live in their full potential physically, mentally, or emotionally.

The most pressing issue that continues to be faced by young people today is their struggles with mental health and addictions. Most national and international sources such as the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and World Health report mental illness affects people across all socio-determinants like age, income levels, education, and culture, which of course includes young people. However the lack of access and barriers to services and system inequities like poverty and homelessness, discrimination, or gender-based violence, among others, worsens mental health symptoms and mental illness especially if supports are difficult to access.

In Canada, suicide — which is the gravest outcome of poor mental health for young people — disproportionately impacts Indigenous children and youth, the rate of which is at least three times higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts. We are encouraged by the development though of resources in

Saskatchewan toward addressing the barriers in services and to build capacity, some of which resulted from our recommendations in our *Desperately Waiting* report in 2022. And some of those developments were the mental health capacity building in schools and integrated youth services pilot, just to name a few, which we're really pleased about. However we continue to receive and investigate a large number of files, signalling that more needs to be done.

When it comes to all matters of service provision, our office is uniquely positioned to support government and all entities to provide, support, or enhance existing services, leading to better outcomes within the child- and youth-serving systems. We do this by engaging in systemic work and making recommendations to improve services across all child-serving sectors. We strive to do this in numerous ways to ensure the recommendations we make are reasonable and doable and if implemented will make significant differences in the lives of children in Saskatchewan.

This past year we consulted extensively with these entities. We had approximately 90 files related to our systemic work that included research and project reviews, recommendations, all in the areas of health, social services, and education. We were pleased to be invited to further consult on the regulations to *The Child and Family Services Act*, a follow-up to our consultation on the Act amendments in 2023. On behalf of Saskatchewan children, we continue to participate at the federal level, and this year we are invited as a witness to provide testimony and a submission to the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights pertaining to their study on aging out of foster care. We are also engaged to consult and offer a submission on Senator Rosemary Moodie's national child strategy bill.

In 2024 we have also spent considerable time monitoring and meeting with stakeholders on the recommendations made in our previous reports. One key highlight is the implementation of our recommendation related to increasing the age of protection for youth from 16 to 18 which was included as an amendment in the recent changes to *The Child and Family Services Act*. We were very pleased to close this recommendation this past year.

To continue to ensure that children, youth, and families and all stakeholders are aware and can connect to our office, public education was a key focus in 2024. Our staff conducted 505 public education presentations to various stakeholders across the province in government ministries, Saskatchewan Health Authority, various non-profit community-based organizations, school boards, and schools, and these presentations led to an increased request for more public education presentations and an increased call to our office for service and assistance regarding the issues children face and/or service provisions they need or are receiving.

We were also able to conduct 79 self-advocacy workshops which reached nearly 1,400 children and youth providing information about our office, their rights, and how they can advocate on behalf of themselves. Since the inception of this workshop in April 2022 we have connected with nearly 6,000 young people across the province which, just in case you have interest, is about 3 per cent of our children and youth population.

As indicated previously, what is most notable about 2024 was the increase in issues related to each file, particularly our advocacy

and investigations which increased by 600 issues from the previous year. We are anticipating that these trends will continue in 2025 and the calls for service to increase. Again this is due to the multi-layered and complex issues children and youth are experiencing.

[10:30]

These cases require more time and resources to achieve resolution and to ensure the young person receives the services to which they are entitled, as is their right. This work requires skill, expertise, and substantive knowledge of the child-serving system.

However we are concerned that our ability to meet one of our guiding principles, which is timely client service, might be severely tested. This upward trend for demand for advocacy continues. Advocacy is one of the primary functions of our office and is key to ensuring young people are safe, protected, and receive the services at the time these are needed.

Our office will also continue to focus heavily on its systemic work. As highlighted earlier, over the past years we've been actively consulting with government agencies, health entities on various legislation, regulations, and policy; and recommending improvements that will result in better system outcomes for children and youth.

Key actions also for '25-26 will include following up on recommendations made in our previous reports concerning children in group homes; mental health and addictions; children in person-of-sufficient-interest care; independent schools; and monitoring our notifications of child deaths and injuries. We also continue to meet with all government entities that serve children as it pertains to the Saskatchewan children and youth strategy, a recommendation we made in 2022. We are encouraged by the government's acceptance of this recommendation as it particularly is vital in bringing the work of all child-serving ministries together to address the common service barriers that young people face.

We also will be conducting an aggregate child injury review of injury files from '22 to 24, and closely examining drug toxicity in families and the impacts of this on children. Our office will also look forward to the future in establishing its next five-year strategic plan for 2025-30.

Although we are experiencing significant and ongoing challenges and pressures, we continue to maintain a strong operational team and will continue to monitor this volume of work within our existing complement. And to pivot and adjust and ensure we uphold our mandate and priorities at the highest level.

Now if I may turn your attention to our written budget submission before you. Our 2025-26 budget proposal reflects our best efforts to maintain costs, while recognizing our obligation to be financially accountable for the expenditure of public funds. Similar to the previous five budget cycles, this budget reflects a relatively status quo budget, no change to our staff FTEs [full-time equivalent], and the maintenance of existing operating funding for goods and services.

However the budget does reflect a slight increase in our overall budget level to account for changes to wage and benefit compensation commensurate with those in executive government, and an adjustment to the consumer price index for the goods and services.

If I can direct your attention to page 5 of our submission, here we discuss the assumptions we have made in developing our '25-26 budget request and outline the pressures to the wage and benefit compensation for both economic adjustments and in-range salary progression for eligible employees, the consumer price index adjustment, and statutory expenses.

Wage and benefit compensation of the staff of the Legislative Assembly Service and independent officers are tied to the Government of Saskatchewan. Consequently, with the ratification of the SGEU [Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union] agreement in late '24, this has resulted in salary pressures beyond our organization's ability to absorb.

One other area impacting our budget development causing expenditure pressure relates to the adjustment of the consumer price index for goods and services which is projected to be 2.6 per cent. Details of our '25-26 budget are outlined fully on page 7 as you see there, and as indicated above, we are only requesting funding for two items: funding to cover the increase in wages and benefits for eligible employees in the amount of \$220,000 and funding to cover the cost of the CPI [consumer price index] adjustment for goods and services in the amount of \$18,000. Overall our '25-26 budget proposal reflects a 7.8 per cent increase in our general operating fund.

And with that I respectfully request that the Board of Internal Economy recommend to the Legislative Assembly an appropriation for the Advocate for Children and Youth office, Vote 076, outlined on page 7 of our submission, for fiscal year '25-26.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission and allowing me to make these remarks, and I'd take any questions now. Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Thank you very much. Any questions from the board? Mr. McLeod.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — I'll start by thanking you for your presentation and you and your team for all the work that you do throughout the course of the year. I just had one question and it's related to the 7.8 per cent increase totalling 238,000. As I go through the numbers, I see the breakdown of that in wages and benefits, CBA contract, in-range, CPI, and statutory. I don't see a lot of discretionary expenses in there. Would you classify any of the 238,000 as discretionary?

**Lisa Broda:** — No, there's no discretionary expenses in there. It's just wages and compensation, that's all.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Mr. Love.

**Matt Love:** — Yeah, thanks for that excellent report and for the

truly exceptional work that you do on behalf of children and youth in our province. I always look forward to this report every year as I follow your work closely.

My question I suppose could have also been posed to the Ombudsman because I saw a similar trend here, which is you're seeing increased calls for advocacy, investigation, increased work, and likely that's due in part to the increased education that you engage in. In other words when you do more work, you create more work, and that's a good thing. I thank you for doing that.

Could you just revisit some of those numbers for me — I didn't quite catch them — in terms of the increase in files for advocacy and investigation, what that increase was over last year, what the trend has been over the last number of years, and your ability to complete that work in a timely way to serve the calls that come into your office.

**Lisa Broda:** — Thank you. Thanks for the question. Yeah, similar to my colleague, Ms. Pratchler, you know, she indicated how she's seeing some of the same multi-faceted complex issues coming into her office. Similarly we are seeing the same upward trend.

We're tracking . . . So we track by files rather than calls, although we probably could get back to the board if they have interest in our call volume. And our files, what's important about that is, you know, our issues continually to become . . . It's more coexisting issues, not just a single issue. So being up over 600 issues tells us a lot. We track over 100 issue types and operationalize those issues. So it tells us a lot about the complexity that children are facing and the families are facing and they're vulnerable . . . if they're, you know, vulnerable families.

But even overall, the highest . . . One of the major issues I highlighted in this report was around mental health and addictions. Because everything else will lead to poor mental health, you know, all the social determinants of health that we know will impact a young person's physical, mental, and emotional stability. So I think we could say easily that the 600, over the 600 issues, takes a little bit more time to resolve.

And that's why we're concerned that our ability to be timely . . . Within our policy we have a 30-day intake resolution timeline and then 90 days for concluding a file. And you know, we're able to do that sufficiently, but we do have struggles with that too. So it's the issue base that, you know, we're seeing some real concerning spots in.

**Matt Love:** — And with that large increase in files are you able to absorb that increased work effectively? Have you made any changes in your structure or how your staff works to address the increased number of files coming in?

**Lisa Broda:** — You know, as I said in my speak, we're monitoring it right now closely. We didn't come here to ask for FTEs this time. The last five years we, you know, our team, we haven't asked for any . . . outside of I think the legal. We asked for I think \$40,000 for legal expenses my first year, my first budget. We've never asked for FTEs in my entire time here.

So but that's because we've been able to manage effectively. I have a really strong staff and they have a lot of expertise. So our resolution times are okay right now, but they're being stretched. So I would say that we will continue to monitor, to your question, and come back to the board if need be.

**Matt Love:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Mr. Weedmark.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Yes. Just for a little bit more detail along the same lines. On page 4 you've got the numbers for the volume of work in 2024. Can you give us some sense, you know, percentage-wise, what would that have changed from the previous year or five years ago? And as those numbers have changed, what's been the effect on the time to close, for instance, a typical investigation?

**Lisa Broda:** — Yeah, thank you. Well similar to my response to Mr. Love, we have about a 30-day, 90-day turnaround and we are, you know, we're concerned about our ability to be able to meet that. And it's really about the issues more than it's about the files. You can see in our submission that we have . . . it's actually a little bit more than the 1,336 files that we outline in our submission. And with that is the increase of issues, which was substantive — 600 over last year.

So the complexity is the key. Less about the amount of files, it's about how many issues that are coming with each of those files. And so it is testing our timelines a little bit. So we are going to monitor that closely, and next year, you know, if we need to make any requests . . . but we are able to manage it in our current operational complement right now. Thank you for the question.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Thank you very much.

**Chair Goudy:** — Ms. Carr.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Just the same question I've asked everybody else. So on the accumulated surplus of . . . yeah.

**Lisa Broda:** — Our financial statements?

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Yes.

**Lisa Broda:** — The surpluses year over year that may happen that when you . . . very often are the result of vacancies. You know, you might have someone on a mat leave and things like that. But this year we're sitting around 75,000 and so . . . to March 31. So I do believe though, you know, we might have some other unanticipated costs as well related to that. But that's where we are.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Thank you.

**Lisa Broda:** — You're welcome.

**Chair Goudy:** — No more questions? One or two from me. I notice systemic change is quite often mentioned in here, and then you also had files related to access to service. Eleven of them had been systemic research. Yeah, just systemic change, systemic research. What is that?



**Lisa Broda:** — So thank you for the question. I appreciate that. Everything we do ultimately will end up in looking for systemic improvements and better outcomes for young people. So whether it's in our advocacy, which does deal with more the front end, sort of, what's coming in and more acute, but everything we do is with that systemic lens. It feeds into where and what we might do for our key actions in the next year.

So you might have heard me say about, we're doing a review of our child injury files for '22-24 in our upcoming year. And what we're hoping to learn about is, you know, what's happening first of all with those children? Is there anything that led to their injuries that we can . . . that need, you know, we need to speak to ministries about on improvement? And if it's, you know, to do with policy or changes in policy or changes in regulations, legislation, whatever it is, ultimately it's going to have better impacts and better outcomes for our young people.

So we think more in the broader systemic lens, so that everything that we do can lead into outcomes that make it better for all children. So even if it's an investigation into a child death or injury, a single investigation, it may have systemic properties, so then it will lead us to go look further into what's happening for all children and youth. And then that's how we hope to support governments for the better outcomes and improvements we're seeking.

**Chair Goudy:** — Thank you. And you'd mentioned a few times too the complexity in the files. What's your opinion on, you know, the change over the last number of years, I guess? I don't know how long your history is in, you know, this area of society. But what would you say is causing your caseload to increase and the complexity to increase?

**Lisa Broda:** — Families are struggling, and like I had said in my speak as well that the broader social and economic conditions right now have been hard. I would say post-pandemic, that has had a lot of impacts on children and youth for sure. Children and youth have, you know, a multitude of issues regardless of their socio-economic status, and what it leads to is anxiety and depression. And we see higher rates of that amongst young people today than we ever have.

And I think that all the different issues we see are coexisting, so when you have, you know, more than one issue to deal with, with a young person or their families — because young people live in families mostly — but yeah, there's a variety of reasons. We'd need more time and certainly could, you know, if anybody would like to talk further. But there's a lot going on out there for our young people. And you know, we're just trying to make sense of it too and keep trying to move the dial on the improvements in all the services that they need.

**Chair Goudy:** — Thank you. I look forward to visiting on that a little more in the future and pop by for a visit. Any more questions? So, Mr. Love, was that a . . .

**Matt Love:** — No.

**Chair Goudy:** — No. Okay, so thank you to the team for coming in today. We appreciate that very much and your hard work, and have a wonderful day.

[10:45]

**Lisa Broda:** — Thank you so much.

**Chair Goudy:** — And at this time, I guess we'll have a short break for health. So everybody, health to you. *Shëndet*, as they say in Albania.

[The board recessed for a period of time.]

### Chief Electoral Officer

**Chair Goudy:** — All right. Thank you, everyone. We'll reconvene, the time now being 11:01. And we are on item no. 5, review of the 2025-2026 budget for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan, vote 34. So I would like to introduce and welcome Dr. Michael Boda and his staff, our Chief Electoral Officer. And would you mind introducing your staff before you give your report? Thanks, Michael.

**Michael Boda:** — Well thank you for inviting me here today — I really appreciate it — and my officials to discuss our '25-26 budget estimates to you and the board. And I'm pleased to be here, and more pleased to be on the other side of the 30th general election, as I'm sure you are. But as our budget submission makes quite clear, our work does not end once voting is complete or even when the election period ends. But our work does change significantly.

And yes, I will introduce who I have with me here today. Jennifer Colin is our deputy chief electoral officer and chief operating officer. And sitting behind me is Richard Hall, who is our executive director of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, and Aaron Thompson, who is our director of finance.

So with your permission, Mr. Chair, I'd like to take about 20 minutes to give an overview of our budget estimates, and after that I would be more than happy to take questions. Okay.

So initially I'd like to offer a brief recap of what Elections Saskatchewan has accomplished over the last year. We delivered 56 hours of in-person voting — that's the most ever in Saskatchewan — during our first-ever voting week. We opened and equipped 61 returning offices and made them functional for a few months, and then we closed them down again.

We served 243 political candidates and seven registered political parties, and we continue to serve them as we work through the statutorily required political finance process and election expense return process. About 4,300 temporary workers were hired, trained, and deployed to administer a modernized voting experience. And finally, we saw more people cast a ballot than we had seen in more than two decades. More than 471,000 voters participated with a turnout rate of close to 57 per cent.

Of course all that was last year, fiscal year '24-25, and today we're here to talk about '25-26. But I would be remiss if we didn't mention the good work of my team literally in every corner of this province, some whom you all would have encountered when you filed your nomination papers or when you cast your ballot. And in fact, your financial agents may still be working with members of our team as we receive candidate expense returns, process them, and ensure legislation is followed and

taxpayer dollars are managed effectively and appropriately.

Now 2025 marks the 13th year that I've had the honour of presenting a budget before this board. But I know this is the first time for some members to have been presented with a budget from Elections Saskatchewan, and I'd like to offer some background information on my office, as I know it's perhaps uncommon to see an 83 per cent reduction from the previous year in a budget. And in doing this, I also want to ensure that the board will be prepared in a few years' time when my budget submission rises by 80 per cent, that being the year of the next general election when we'll need to pay those thousands of election workers, rent voting locations, and so on.

So rather than following the typical one-year spending cycle common in most public sector organizations, Elections Saskatchewan, like other election management bodies across the country — like Elections Canada, Elections Ontario, and any other EMB [election management body] — we follow a four-year spending cycle, the four years between fixed-date general elections. Year one is the year immediately after the event, while year four sees the next election conducted.

Saskatchewan's next election is scheduled in legislation for the last day . . . The last day of voting in voting week will be October the 30th, 2028, the day before Halloween. If you refer to page 4 of our budget submission, you will see a swooping-arrow diagram that illustrates the four-year cycle and offers a high-level, one-sentence description of what takes place in each of those years.

By methodically planning and spending in this regard, we can take advantage of the resources that we have available to us and make better use of them. We can plan our significant purchases of supplies to ensure that we get good value for money. And of course spending increases as you move closer to the year of a general election. In year one it's quite low, increases in year two. Year three sees a larger increase as we'll be making significant investment in supplies and resourcing, and then finally year four sees our largest budget as we're responsible for administering one of the largest events conducted in the province.

There is one other item important to understanding Election Saskatchewan's budget submission, this being the distinction between ongoing administration costs and event-related costs. You can find more information about how the two are different on page 5 of the submission, but the goal is to be able to offer a true multi-year total of what it costs to administer a general election.

Administrative costs are costs related to our day-to-day operations, so salaries for our permanent staff, head office, warehouse rent, telephone, internet costs, etc. Event-related costs are instead those related to the actual planning, organizing, and the delivery of an election, and these include purchasing necessary supplies such as ballot paper, term resources needed only for the election, paying election workers, reimbursing party and candidate expenses, and so on.

Our administrative costs tend to remain fairly static from year to year, rising over time with inflation, while our event expenses rise sharply from year one to year four. The separation of administration and event-related expenses is something that

Elections Saskatchewan has been doing for more than a decade, and it's an international best practice in election cost accounting. It allows us to offer you and the public a very clear picture of what it costs to administer a general election, and I'll return to this in a few minutes. It allows me to tell you with certainty what our elections in 2016 and 2020 cost the province. And later this calendar year or early next year, I'll be able to offer details on the October 2024 process as well.

I hope that I've been able to offer a quick overview of Elections Saskatchewan, who we are, how our organization and our four-year cycle differs from the standard one-year cycle seen in most government organizations, even organizations facing a certain number of challenges in fulfilling its mandate, and Elections Saskatchewan is no exception. I've outlined a number of these challenges on page 8 and 9, but today I'd like to look closely at just three of those challenges.

The first I'd like to raise is the ongoing issue of cybersecurity, along with related issues such as foreign interference. This is something that my office took very seriously in the lead-up to last fall's election, and frankly we had to.

We worked with an outside security vendor to harden our systems, and I proactively engaged with both CSIS [Canadian Security Intelligence Service] and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security to ensure that we understand the types of threats that could affect us in conducting elections in Saskatchewan. In fact the Centre for Cyber Security has deemed the country's democratic institutions as critical infrastructure organizations because they are considered essential for Canada and Saskatchewan to function.

A similar designation around the infrastructure of voting has been made in the United States due to the presence of external threats. And please believe me; there are threats here. The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security in their December 2023 report noted that the number of elections targeted by cybersecurity was rising, and that the bad actors behind these attacks have both short-term goals, such as creating questions and skepticism around the results of an individual election, as well as long-term goals, such as throwing our whole democratic system of governance into question.

A second challenge relates to an overlap between provincial and municipal election periods. Now some of you have heard me express concerns about this overlap in the past. I have issued two papers on this in which I presented legislators with options to fix this ongoing overlap and put forward recommendations on how the problem can be overcome. To date, the options or my recommendations have not been acted on, and last fall municipal elections were held just 16 days after the provincial one.

Having provincial and municipal elections so close together serves no one well — not voters, not candidates, and not election managers, who deal with a confused public and spend considerable time fielding questions related to another jurisdiction's election. While I have yet to determine what approach I'll take to this challenge, I know that come 2028 we really should not have our provincial and municipal elections two weeks apart.

A final challenge I'd like to speak to today is one that is common

to most election management bodies: the recruitment and retention of workers. And yes, recruitment was a significant challenge for us, even though we were able to decrease the number of workers we hired from our last election by more than half, from around 11,000 to 4,300.

The election in 2024 was perhaps the first general election where you began to see the fruits of nearly a decade of work in which Saskatchewan's election system is evolving to address the needs of a 21st-century stakeholder in the province, and to allow for a reinforcing of the strong, democratic traditions the province has had for more than a century.

One of the challenges that has resulted from this initial transition with the implementation of voting week that involves six days of voting was that we required far fewer workers for one day and far more workers for six days of voting week. This meant that many of the people we had previously recruited who were available for one day, who could take a day off from their employment, were no longer available.

In the process of evolving these terms, we were also changing much of the work that needed to be done. A person with a different skill set is needed to administer voting that involves an electronic poll book than is needed for an election where there's a poll book on paper and pencils are used to cross off voters.

And so as we examine how we've done things in our past election, we look toward our next election. One of the questions we'll be asking is, how do we find and recruit people with the skill sets that we need? What can we do to better prepare ourselves to hire a few thousand people in a short period of time?

[11:15]

Are there groups we can partner with? High school students are a popular group for election management bodies to target, but that's not without its challenges, especially when there are six days of voting. This is something that we will be looking at, how to find the people we need in the locations that we need them.

So yes, there are many challenges. There are others in the document I submitted, and we face them in the months ahead. But I'd like to focus on what we are doing to address these and other challenges and what we will be focused on as an organization in the coming fiscal year.

Within the priorities I'll mention, you'll notice two themes. One of them is the need to close out last October's general election, and the other is the need to begin preparing for our next election, scheduled for October 2028. The phrase we used in our budget submission is that year one of the election has a dual focus, finishing out one event while we're also getting ready for the next.

The first priority that we're pursuing is twofold. An initial element of it will involve conducting a broad institutional evaluation of Elections Saskatchewan. It was highlighted in my budget submission, but the last institutional review of Elections Saskatchewan was conducted and published in March 2009. It was called the Hamilton report, and I'd encourage board members to review it.

In many ways that document resulted in the organization that now exists to run provincial elections here in Saskatchewan. As an incoming chief electoral officer in 2012 and given Saskatchewan's electoral legislation, that paper offered me a framework by which to build the capacity of election administration in the province that we currently have.

But the years since that report was released have seen some of the most significant changes to our elections system in the past hundred years of our province. We have moved from door-to-door enumeration to the creation and ongoing maintenance of a permanent register of voters. We have progressively, methodically, thoughtfully introduced elements of the voting process that are broadening access to the ballot to voters, while working to maintain the integrity of our elections system, first in 2020 and again in 2024.

And as we have seen an ongoing problem with recruiting election officials, just as our parties have found it difficult — I hear that from your party representatives in recruiting volunteers — we have begun adapting the system to reduce our reliance on people and have turned to a more reliable resource — technology. The election we ran in 2024 didn't look much like the one we ran in 2011. And that means we need to reassess who we are as Elections Saskatchewan and how we work.

A second element of this priority, pending the results of that review, we need to establish a new strategic plan that will guide us through the next election and beyond. Our current strategic plan was designed to lead us through October of 2024, that election, and it'll conclude at the end of this calendar year, 2025.

Something that I hope board members have noticed, when you read our budget submission and in reading past annual reports and other documents, is that we take strategic planning and our stated commitments very, very seriously. I've often said it, but our strategic plan does not sit on a shelf. We don't put it in a drawer after we complete it. We live by that strat plan. It actively guides our work and our activities. When you receive my office's next budget submission it will be framed around a new strategic plan and a new set of goals that will lead us through 2028.

A second priority for my office in the coming year will be to take all of the data and information we've collected during the course of the past year, really over the course of the past election, and use it to evaluate how we did in administering the election and then publish it as part of my post-election reporting.

Assessment is another area that I take very, very seriously and to which I am committed to being a leader among election management bodies in Canada and beyond. When a general election is only conducted every four years, it means you really need to commit to taking the lessons you've learned from one event and using them to get better the next time.

My post-election reporting will be released in four volumes, and you can find the titles and the content and tentative release dates on page 16 of our budget submission.

Volume 4 of that report will be especially important, leading to my third priority for the next year, and this is to make recommendations within that volume 4 report as to how our next general election should be conducted. These recommendations

will be based on all of the assessment activities that have been undertaken, including conversations with your parties' chief official agents as well as surveys of voters and our election workers.

My hope is that we will see a continued progression of adapting to the 21st century needs of our stakeholders in our next election. Of course I want to be clear; I can make recommendations for how an election should be run. But it's for you, the legislators who have the ultimate say, either by making changes to *The Election Act* or by approving directives written and put forward by myself.

A fourth and final priority for the next year that I would point to relates back to the challenge of recruitment and retention, and it is to begin building the team that will conduct the next general election. Here I'm speaking about our returning officers who manage the election in each constituency, as well as election workers who directly administer voting to the public.

All 61 of the returning officers who administered voting in the last election, they have a contract that expires six months after the return to the writ. So that's around May 20th. My hope is that a significant number of them both want to return and also will grade out well on our post-event evaluations. Those that meet both of those criteria will be offered a contract for the coming election cycle.

And in constituencies where we don't have a returning individual, we will begin recruiting someone to fill that role. Our experience leading up to the last election showed us that some of these positions were very challenging to fill. We need to find a person who is comfortable with very minimal engagement for the first few years of the election cycle before being hit with a significant increase in required training and work come years three and four.

Now those were our returning officers, but there is also work to be done with recruiting these thousands of election workers that will need to administer voting in 2028. And of course given where we're at, this will be planning work, not actually hiring.

I've mentioned that we were able to greatly reduce the number of workers we needed during the past October's election. And despite a significant decrease, I wouldn't say that recruitment was easy this time. In fact in some communities it was extremely difficult, and we were filling positions right up to the starting of voting week. As soon as the coming year, we will begin to look at these problem areas and constituencies, and we will look to see if there are ways that we can improve the coverage of our Take Part program to better target specific communities.

Finding enough qualified, competent people to run an election has increasingly become a challenge. And as Elections Saskatchewan has decreased the number of people that we need, we have increased the skills and qualifications that we're looking for in order to serve voters across the province. This is not a challenge that will go away, but it is a priority to ensure that come 2028 we are as well positioned as we can be to find the workers that we need to administer the best election that we can.

Now before I finish I want to move away from this year's budget for a moment and look at the election cycle as a whole. After

every general election, a common question is, what did it all cost? It's a question I have been committed to providing a fulsome and accurate answer to since I began my term as Chief Electoral Officer. I have long believed that the cost of general elections were growing exponentially over time. Saskatchewan has seen increases of as much as 50 per cent between events, going back to 2003, 2007, and 2011, and even 2016. And clearly, this was a problem and a situation that, in my view, was not sustainable.

I believe we've made a lot of progress. And when I submitted last year's budget document, we estimated that the total four-year cost of the province's 2024 election would be \$32.4 million, an increase of about 14 per cent over the province's 2020 election, which cost \$28.2 million. This 14 per cent increase between 2020 and 2024 was less than Saskatchewan's inflation rate of 15.25 per cent.

I would argue that an increase in line with inflation is a reasonable, prudent goal, as many of our costs are fixed closely to those numbers — party and candidate reimbursements, for example, as well as what we pay our election workers — which must always increase to ensure that our lowest positions are not paying less than the provincial minimum wage.

We must also deal with some costs that rise much faster than inflation. Returning office rents, for example, increased significantly between 2020 and 2024. But we can make up some of these costs that rise faster than inflation by finding efficiencies in other areas. Now the spending and accounting related to an election continues for quite some time after the event is over. It's likely, for example, that we won't be able to make final reimbursement payments to political parties until September or even October.

So I can't give you a total cost of last year's election yet, but I can tell you that when I have it, it will be published in my volume 3 report and that will likely be in early 2026. And as the cost of the province's next election, as for that election cost in 2028, the events of 2020 and a world pandemic showed that it's not always wise to predict things that far out. But I feel comfortable saying that my goal will be to deliver an election that once again flatlines at cost, in line with inflationary pressures.

Elections Saskatchewan's budget request for the coming fiscal year balances a commitment to ensure an accessible, trusted elections event while also considering elements of efficiency and ensuring the responsible use of public dollars. Therefore I would ask that the Board of Internal Economy recommend to government that the allocation of \$4,933,798 of statutory funds be approved for the coming fiscal year.

So, Mr. Chair, let me thank you and this board again for providing me with the time to make this presentation and for the support and co-operation that you as a board have given me over the years and will in the coming years. I am very proud to have been able to sit here today and to begin relaying the story of the 30th general election to you.

You'll often hear an election management body compared to the referee in a hockey game, meaning that if we are doing our job, that you don't see much said about us. I'm happy to say that for the most part, Elections Saskatchewan stayed out of the news and public conversation and allowed you, the political actors, to take

the centre stage, which is as it should be. So with that, Mr. Chair, I would be pleased to take some questions.

**Chair Goudy:** — Thank you. Any questions from the board? Mr. McLeod.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Thank you. I'll start just by thanking you, Dr. Boda, very much for your presentation and for the work, particularly on an election year. You and all of your staff have had a very busy time. And I want to express my personal thanks to you for that great work. I'd also flag for any presenters that haven't yet come to the board the minus 82 per cent ask. Dr. Boda's throwing down the gauntlet.

But in seriousness, Dr. Boda, thank you for your work and for your presentation. The only question I had was just around your comments in the report — thank you for that — regarding expected recommendations that would be coming forward. I just wanted to clarify you're not asking for any budget for those as they haven't yet come before the legislature. Is that clear? Or is there some expense built into your budget in anticipation of that?

**Michael Boda:** — The expense that would be built into the budget is essentially continuing with the process of evaluation that has been ongoing. So that's the only expense.

[11:30]

But volume 1 is the statement of votes, and that's where you get to see who voted where. Volume 2 is really that important evaluation. We're the only election management body in the country that has a parallel process that goes on during the election. I have a team of two major social scientists and others from Johnson-Shoyama, the graduate public policy school, and IFES, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems based out of Washington, DC [District of Columbia], but it's international.

They come in and they evaluate what we're doing and they gather data for us because we're running the election, and it also allows them to be outside the process. And it's with that that I work with those social scientists in order to create volume 2 which talks about what we did well and what we need to do better based on the legislation we had.

Then volume 3 is really about the cost of the election. And in there it's how much did the election administration cost and how much were the reimbursements to the political parties, and that's narrowed down to there.

It's volume 4 where I make recommendations for legislative change based on everything that we're doing. So those changes aren't there yet. They'll come after that. And then I would liaise with House leaders in order to work on what needs to be changed in the election legislation.

And we do have CEO [Chief Electoral Officer] directives which are a great tool which allows me to bring directives before you. They may not be in the legislation but I bring it before the board, and that allows us to pursue a change in the legislation, but that would come in the next cycle of the legislation. So for this change we'll be looking at the directives that came forward in the last election and how we can make them permanent within the

election legislation. So we're always working one election ahead.

So there aren't any costs — to answer your question — costs with respect to what's new, but there are costs with respect to doing those volumes. That's really what . . . I'll put a lot of emphasis and energy into that in the next year.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Any other questions? Mr. Love.

**Matt Love:** — Yeah, just a quick one. In the last couple of years that I've been a member of the board, you've brought forward a number of CEO directives and requests for modernization efforts. And I want to commend you for the election, as my colleague just mentioned, that we all went through. And feedback from folks in my community in and around Saskatoon, very positive as far as ease of registering, so that was great to see.

My question is about the expenses of it. So you reported roughly hiring half the number of election workers which was in line with the discussions that we had here and the challenges of recruitment and as well as the escalating costs, as you mentioned in your report today. Is that fully how you would account for that reduction in the expenses in this election? Is it mostly due to the reduction in election workers? Were there other ways that you found efficiencies in this election and lessons moving forward?

**Michael Boda:** — So the budget that was put forward for this election, which was around \$32 million, that was essentially a flat line including inflation. But what we had to do over the last cycle was account for the fact that we were increasingly having a problem with relying on people in order to implement the process.

I worked with this body in order to move forward with reforming the system, taking a different approach to voting. It was much broader than that. There was all sorts of things that we're changing. But in terms of the system for how we deliver the vote, particularly in urban and rural areas, they were two different ways. But by changing that, by introducing technology with the expectation . . . I put forward a model with a certain expectation and then that was obviously changed. We're well aware of that. And so I had to adapt that model in order to introduce more people than I would have for counting, but ultimately it is the technology that allows us — the technology and the change in the process — that allows us to reduce the number of people that we're hiring.

We saw that we were able to reduce those significantly in the urban areas. In the rural areas, the model was changed but it was not an IT [information technology]-focused or a technology-focused process. So to answer your question — I hope I'm answering your question — it is that we were able to continue to flatline, but we're placing less emphasis on the individual, a person having to be there because we had to have many more staff. It was a very complex process and frankly it wasn't as accurate. And that is what I can offer Saskatchewan in terms of my expertise. I can tell you that technology helps you in terms of accuracy moving forward.

So that's all part of — we have been using the word "modernization." I want to be careful to . . . When we use the

word “modernization” it automatically sounds like we’re using all of this technology all over the place. This is about advancing us toward the expectations of a 21st century voter. It is about moving forward in a way so that voters’ expectations are met. And it’s also a matter of broadening access to the voter beyond that 1905 “You have to go exactly here at this time and this is the only way that we’re going to count these ballots at this location.”

So really what we’re trying to do is broaden access to the voter and make it more accessible to them. The word “modernization” is used, but it’s what we want to do is reinforce those democratic traditions that we are so good at in this province. We have been great at democracy over the years.

When I used to work internationally, I was so proud of Saskatchewan and Canada and it was our model. We have these strong traditions but we have to reinforce those. And you know, voters are faced with 21st century issues, and you know, they don’t do their banking at the bank anymore. They’re using technology in a different way, so what we have to do is advance in that way as well.

**Matt Love:** — Yeah, thank you. And I would say you certainly presented evidence to us today that you were successful in achieving those goals and outcomes, so thank you again for your work.

**Chair Goudy:** — No more questions? Just one for me just on this budget 2024-25 to ’25-26. So you had reduced the number of staff by 50 per cent about? Is that what you . . .

**Michael Boda:** — It’s about. From just over 11,000 to I think it was under 4,500 but I think it’s 43 to 4,400, yeah.

**Chair Goudy:** — And then the salaries went up. Just unsure of . . . I’m just pretty ignorant on all of that, but you know, to reduce it by half and then salaries go up, I just . . . What’s the . . . Just my mind has a disconnect there.

**Michael Boda:** — How does that work?

**Chair Goudy:** — How do you have half of the employees and more salary? Just how does that work?

**Michael Boda:** — I’ll let Jennifer answer but I’ll begin by saying just big picture, again the model changed. Where you had two workers at a table in the past, we didn’t need two workers at that table any longer. And the reason was because we were introducing electronic poll books which got rid of all this paperwork. It was done right on the computer itself. And so that was part of the reduction and the change in the model. But you go ahead.

**Jennifer Colin:** — Thank you. I wonder if you’re perhaps referring to the increase in the salary budget for our administration which is our head office staff, which is probably similar to what you’ve heard from previous presentations this morning with respect to the government collective agreement and the increases in salaries, as well as the in-range progression that we’re projecting for next fiscal year. Because there will be no salaries for election officials in our event budget next year.

**Chair Goudy:** — I’m just going to admit that was a very ignorant

question. Because yes, obviously the 1.2 million, or sorry, 1.9 to 2.2 wouldn’t have anything to do with the election. Thank you. That is very humbling but let us move along very quickly.

Any other questions, ignorant or otherwise? Well thank you very much for your presentation and I would look forward to seeing . . . Oh sorry, one last quick question is, you said that it would come out in the report in the future but you would let this board see that as soon as you have those numbers I’m guessing. Or do we normally wait until that report comes out?

**Michael Boda:** — The report is tabled before the Legislative Assembly, so that’s how it will come to you. And then copies will of course be distributed to you.

**Chair Goudy:** — All right. Thank you very much for your time and your presentation.

**Michael Boda:** — Thank you so much. Thank you again.

### **Conflict of Interest Commissioner Registrar of Lobbyists**

**Chair Goudy:** — All right. Well item no. 6, a review of the 2025-2026 budget for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the Registrar of Lobbyists, vote 57. And I would like to introduce and welcome Maurice Herauf and his crew — which is small, small crew but a good crew — and just ask you to, before you deliver your budget, just to say a little bit about yourselves.

**Maurice Herauf:** — Well thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the Board of Internal Economy. Before I introduce my budget and go any further I want to acknowledge the presence of Sandra Arberry, deputy local registrar and executive operations officer for the Conflict of Interest office. As usual, Sandra’s assistance to me is always invaluable. And I made this joke last year, but I think it works so I’ll use it again: we recognize the importance of this body so we bring our entire staff. So that’s it. What you see is what you get.

And I also wish to acknowledge the assistance we receive from the staff at LAS for their contributions and assistance in all their financial and IT-related matters. And I want to acknowledge Cindy and Judith sitting back there. Without them we wouldn’t be able to function with a two-person office.

So I just want to lead it off by saying we have no major projects targeted for the ’25-26 fiscal year; therefore we’re not requesting additional fund for new initiatives. Some of the board members who were here in previous submissions from myself knew that last year we asked for an increase to do some work on our lobbyist registry, and that was concluded.

And the year before that we actually got an increase to deal with the website for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Up to the time I started, we did not have a website. We were sort of an outlier in the whole country. But those things have all taken care of so we’re not coming asking for 40, 50, \$60,000 to accomplish any of those things.

And before highlighting our specific budget request, I would like to outline some of our accomplishments for the current fiscal

year. The financial disclosure process for 2023 went well. There was 100 per cent compliance with the statutory filing timeline. I'm just afraid we might not hit that this year because it's the 27th and we've got a lot of people outstanding.

We're now gearing up for the 2024 disclosure process and all members will have received notification of the requirements. The disclosure process expands in any election year to include members who, for various reasons, cease to be members. There were an additional 21 members who elected not to run and 10 members who were defeated. These 31 former members were required to file financial disclosure from January 1st, 2024 to the date they ceased to be a member. In addition, members who fit within this category must also have a final consultation with me, an exit interview so to speak. We just completed the last exit interviews for former members earlier this month, so those 31 have all been taken care of.

Since the amendment to the Act in 2020, the 31 former members can use the services of our office for a period of one year from the date they cease to be a member. So for a period of one year from October 1st, 2024, we have responsibility for 92 members and former members — 61 plus 31.

Many of these 92 members have already sought the advice of my office during the past few months. Questions were related to issues such as cooling-off periods, exemptions, sponsored travel, business dealings, investments, etc. I'm pleased that members are making use of section 27 of the Act to obtain my opinion, but at the same time the increase in requests has been rather overwhelming to our budget, and you will note that we have increased our legal fees accordingly or will be making that request.

[11:45]

With regard to the lobbyist side of my mandate, the additional funds requested in last year's budget for communications related to elections and lobbying were well spent. Many materials were posted to the lobbyist website and Sandra conducted a number of online information sessions with lobbyists and other interested stakeholders. We have since removed those materials but continue to feel that they have established a useful tool for assisting with compliance and transparency, so we'll continue to reach out to various groups and provide additional directives going forward.

Administratively with the change in MLAs and a new cabinet, the majority of in-house and consultant lobbyist registrations are required to be updated, and we continue to process the incoming registrations as quickly as possible.

Now let us examine our budget. When we talk about salaries, as mentioned in our budget submission, this section forms the majority of our budget increase. Sandra and I were the only two employees, so it relates to the same issue that was raised by the previous . . . I think all out-of-scope — and I'm not necessarily clear — but all out-of-scope people are getting increases based on, going back, 3 per cent, 3 per cent, 3 per cent, 1.6. Because we've never had any increases since I started, and I think we are tied with the deputy ministers, and that whole thing is coming forward now that the contracts have been settled. That's sort of my impression of how that works.

Travel and business. We continue to budget to attend professional development conferences associated with my mandate. Aside from attendance at these conferences, there are no additional expenditures in this category.

Contractual services. The increase in contractual services can be directly attributed to an increase in our legal services budget. In December 2024 we received a supplemental to our 2024-25 budget, part of which was to cover legal service costs due to unanticipated investigations and requests for opinions.

With the legislative option for prior members to request opinions from my office for one year from the date they cease to be members and a general increase in request for opinions, we have increased the legal services budget for this budget cycle with the hope that no supplemental will be required in this area.

Supplies and services. This category sees a decrease of 18,000. As I mentioned before, it's largely due to the additional monies received last year for the final piece of the lobbyist registry upgrade and elections-related material. This year we're back to a largely status quo estimate.

Equipment and assets. The office laptops have reached their evergreen stage so will be replaced, and we have looked into upgrading our telephone system. Other than the additional 5,000 for two laptops and four new phones, in the base amount of this category, the COIC [Conflict of Interest Commissioner] and SRL [Saskatchewan Registrar of Lobbyists] licences remain the same.

So finally, the budget request for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists is as noted on the submission. Overall the budget request is increased from last fiscal for the reasons provided. Our request and the percentage increases are noted on page 4 of our budget proposal.

With that, I'll close unless there's questions. I see that lunch is waiting, so I tried to be quick.

**Chair Goudy:** — We don't have long . . . [inaudible].

**Maurice Herauf:** — For you, not for us.

**Chair Goudy:** — Well said. Thank you for that presentation. Any questions from the board? Mr. McLeod.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — I'll just start by thanking you and Sandra both for your work. The work that you do for the members and for the public is greatly appreciated, and we want to publicly thank you for all of that right now and for the presentation as well.

My only question is just surrounding something that you touched on. Actually I've got two questions. The first is the personal services one that you talked about following, kind of, the deputy minister and out-of-scope salary increases. Am I understanding the numbers correctly, I guess is the question? I see an increase year over year of about 40,000 on page 6 of the presentation.

**Maurice Herauf:** — Yes.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — I'm just trying to work the math in my head. Can you help me math that out in terms of the percentages

and how we arrive at that 40 increase?

**Maurice Herauf:** — Well as I indicated before — and I think as all the other independent officers or statutory offices — this relates back to the settlement of the union contracts and therefore the application of these things to out-of-scope employees. And it's my understanding it's 3 per cent going back to . . . Over a four-year period, it was 3 per cent, 3 per cent, 3 per cent, and then I think April 1st is 1.67 per cent.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — That's where that total, those percentages . . .

**Maurice Herauf:** — That's where that comes in, yeah.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Okay. Thank you for that. And just the last question I had was just on the contractual services and the increases for the contractual services. You gave a brief description in the presentation. Can you elaborate on that? Just the need for contractual services, how that works through your office.

**Maurice Herauf:** — Yeah. The contractual services we have are with an IT company and other things. But the increase in contractual services relates strictly to legal services. We retain private counsel, or I retain private counsel because we have some really tricky issues that have come up probably in the last few months with the election and with investigations. I've been here four and a half years and this is the first time we had to do those.

So I won't act as investigator, prosecutor, and trier. Naturally that wouldn't be acceptable, so we have to retain legal counsel to do . . . We've done one, two, three, four; I think we're near completing our fifth investigation. Some of the investigations related not . . . just to whether there was reasonable and probable grounds to proceed. And there's two of those that didn't go any further, but they still require a lot of work with respect to determining that and contacting the members responsible to see what their response is.

So I retain private counsel. We've always had private counsel, even before, my predecessors. And I try to get somebody who has a reasonable hourly rate — which I have — and somebody who I know from their background. I was in charge of retention when I was a judge of Court of Appeal. I was in charge of hiring law clerks. And the one that we picked, that I picked, was one that I hired. And she clerked with the Court of Appeal, and she's now in private practice, and she provides great service to me.

But unfortunately the amount of work that has to go into those investigations is very time-consuming. And the interviews and the examination of all the documentation, putting the investigative report together, and then helping and assisting in me drawing up the final opinion is very time-consuming.

So it takes a lot of time, and we got an increase in the legal budget last year, anticipating that because it's an election year . . . You know, I had no idea that we were going to get a 50 per cent turnover at that time. Because the 2020 election, there was only 15 that didn't return: 11 who retired, and four that weren't re-elected. This year, with 31 not returning and 31 new members, it's been a lot of work. Yeah. So that's legal services, the increase is generally dealing with. And a bit of rent increase. And the 2.61

CPI that we're at.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — That's all built into the same number?

**Maurice Herauf:** — Yeah.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Okay. Thank you. That's all I have.

**Chair Goudy:** — Mr. Weedmark.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — I just have one question. So that contractual services, it includes legal services; it includes IT. And you're saying that the increase is entirely due to the increase in the legal services going up to 115. Can you just give us a basic, a rough percentage breakdown of how that 115,000 request breaks down between legal services and the other things that would be under contractual services?

**Maurice Herauf:** — Yeah, legal services we had budgeted 20,000 this year. We came back for a supplemental, as you hon. members may recall, back in December you approved. We would have run our budget out. We had to come back, even with salary increases if that wasn't on the table, we had to come back for an increase in legal services. So we got an increase in December for an additional 40,000 for legal services.

And then we're requesting in next fiscal year out of that entire amount an additional 25,000 . . . 20,000 towards legal fees. And the rest is rent. In IT, you know, we have IT provided by a private company. They do the services, maintain our websites, and things like that.

Other than that it's like a small budget in a two-person office. There's not much more, Mr. Weedmark, that we have.

**Kevin Weedmark:** — Excellent. Thank you very much.

**Chair Goudy:** — Any other questions? I'm coming off a bad question, so I want to not mess up. I got to do better.

So anyways, just curious here. So it seems like you're balancing out your workload between the two of you, who's maybe a little more focused on the conflict of interest and who's more on the Registrar of Lobbyists. Because I noticed on the head of agency, which would be yourself, you increased substantially on the salary on the conflict of interest, but then on the Registrar of Lobbyists you went down. So does that mean you're shifting responsibilities from one person to the other a little bit? Is that how you juggle the workload? I just was curious on . . .

**Maurice Herauf:** — I'll let Sandra . . . She'll answer the historical reason for why we have different subvotes for these categories and how that works.

**Sandra Arberry:** — All right. Thank you. So historically the way it has been broken down is that my position, it was a 70/30 split because 70 per cent of the time I spent doing Registrar of Lobbyists stuff, and 30 per cent of the time I did assisting the commissioner.

Then Ron Samways, who used to assist the commissioner, he retired so I took over his job. So now it's a 60/40 split because I do 40 per cent now for the commissioner because I've taken over



Ron Samways's duties, and that's why you'll see the difference in the salary between the splits.

**Maurice Herauf:** — And plus, we had to contract services with Ron Samways and he retired, so he's no longer on there.

**Saundra Arberry:** — Right. And so that's where the split, the difference in the percentage comes from, Mr. Goudy.

**Chair Goudy:** — Well thank you very much, you two, for bringing your whole staff today. We do appreciate it. I hope you carpooled in this cold weather.

**Maurice Herauf:** — We won't use the joke next year. Thank you.

**Saundra Arberry:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Have a great afternoon. Well I guess it's our noses telling us it's time for lunch, so we'll have . . . Could we, should we shorten it up a little bit? Does anybody have commitments at noon that you needed to be away for a little longer? Should we come back a little earlier? It's up to you.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — What are you suggesting?

**Chair Goudy:** — Well lunch break was 11:45 to 12:50. Could we come back at 12:50 anyways? If we went from 12 to 12:50 and then we're back on schedule.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Sure, yeah. Yeah.

**Chair Goudy:** — Well we can grab our lunches.

[The board recessed from 11:59 until 12:58.]

### Legislative Assembly Service

**Chair Goudy:** — Thank you, everyone. I'd like to reconvene the meeting at two minutes ahead of time, at 12:58. I'm out of breath. Item 7, review of the 2025-2026 Legislative Assembly vote 21 funding proposal. One, refurbishment asset replacement fund proposal for furniture restoration and purchases and projects focused on technological modernization. No. 2, Legislative Assembly budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates and revenue estimates.

And someone who I have appreciated very much and has helped me learn my role, I'd like to introduce and welcome Iris Lang, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. And before you begin your budget presentation, would you introduce your staff?

**Iris Lang:** — Actually I'll do it as part of my presentation if that's okay, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker and board members. It is a pleasure to be here today to present the Legislative Assembly 2025-26 business plan and the Legislative Assembly funding proposal. It is my honour to lead the LAS. I'm grateful to have such a dedicated LAS team who is driven by passion for upholding and promoting the values, processes, and ideals of parliamentary democracy.

So now before I actually begin the formal presentation, I will introduce the members that are with me, part of the LAS team

who are joining with me at the table today to present the funding proposal: Cindy Hingley, principal director, financial services; and Judith Majkut, senior manager, financial services.

[13:00]

So I will begin by providing details of the LAS strategic plan and the 2025-2026 business plan, followed by some brief introductory remarks about the proposed budget before you for 2025-26. Finally at the end of my presentation I'll hand it over to Judith and Cindy, who will walk through the actual budget details. And Cindy and Judith will detail the funding proposal, including both statutory and non-statutory funding, and will respond to any questions you may have about the budget and specific operational questions.

So the 2025-26 business plan that you have before you is the first year of our three-year new strategic plan that is designed to strengthen parliamentary processes, democratic engagement, deliver member- and client-centric services, foster an inclusive organization and healthy workforce, and strengthen administrative oversight. The three-year updated plan sets a clear path forward for the LAS team. The plan sets a direction that focuses on collaborative team approach, increased accountability, stronger governance, and continuous improvement.

This 2025-26 business plan concentrates on modernizing and improving LAS services and processes. Each objective in the strategic plan was developed with the intent of fostering teamwork, optimizing resources, and providing impartial client services. Two of the top priorities this year are improving access to parliamentary publications through a new digital platform along with initiating the redesign of the Legislative Assembly website. These initiatives align with our vision of thriving parliamentary participation and ensuring the democratic system is trusted, valued, and understood.

Another crucial priority is investing in technology and services that enhance our support to you in your work and safeguard our systems. As a participant in the Government of Saskatchewan's enterprise business modernization project, EBMP, we are anticipating the implementation of the government enterprise management system, GEM, this upcoming fiscal year. The executive government hasn't provided a definitive launch date but is aiming to launch the financial and procurement streams first, followed by the HR [human resources] and payroll systems sometime after. We will be diligently working to implement this system for the LAS as well as for the statutory officers.

So once GEM is online, we will also examine the electronic system that you as members use to request payments. We will determine if efficiencies can be made by integrating it with GEM. We will also implement enterprise cybersecurity solutions to ensure that we have tools in place to minimize digital threats to our technological systems and data.

Continuing along the lines of security and safety, the Sergeant-at-Arms will be conducting safety reviews and constituency sites visits to ensure that you and your constituency assistants have the information needed to make informed decisions about enhancing safety. We will continue to build and strengthen a safe and inclusive workplace by offering psychological health and safety

training to all employees. Identifying factors and learning about risks will build workplace resiliency to cope with and manage common stressors.

With this shift in priorities and resources, the LAS is now positioned to initiate a comprehensive policy review, monitor and evaluate renewed business continuity plan, and undertake improvement projects. These initiatives will strengthen our administrative oversight.

We have an ambitious three-year plan ahead of us, and I am grateful to the LAS team for their support and dedication. I'm proud to lead such a valuable and well-respected organization. I believe this plan will set a path forward for the LAS to ensure an effective and efficient government structure is in place well beyond my tenure as Clerk.

Now turning to this year's budget request for the Legislative Assembly vote 21, it is \$34.94 million. This reflects an overall increase of 5.68 per cent, or \$1.877 million, over last year's appropriation.

The majority, and I'm sure you've heard this all day already, the majority of our increases relate to salaries and post-election transition allowances. You'll recall during the board meeting in December we requested additional funding to meet our 2024-25 salary obligations. The compensation changes in executive government have also impacted the '25-26 funding request. We have realigned our compensation with executive government and have incorporated the same 11.08 per cent adjustment. This accounts for a significant portion of this year's cost increase.

Now I'll turn the presentation over to Judith. She will discuss the details of the Legislative Assembly vote 21 funding request.

**Judith Majkut:** — Thank you, Iris. Good afternoon, Speaker Goudy and board members. I am pleased to present the '25-26 Legislative Assembly funding proposal for vote 21. This budget is built upon fiscal responsibility and the province's current financial situation. It also reflects the unique financial pressures following the provincial general election and significant compounded compensation increases.

In developing our budget we established the following assumptions. Consumer price index. Based on the Ministry of Finance's initial CPI forecast, we have applied a modest 2.6 per cent CPI to our budget for goods and services as well as impacted member directives.

Salary increases. We have incorporated base funding that considers the impact of retroactive economic adjustments paid in the '24-25 fiscal year, a 1.67 per cent cost-of-living salary adjustment for all Legislative Assembly Service employees, and in-range progression salary adjustments for eligible employees in parallel with public services.

Sitting days. We have factored in the standard sitting days and the ordinary times for meeting and adjournment.

As Iris mentioned earlier, this year's budget request for the Legislative Assembly is 34.94 million, which is an overall increase of 1.877 million, or 5.68 per cent, over last year's appropriation. On pages 8 and 9 of the proposal you will see the

increases for '25-2026 are broken down into six categories. The statutory or MLA-related cost increases include consumer price index, an increase of 418,000 or 22.27 per cent. This includes increases to all directive provisions, with the largest portion attributed to MLA indemnities, 226,000, and caucus resources and grants, 120,000.

Post-election transition allowances is an increase of 310,000 or 16.52 per cent. This is due to the large number of members not seeking re-election or defeated at the polls. Travel and living expenses, an increase of 54,000 or 2.88 per cent. Interparliamentary associations has an increase of 143,000 or 7.62 per cent. The Speaker's office and LA [Legislative Assembly] operations cost increases include salaries, an increase of 947,000 or 50.45 per cent. Again this is primarily due to the significant retroactive economic increases to wages mentioned earlier. These are the same increases and the same time period as the out-of-scope government employees.

Goods and services, an increase of 291,000 or 15.50 per cent. The majority of this increase includes funding for hosting the parliamentary publications and public accounts conferences, renovation costs, and exchange rate pressures.

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

**Cindy Hingley:** — Thanks, Judith. Our summary of appropriation and expenses is outlined on page 12, which provides a complete overview of the \$34.94 million request. As Judith has already presented the key increases, I won't walk through the section line by line, but we're happy to answer any questions at the end of the presentation. The proposed revenue estimates for the upcoming fiscal year remains unchanged at \$10,000.

Finally I'll touch on our Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund request, which is outlined on page 6. This fund was established in 2007 to support improvements to LAS and Legislative Assembly facilities. \$350,000 was approved for a five-year term, and that term ends March 31st, 2027. For the upcoming 2025-2026 fiscal year, the LAS is proposing once again to dedicate funding to furniture restoration and procurement and for projects focused on technological modernization. For our furniture restoration project, we plan to purchase and refurbish furniture in caucus meeting rooms.

Our other project is to modernize and enhance IT infrastructure and online services, which will increase security, accessibility, and function. And finally, we'll continue to develop digital versions of parliamentary and Assembly publications related to order papers and the progress of bills.

In closing, this budget reflects our efforts in modernizing and improving our services and processes. We continue to be committed and dedicated to serving the Assembly and its members impartially, confidentially, and with the highest level of service. Thank you for your time and consideration of our proposed budget, and I now welcome any questions you may have for us at this time.

**Chair Goudy:** — Thank you so much, you three. Is there any questions from the board? Ms. Sarauer.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Thank you, Ms. Lang and your officials, for all the work you do, but in particular your work on this budget recommendation request that you've presented today. I just have one quick question, and I apologize if I missed this in your submission, but the budget request has a decrease in money allocated for interparliamentary associations. Can you explain why that is?

**Iris Lang:** — Yes. Last year we asked for a significant increase. So CPA [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association] is different than other budgets because it's a grant, so we're able to keep the monies if we don't spend it. So of course we asked for additional funds in anticipation of hosting the MLC [Midwestern Legislative Conference] conference this summer. And of course with the election there wasn't a lot of members travelling, so there was significant savings there as well as adding additional funds last year.

So we felt, given where the balance of the funds in CPA currently is, we could reduce that amount even with a small increase in some of the costs related to some of the registration. For example, the MLC of course is in US funds, so there'll be a little bump there. As well there was a slight increase in the registration for CPA international.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Thank you.

**Chair Goudy:** — Mr. McLeod.

**Hon. Tim McLeod:** — Thank you. And thank you for the presentation and for all the work that you do, particularly making members look good, which is harder most days than not.

With regard to just a follow-up to what you had said, do you have a rough idea what surplus was there? You said that there's . . . because members weren't travelling because of the election year, that sort of thing. Do you know roughly where that number would be on the carryforward?

**Iris Lang:** — Well the new executive for CPA hasn't met yet, so the determination even for the coming year as to what professional development opportunities there are for members . . . Until they actually meet, we won't know for sure how much will be spent. But certainly there will be some additional funds that could go towards paying for any costs that are needed for MLC, but we don't know that until the executive meets to make a determination.

**Chair Goudy:** — Ms. Carr.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — I guess just to follow up on that, but what is the balance sitting there, whether we choose to use 10 per cent of it or 100? But what's sitting there approximately?

**Judith Majkut:** — There is approximately about 300,000 sitting there.

[13:15]

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — And then I just have a follow-up question

on . . . You talked a little bit about the replacements of furniture and fixtures, the \$350,000 that you're asking for, and I guess technological modernization. So you mentioned you were going to be a part of EBMP and you're going to get something called GEM, or I think that's what you said it was. Are they charging you back for that? Okay.

So can you tell me what you plan . . . You mentioned maybe refurbishing some of the furniture in the caucus boardrooms, but what else do you plan on doing with that money?

**Cindy Hingley:** — So yes, we talked about refurbishing some of the furnishings in the caucus meeting rooms, so some of that will include the furniture in each of the caucus boardrooms. I think there were some chairs and things like that that we wanted to replace. And then we're also developing some digital versions of parliamentary and Assembly publications. And then we're also putting some work into . . . We modernized our website and our intranet, so there's some further work that we're doing there. Do you want to talk about cybersecurity and stuff like that as well?

**Iris Lang:** — Yeah, certainly with many of our . . . A lot of our information is going to the cloud, so we need to ensure that we have a robust cybersecurity system to protect that. And we haven't done a full security review of our system in a long time, and I think it's imperative and important to secure and ensure that our data and information is safe. So we have undertaken that. And I think you probably would have seen that also in executive government they're doing similar cybersecurity reviews, and so that's what we're also doing.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — So just to touch on that then, are you working with executive government and SaskBuilds on a common approach to that, or are you a lone wolf out there looking for your own services?

**Iris Lang:** — Well it's a combination. Certainly our internal resources have contact with executive government all the time. Our current principal director of IT, that's where he came from. He came from executive government so he's very familiar with what's happening there. We discuss what they've done. We've reached out to external IT experts to also assist us to do an assessment and, you know, check to ensure if they can break our system.

So we are in combination. We are never a lone wolf because we're integrated. We're integrating systems where we can. Certainly with the new GEM system coming online, we have to integrate. But of course the members' payment system currently is separate and apart. So that's why we're looking, can we actually integrate it, and what are the risks of putting members' private information in the cloud?

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — I'll let it go to someone else and then I can come back. You're good? Okay. On the actual budget on page 12, when we look at the line items — so I'm assuming where it says Legislative Assembly Services — that 350,000 is included in that \$462,000 increase. Is that where that falls?

**Cindy Hingley:** — The Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund?

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Yeah.

**Cindy Hingley:** — It's included under central management and services.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Okay. So then when we look at . . . I guess you talked a little bit about Legislative Assembly Services, 6.4 per cent increase in this line item. Can you expand on that a little bit more?

**Cindy Hingley:** — Under central management and services?

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — No, under Legislative Assembly Services. If the 350 isn't in there, then I'm curious about the \$462,000 increase.

**Cindy Hingley:** — Okay. So a bulk of that, as everyone has talked about, is the salary component.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — That isn't that line.

**Cindy Hingley:** — Correct, yeah. Like that's our biggest increase. Our biggest ask this budget is all-encompassing. It's \$947,000 is salaries, so that's the biggest ask. There would have been the portion related to hosting our two conferences also in there, and then a bit of the pressures on goods and services, but mostly salaries.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — No, that's good. The last question I have on this is Office of the Speaker and Board of Internal Economy, 13.41 per cent increase — quite significant. What is that for?

**Cindy Hingley:** — Again it would be pretty much salaries.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — For Office of the Speaker?

**Cindy Hingley:** — Yes.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — So did we hire new people? Because yeah, generally with the committees that we've seen so far, it's about a 10 per cent increase when we take all of the statutory increases into consideration, so this is another 3.41 per cent on top of that.

**Cindy Hingley:** — Yeah, the only two impacts would be salaries and CPI, because again the Speaker's salary would be included in there as well.

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — Okay.

**Chair Goudy:** — [Inaudible] . . . Okay, any other questions? Mr. Love? Nothing?

**Matt Love:** — No questions.

**Chair Goudy:** — I just had to do that because when I was not the Chair, somebody always did that to me. You might know who he is. You might know who he is. Pass that on to him. So there we go. Well we sure appreciate your taking the time for us today and all the work that you do, and yeah, thanks for coming today.

Yes. Other business? Maybe we can ask if we would wish to defer eight to later, but can we move in camera? Could I have a motion to move in camera? Moved by Ms. Sarauer, seconded by Ms. Carr. All in favour? Oh, we don't need a seconder. Carried. She jumped ahead of me.

So the board now moves into camera at 1:22.

[The board continued in camera from 13:22 until 14:56.]

**Chair Goudy:** — So the board will now come out of camera at 2:56.

So item no. 2, meeting 1/25. The motion:

That the 2025-26 expenditure estimates for vote 56, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, be approved in the amount of 4,914,000; budgetary to be voted, 4,652,000; statutory, 262,000; and further,

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

Could I have someone to move the motion?

**Hon. Lori Carr:** — I so move.

**Chair Goudy:** — Ms. Carr.

**Nicole Sarauer:** — Seconded.

**Chair Goudy:** — Ms. Sarauer. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried.

Item no. 3, meeting 1/25. Motion:

That the 2025-26 expenditure estimates for vote 55, Information and Privacy Commissioner, be approved in the amount of 2,916,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 2,654,000; statutory, 262,000; and further,

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

Would someone like to make that motion? Mr. Love. Seconded, Mr. Sean. Cool cat. Okay, all in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried.

[15:00]

All right. Agenda item 4, meeting 1/25. Motion:

That the 2025-26 expenditure estimates for vote 76, Advocate for Children and Youth, be approved in the amount of 3,261,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 2,999,000; statutory, 262,000; and further,

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

Who would like to make that motion? Mr. Weedmark. And seconded? Ms. Sarauer. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried.

So agenda item 5, meeting 1/25. Motion:

That the 2025-26 expenditure estimates for vote 34, Chief Electoral Officer, be approved in the amount of 4,994,000 as follows: statutory, 4,994,000; and further,

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

Who would like to make that motion? Ms. Carr. Seconded? Mr. Love. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried.

All right. Agenda item 6, meeting 1/25. Motion:

That the 2025-26 expenditure estimates for vote 57, Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Registrar of Lobbyists, be approved in the amount of 595,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 595,000; and further,

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

Who would like to make that motion? Ms. Sarauer. And seconded? Ms. Carr. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried.

Agenda item 7(1), meeting 1/25. Motion:

That for the 2025-26 fiscal year, the Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund be approved for furniture restoration and procurement and technological modernization projects, 350,000.

Mr. Sean again. Seconded, Mr. Love. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried.

Agenda item 7(2), meeting 1/25. Motion:

That the 2025-26 expenditure estimates for vote 21, Legislative Assembly, be approved in the amount of 34,740,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 11,908,000; statutory, 22,832,000; and,

That the 2025-26 revenue estimates for vote 21, Legislative Assembly, be approved in the amount of 10,000 as follows: revenue to be voted, 10,000; and further,

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

Who would like to make that motion? Ms. Sarauer. And seconded by? Mr. Weedmark.

All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried.

Okay. Agenda item 8(a), meeting 1/25. Motion:

That the Board of Internal Economy recommends Lisa Broda be reappointed as the Advocate for Children and Youth for one additional term of five years in accordance with subsection 3(5) of *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* effective April 1st, 2025; and further,

That this recommendation be transmitted by the Chair to the Legislative Assembly in accordance with subsection 3(3) of *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*.

Who would . . . Mr. Weedmark. Seconded? Mr. Love.

All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Carried. And that wraps up the business. Is there any other business before we adjourn? Could I have a motion to adjourn? Mr. Wilson. All in favour of that?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**Chair Goudy:** — Don't need a seconder. All right, we're adjourned. Thank you all very much.

[The board adjourned at 15:06.]