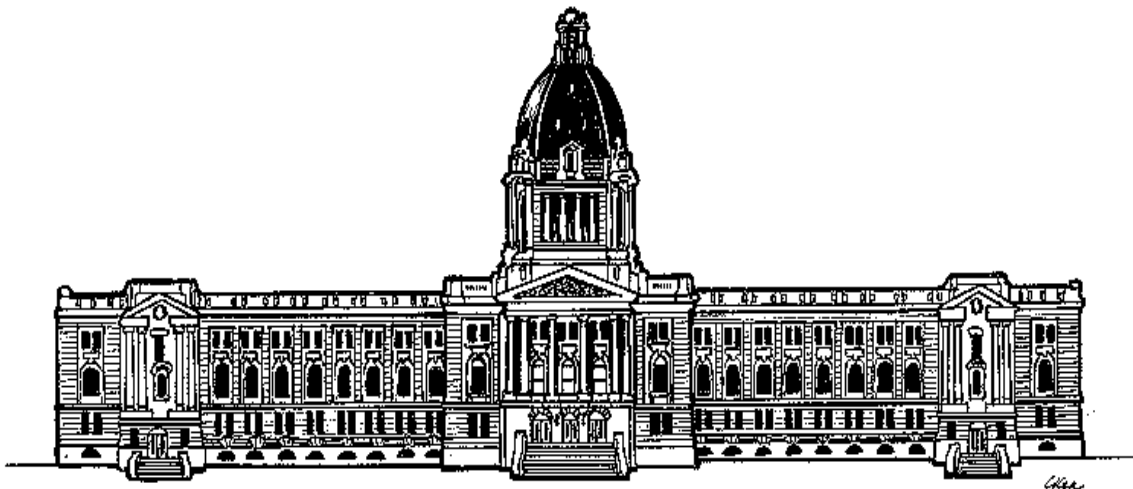




# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

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**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES  
2005**

Ms. Judy Junor, Chair  
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Wayne Elhard, Deputy Chair  
Cypress Hills

Mr. Lon Borgerson  
Saskatchewan Rivers

Hon. Joanne Crofford  
Regina Rosemont

Mr. Glenn Hagel  
Moose Jaw North

Mr. Ted Merriman  
Saskatoon Northwest

Mr. Don Toth  
Moosomin

[The committee met at 15:00.]

**General Revenue Fund  
Community Resources and Employment  
Vote 36**

**Subvote (RE01)**

**The Chair:** — The first item up for business before the committee are two documents that have been sent to me by the minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation — or pardon me, Community Resources and Employment and we will table them. And they're a follow up to the May 4 meeting questions that were raised at that point and we'll pass out a copy to each of the members and thank you to the minister.

And the first item of business is the estimates for the department of culture — of Community Resources and Employment ... [inaudible interjection] ... I am, I'm stuck there ... found on page 33 of the Saskatchewan Estimates book. The minister can introduce the deputy and if you have any opening statements.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Today with me is Wynne Young seated beside me, deputy minister. And behind us Shelley Whitehead, assistant deputy minister of policy; Bob Wihlidal, assistant deputy minister, client services; Darrell Jones, assistant deputy minister, housing and central administration; Don Allen, executive director, finance and property management division; Lynn Tulloch, executive director, employment and income assistance; Gord Tweed, associate executive director, operations and delivery support, employment and income assistance; April Barry, executive director, early learning and child care branch; Marilyn Hedlund, executive director, child and family services division; Betty West, associate executive director, community living; and Larry Chaykowski, executive director, housing program, operations division. I think that's a complete list.

**The Chair:** — And again I'll just remind the officials if they speak at the mike for the first time, identify yourself so Hansard will have an easy time recording that. Did you have an opening statement, Minister?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — No, just we're here at the wish of the committee to answer any questions they might have regarding the department.

**The Chair:** — Questions, then. Mr. Merriman.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just received this report so I'll have to get to get to that in a few minutes. I haven't had a chance to review it.

I'd like to start off with some small questions on some issues of case studies and then proceed into the general department area. Madam Minister, I'd like to talk a little bit about Valley View Centre. As you're aware, it houses approximately 362 men and women that live in the centre year round. Most of them are level 4 care with the average age being 49 and the average length of stay being 30 years. I have a couple of small questions on it. What is the department's plan for this facility over the next five

years?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — At the moment ... Well actually for a few years now, we haven't been doing any new intakes into Valley View. People are all being supported that are new clients ... new residents are all being supported in facilities in the communities around the province. So the notion is, I guess a gradual phase out would be the best way to describe it as new people are not coming in. And the people who are there are either themselves or their families in some instances choosing alternate supports or in fact some people are just spending out their time there. We haven't got any decision yet on whether to speed that process up beyond natural attrition.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Two follow-up questions, Minister. When you talk about a gradual phase out and the statistics I just gave you, which is that the approximate stay there is 30 years and we have 362 patients we're dealing with, what are the plans ... Are we looking at a 30-year phase out? And when you say some of them are choosing to leave, is this by their own volition or are they being removed by the department?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes. No, every person has an individualized plan so that would be in consultation with family. There might be new options that are closer to home. There may be options that the person themselves is interested in exploring.

Certainly I've spoken to people recently who had at some point in their life been residents and had made the choice to move out into the community. So it's a variety of things. But no one is moved without a very extensive personal plan for that person developed with the family, the person, and Valley View.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Well with 362 people, are you saying that we have 360 spaces available in other parts of the province that we're putting these people into?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well there's two things. One is that we continue to expand in every year the community capacity to accept people. But as well as you know this facility used to house many, many, many more people than that and gradually cottages have closed as the number of people there has reduced. So we have more options today than we had before.

And at such point that there would be any determination that the staff to resident ratio was such that you couldn't justify the cost any more, then we would have to sit down with the staff, with the parents, with the families, and decide what reasonable alternatives are, even including building new residences because of course under our housing policy, this is some of the types of facilities that we build under our community living division as well.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Another supplement question. You said you're expanding every year. What's the expansion annually? What was it in 2003-2004, beds available for these people in the province?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'll see if Betty West, the associate executive director, community living, can answer that for us.

**Ms. West:** — Yes. Betty West, executive director, community living division. We respond through the dollars that are available every year for new initiatives to the kinds of needs that are present in the community as well as those individuals at Valley View Centre and their families who wish to leave. So the number of spaces that we create every year depends on the specific needs that are present both in communities during that . . . at that point in time as well as those individuals who want to leave Valley View Centre.

Those dollars are directed toward both new group home development as well as independent living programs and some expansion to supports within the day programs and vocational programs in the province. So the number of spaces that are created depend on the need that exists at that given point in time.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. Just to — I understand what you said — but to repeat the question. How many were . . . spaces were set up or structures created in the year 2003 and the year 2004?

**Ms. West:** — We'll have to supply the information to you and we can certainly do that.

**Mr. Merriman:** — When could I expect that information?

**Ms. West:** — By the end of day tomorrow.

**Mr. Merriman:** — End of the day tomorrow. Thank you very much. Are there any other plans to use this facility for any other purpose for long-term medical or therapeutic uses or anything? Or are we just going to mothball the facility at the end of the term?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — SPM [Saskatchewan Property Management] would consider, the Property Management department of government would consider from . . . based on the priority listing of how they consider reuse of buildings, would be the ones that would be making that discussion. We would not ourselves in the department make the determination of alternate use.

**Mr. Merriman:** — So in other words you have no planned use for that facility from your department whatsoever.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — We're a tenant there, no. No we don't.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I'm just going to pass to my colleague who only has a couple of questions and then I'll come back. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Ms. Harpauer.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm returning to a constituent that I had brought to your attention actually last year. And at that time you asked for the information that I had on him, and you reviewed it. And you found some way of helping him for, I believe, it was three, four months, and then — for whatever reason and he's not sure — he was cut off again. And he's not receiving assistance.

But he has a rare disease called the Marfan's syndrome and had numerous complications from this disease. He had open heart

surgery and an artificial valve put in place in 1994. And then in 1997 he had a cyst on his spine that was operated on. That operation was repeated in 2002, and there was neurological damage from the operation.

The end result of what this gentleman has to live with is, he must be permanently catheterized. And the problem is that he cannot use the hard catheters, so he must use the soft catheters. And the cost to him is over \$1,000 a month.

Now he's a farmer and is managing to still support his family with that. But whenever his income is assessed for any programs that are available, all his assets are taken into consideration. And these are assets that have no cash value, quite frankly, unless you sell them and then he can no longer viably farm. So he's between a rock and a hard spot and doesn't know which way to turn.

Now I know your department has received a letter from his doctor in Humboldt as well as a letter in July from three physicians, four physicians . . . with infectious diseases . . . sort of outlining his case, the condition, and the challenges that he faces. Is there any possible program that this gentleman will fit into because I think what's happening is that he has a very unique and very challenging situation that doesn't buttonhole into stringent programs?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'm going to ask Gord Tweed to answer that. And Gord, just give your title and your . . .

**Mr. Tweed:** — Gord Tweed, the associate executive director of employment and income assistance division. I'm not familiar with the individual specifically. But with respect to available programs, certainly any individual can apply for benefits through the social assistance program.

We would undertake an evaluation or an assessment of the individual's circumstance concerning his resources that are available to him and his needs that are presented. With respect to significant health-related needs, certainly that might be factored into the assessment. But generally speaking, those needs would be provided through programs available through the Department of Health.

The supplementary health program, the program that . . . our program is the . . . We can conduct an assessment on your financial assessment for social assistance, your financial eligibility for social assistance. We can also consider your health-related needs in determining whether you might qualify for supplementary health benefit program administered by the Department of Health.

On a particular circumstance for the individual that you're presenting, if you want to follow that up with an inquiry to our office, I'd be pleased to follow up on the matter.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — I definitely will be forwarding the information that I have. The Department of Health has continuously shuffled him, quite frankly, on to your department. He's approached them for a number of programs.

The difficulty again, because of the unique situation that he's in, he has no feeling from his waist down but he is not

wheelchair bound. He can conscientiously make his legs move. So therefore he doesn't fall into the tight criteria of being a paraplegic. And yet medically he's classified as such. So those are the challenges he faces. And every time that he approaches the Department of Health they suggest that he turn to your department.

I suspect — I don't know for sure — that in the past you were able to assist him perhaps through the SAIL [Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living] program, and I don't know that for sure. And as I said previously, I don't know why he was suddenly cut off.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'll just say that Gord has made a commitment to look into it. And regardless of what the outcome is, and certainly we would hope to get a good outcome that meets his circumstances, we'll make sure the buck stops somewhere.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you very, very much.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Toth.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I have a couple questions about adoption, and specifically out-of-province, out-of-country. As you are aware and your department's probably aware, it's getting more difficult and the waiting lists are getting longer for people to adopt; and there are families who would dearly love to be parents. Unfortunately circumstances dictate otherwise.

And I've had a couple inquiries made regarding out-of-province and out-of-country, more, mostly out-of-country. What I'd like to know: what would be the process involved, what kind of costs might be associated with an out-of-country adoption, and would there be any financial assistance of any kind from any level of government?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'll just maybe start with a little bit of an opening comment that one of the reasons why there is some change in the atmosphere of international adoptions is that some countries themselves have sometimes some misgivings about the merits of their children leaving their country to be somewhere else. And so there's some of those kind of changes take place that are outside of our control. But aside from that, I'll turn it over to Marilyn Hedlund to introduce herself and provide you with a more detailed answer.

**Ms. Hedlund:** — Marilyn Hedlund, executive director for child and family services. The process for any adoption is to obtain a home study through the jurisdiction that the family resides within and they can then initiate a process for international adoption with the approvals done in their home province.

I don't have information on the particular cost associated with the international adoption but I can get that for you. We do have an option for assisted adoption, should children be placed with a family and have recognized and assessed special needs when they're placed. And we can provide for special needs up to age 21 and a contribution towards their care and maintenance as well.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Aside from that the families bear their

own expense, right?

**Ms. Hedlund:** — Right. The families would bear their own expense. Now I could get an estimate for you as to what the cost would be.

**Mr. Toth:** — So if I understand you correctly, what you're saying is any costs in moving forward with an adoption internationally would be totally borne by the adoptive parents. There would be no financial assistance of any kind.

**Ms. Hedlund:** — The travel would be borne by the parents. The assessment would be completed through our own services.

**Mr. Toth:** — You'd be able to get me some information as to the costs and I guess whether or not . . . or possibly as well what countries would be open to adoptions to Canadian residents. Is that possible, please?

**Ms. Hedlund:** — Yes, I could do that. Yes.

**Mr. Toth:** — The other question I guess, just a final question to follow this up. We talk about immigration and opening our doors. Is this an avenue . . . If there are countries who are facing a significant burden of a number of children, especially some of the nations where we've had such turmoil and we have children that are orphaned, would this be a means of reaching out to those children as well as opening up the door to greater immigration to our country and specifically to our provinces? Has our province looked at adoption as another means of immigration to this province?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — We haven't looked at it specifically that way because it always starts from the question of what is best for the child. And of course there has to be the willing family, the available child, and so there hasn't been any kind of what you'd call a wholesale attempt to do that.

Also it is the policy right across Canada that unless someone's adopting a family group, they can only adopt one child at a time. And so you know you might have a number of people who might slowly come in that way but it is — because of the assessment and everything — it is a longer process. I don't know if you want to add anything to that.

**Ms. Hedlund:** — We haven't typically connected immigration with adoption. Families indicate their interest in adopting a child and then there is a match made with available children based on their best interests and a good match with the family.

**Mr. Toth:** — One final question, Madam Minister. In view of the fact that we have such a large or a long waiting list, and of course most recently a couple of the calls that have come to my office have come from parents who were actually getting a little up in their years and not — they're at where you would think they would . . . maybe teenage children. So they feel that time is running out for them to actually be quality parents. And is there a process whereby an age of potential parents is looked at and how they . . . and where they would be placed on the waiting list to adopt a child? Or is it just on a first-come, first-served basis and basically stays at that level?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — The comment I'll make first and then

Marilyn Hedlund can provide a more detailed answer. But one of the reasons why there's less children being adopted today is because of increasing efforts for children to remain with the parent, and in the case of First Nations children, within their community sometimes with extended family relatives. And so that has reduced the number of children and likely increased the waiting list. But as to the process of how people move through the waiting list and whether anything can be done about the fact that there's a waiting list . . .

**Ms. Hedlund:** — In relation to the . . . Typically the home study would indicate just what would be the best match for that particular family and speak to any willingness that they have to deal with special needs. And if there is a child on the waiting list for adoption, an older child or a child with special needs, then we'd be able to match that child to the family.

And of course some adoptive families would move further up the waiting list because of their openness to special needs and older children.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Merriman.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. To the minister, I was just looking at a general department employment record here. And there's a category of other with 21 people in. I was just kind of curious what other was.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'll get the deputy . . . Do you have a resource person you'd like to call on for that, Wynne?

**Ms. Young:** — Okay.

**Mr. Merriman:** — . . . when I look at the agencies we have all over the province and we seem to have just about every area covered well, but we still have over \$4 million in travel. What would this relate to?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — The province is divided up into regions and so the staff of each region cover all the communities in that region. And I'll just say that one of the things about our department is because so much of our work is directly in areas involving children and families, there is a lot of direct visits as well out to households. But I'll let Wynne provide a more detailed answer on the travel.

**Ms. Young:** — Most of the travel of course is in province. And I was just checking, but we have about 11,000 field staff who that is their work, is to travel within the province visiting clients or travelling with clients. And so that would account for most of the travel that's in our budget.

And we're still trying to find the other note for you.

**Mr. Merriman:** — That's fine. It wasn't that critical a question. I was just wondering that if we had the resources in the area, were we sending people from one region to another. But if it's home to home, then that's certainly acceptable.

I'd like to go on to some general questions. What is the process by which the department reviews a recipient's case file to

determine the amount of assistance they can receive?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I think that's a very specific administrative question, but I know that there's lots of rules and guidelines. So I'll have to get Mr. Tweed to fill you in a bit more on that.

**Mr. Tweed:** — The question that is posed around the eligibility for benefits and the process used to review that. The program is a needs-based program. The term that we use to calculate entitlement or eligibility is budget deficit. So we would review the individual's circumstance, assessing their basic needs which would include things such as their shelter provision, the utilities, basic allowance. We would also consider any special need requirements that they might have. An example of that might be if you had transportation just to facilitate your engagement or perhaps travelling to a child care centre if you were going to have a child in a child care centre.

We would balance that then against your available resources so the income that you have within your . . . at your disposal, whether that be the income from employment, employment insurance, or other sources of income. The calculation is basically a very straightforward calculation when you consider all the complexities of the factors that go in. If your needs as prescribed by the regulations exceed your available resources, which include assets and income, then you would be entitled, presuming that you meet the other qualifications of the program. If your resources exceeded your needs, we would describe that as a budget surplus and you would not qualify for benefits.

**Mr. Merriman:** — That's the area that concerns me the most is the way it's triggered for review in special cases. And I'll give you two instances and you can act to them as to how that's reviewed.

One is a mentally challenged young man who works for SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres], whose parents set up a \$5,000 trust fund for him so that on his demise he would be looked after for funeral arrangements. Unfortunately both parents pass away. He has a \$5,000 trust fund and as such your program triggers out and his benefits are stopped. To me, when I look at that, it would be logical to me to say, that's a special circumstance instance where this person is mentally challenged. He's not trying to fleece the system. And that's set up as a reserve by his parents to make sure that he's looked after when they're not here to do it. What mechanism or is there a mechanism to review those types of instances?

**Mr. Tweed:** — There are some. There are provisions within the regulations specifically around inheritances and inheritance income. There is an exemption built into the regulations around inheritances, excuse me.

With respect to trust funds, the program is a last resort program where the individual's available resources are considered available to meet their ongoing needs. In the instance of a trust fund, the availability of the trust fund to meet those basic needs would certainly be considered as part of the eligibility requirement.

**Mr. Merriman:** — In a normal instance I would agree with

you but with a mentally challenged person that this is set aside for, I don't think the trust fund was there for him to go buy a car or to upgrade his apartment or anything. It was set there specifically for funeral arrangements. And being that he's severely mentally challenged I would say that that's outside the box and should be looked as a separate issue than if I leave my children a trust fund.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Again the individual circumstances related to trust fund for that purpose . . . I would offer to examine that particular individual's circumstance if you want to forward that information to me. And without knowing the details of the trust fund specifically I think that would be useful information to have in the review.

**Mr. Merriman:** — I understand that and it's hard talking in generics here because of the confidentiality issue. But I have one more which is a young lady that was in the public eye not too long ago trying to get some formula for her child. Along comes the end of the year. She gets a refund from Revenue Canada but in effect she owes Revenue Canada money from another issue. So she in effect gets a refund of \$1,300 but never receives any cash and gets dinged \$1,300. The net effect is she's \$1,300 lower than she was last month and last month she was already in trouble.

So I guess where I'm trying to come to is . . . When I get those calls I look at it logically and say, this doesn't make sense. If she got a cheque for \$1,300 and she cashed the cheque, then that makes sense to me. If she never received the cash it's paper money and you can't buy the formula on paper money.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Do you want me to . . .

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes, I'm not familiar with this sort of thing.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Yes. The issue of funds that are secured by creditors is always . . . it's a difficult one. I guess the expectation would be that the individual would discuss their affairs with their creditors. In the circumstance of an income tax refund that was recovered, certainly income tax refunds are considered to be income under the social assistance program. I think that our department would endeavour to work with the individual to try and assist them with their affairs.

The availability of the resource of the last resort program though is the policy that you raise, and the ability of the individual to interact in advance of, say the security of those funds, would certainly be important in the case assessment.

When funds are recovered, then you see the effect of continuing to maintain eligibility in a very general sense. The upshot of that would be that through the social assistance program the debt might be being recovered, in effect, or being compensated for through the social assistance program. So it gets quite complex on an individual basis.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Yes, I understand it's complex but if you look at it that . . . we're talking either paper money or cash money, and there's a big difference, huge difference. On paper she has \$1,300. In her bank account she has zero. So my question is, you need to have a process that reviews these, you

know, on a logical basis that may not be in your manual. It may be something that's outside of the box that needs to be addressed. And you can't logically take someone that has nothing and expect to go into the negative on a cash flow basis. It doesn't work.

**Mr. Tweed:** — One of the important features of the program is an independent appeal process that's established so that when we apply our rules, our regulations, and our policies, or our interpretation of them, that the individual can have their concerns expressed before an independent appeal board and seek remedy through that avenue.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. Now we're going to get specific. Okay. She is buying this formula every month for the child that needs it, okay. April 1 she gets this thing from the government she's cut off, so in effect she doesn't have the money to supplement to get the formula for the child while you go through a review process. You know, what I'm saying is, approve it and then validate it through your approval process. I mean, how does she feed this child this special formula while she's waiting for an appeal process?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Yes. There is provision for interim assistance pending the outcome of the appeal. So the individual could request that type of support as we go through the review.

**Mr. Merriman:** — I'm going to have my CA [constituency assistant] get in touch with you directly and you can deal with this one because, you know, it just doesn't make logical sense to me.

Are the individuals with disabilities receiving any additional increases than the basic adult allowance?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes. In this budget — I don't have it right in front of me — there was an increase for people with disabilities. And here we go.

One of the features in this budget was the ability for those who are working to earn an additional \$50 a month without having anything clawed back. The other one was they did receive the \$10 per month basic increase. And if the people were disabled and living in a residential care facility, as well there was an increase to the personal living allowance.

So those would be the main things that were directly on the income, although there was also the shelter, the disability shelter adjustment as well as the quality shelter supplement. So there was actually quite a bit of additional resources for disabled people in this budget.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Did this supplement also apply to people with mental handicaps?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — At the moment there's an advisory group working with the department to . . . on the shelter supplement one at least. I'll get Gord Tweed to give you an answer on the other part for people with intellectual disabilities. But on the quality shelter allowance, most of it was targeted at people who needed a certain type of housing because of their disability. And so what the committee that's working with us on is to identify what this particular housing challenges are for

people with intellectual disabilities.

If they were part of a family they would automatically qualify. I think the people . . . well not automatically, but I mean they would automatically have the potential of qualifying. If they aren't part of a family, if they're a single individual, they would then have to be approved based on the impact of their disability on their housing.

**Mr. Merriman:** — When was the last time that the government reviewed these financial needs prior to this budget for people with disabilities on the basic allowance?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well we have made fairly constant improvements in the area of disability resources over the last, I guess since 2001 was the report. There's been about an additional 8 million put into a variety of disability supports, everything from transportation to disability tax credit, disability supplement, caregiver tax credit, infirm dependent tax credit, the employment support programs. I mean there's been quite a wide range of things.

But it's . . . I would say our goal is to just keep making improvements every year. And we do have an advisory group made up of people and parents from that community who advise us on the priorities.

Oh my figure is a little low. It's since the release of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues in 2001, the disability action plan, there's been an additional 25 million in the area of support to people with disabilities, and which gives you an idea of sort of the kind of magnitude of money you can put in and not necessarily see as many results as you would like to see.

**Mr. Merriman:** — That 25 million, is that annually or cumulative?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Cumulative.

**Mr. Merriman:** — And what was that year? I'm sorry.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Ongoing since 2001.

**Mr. Merriman:** — I'm sorry, Minister. You confused me there. Is that \$25 million annually every year ongoing?

**Ms. Young:** — Since 2001 there's been an . . .

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — You have to identify yourself.

**Ms. Young:** — Oh, sorry. Wynne Young. Since 2001 there has been 25 million added over those years, but it's now ongoing. But it didn't all get added in 2001.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — It's a 25 million lift overall.

**Ms. Young:** — It's a 25 million lift. That's right.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Does the government have any plans to establish a separate financial assistant programs for persons with disabilities?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — The whole matter of disability pensions is under consideration. Now we've had some advice from provinces who have gone that route that it tends to discourage people from seeking employment. And what becomes the tricky question is how you determine who realistically can be employed because obviously there will be some instances where it's slim to none is the chance of being employed.

But even in provinces where they've moved to a disability pension approach, they have felt that it has been some detriment. So right now at the ministers level, it's Ontario who's leading the discussion on a disability pension approach with the federal government and the provinces.

So that's under very active consideration. And certainly if anybody has any views on that, we'd just be quite willing to receive that because it is something that we're collectively in Canada struggling with right now — what the best way to do that is.

**Mr. Merriman:** — You know, I just took exception to that slim and none comment. You know, I saw a lot of people when I was in SARC who, I would say, are not productive, but they're working. They're creating something, although minimal. And you know, when you look in their eyes, they're contributing. They may only be getting 80 cents or whatever it is, and the value doesn't matter. But they're not sitting in an 8 by 8 room being watched 24 hours a day. So I would say that everybody can be productive in his own way.

It may be a question as to productivity and challenges in the workforce. But you know, I see that program as very good in taking people who are disabled in many fashions. And it may again not be productive work to us, but it's certainly productive work to them.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I am going to have to respond to that because that would not be the kind of individual I was referring to. Obviously they are quite capable of working. I'm talking about a person who's quadriplegic and blind and deaf, of which I have encountered people like that in group homes.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well just to counter that, the ladies I saw were just ripping pages out of magazines but I think that they were productive unto themselves.

Did the government cut funding this year from the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — No. Well no. In fact we added to virtually every category. This was the largest increase this budget has seen for several years. So in every category there was an increase for every type of person who receives assistance both under the social assistance program but also under the Building Independence program where it's support for people who are employed but aren't receiving enough from their employment to live. So there would have been some increase. Now it depends if you're speaking about a specific program.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well I said the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan. And according to your budget estimates 2005-2006, 2004-2005, it's down \$17 million.



**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes. The transitional employment allowance has its own line in the budget now so it may be just a matter of how the lines are added up but there wouldn't have been any money removed, no. It might have been transferred to a different description — the transitional employment allowance out of the actual more dependency SAP [Saskatchewan Assistance Plan] line of the budget.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well I'm looking on page 36 of this year's budget and it says Saskatchewan Assistance Plan, 209 million and change, prior year 226 million and change. And my question is, where did that money go?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes. The money went from the assistance plan on line 1 and went to the transitional employment allowance on line 3. So it didn't leave; it just changed location.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. I guess that begs the question, why did it change location?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — The transitional employment allowance is a program that's new under Building Independence which is intended to bridge people from one job to another job without getting them settled right on to social assistance. So it's structured in a different way and it's more of a flat allowance rather than a line-by-line needs assessment. It's treated I guess a little bit more like an income than like social assistance. And the person, once being on TEA [transitional employment allowance] for a period of time would then typically move into employment. But if in fact they didn't move into employment I think they would then be considered to be on regular social assistance. But we're trying more and more to have programs that don't have people settle in to being on social assistance and I think that would be similar to some of the objectives I've heard articulated by yourselves.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well one of the questions that I articulated and asked in the House and I'll ask it again in committee is that, do you plan on indexing the food allowance?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — That certainly is not something we've done to date and every year when we consider our budget we look at all the places where money might go. We don't have a particular thing in the package of supports called specifically a food allowance. We just have the personal allowance and then the housing and the . . . it's a basket of things all included in one amount.

What we have been doing as a matter of policy is trying to bring everybody to the market basket level, and this year people moved between 4 and 12 per cent closer to the market basket measure for assessing people's income adequacy. The other thing that is going right now is the food security committee that's meeting around the province, of people who work in the area of children's feeding programs, food banks — those kinds of areas — to talk about where the best place to put that money is in order to achieve the goal of food adequacy. And it's got quite a wide range of partners — everything from agricultural representatives to, as I say, people who are in the charitable food programs in the province.

Because one of the things that I do want to make sure of is that

the resources we put in do reach children. And that's why we targeted some of the money this year to the school feeding programs to ensure that that food got to the kids. And so it's a double thing. It's the goal of reaching the market basket measure as well as the goal of making sure that the food is actually getting to the kids.

**Mr. Merriman:** — So, Madam Minister, are you saying that your food security feeding program is going to be increased to feeding in the schools? Is that what I'm hearing from you?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — That's what's in this budget. We increased it by an additional 500,000 this year. And it's not just the schools. It's community kitchens, it's . . . what are some of the other kinds of things? Yes, just anyone who's involved in the non-profit sector and food programs.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well on that issue you and I certainly have a fundamental disagreement. I know for instance at St. Mary's School in Saskatoon, they serve 5,500 meals a month to some 200 children. What you're saying is that we're going to continue to feed the children in the schools rather than give the parents the money to allow the parents to feed their own children. And I have a fundamental issue with that approach.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well you know, all I can say to you is that teachers tell us that kids arrive at school hungry whether or not the parents could have got them food. And so I have to feed the children where they're hungry.

It was becoming very detrimental to teachers to be able to teach kids who were arriving at school hungry, and surprisingly not just kids from poor families but kids from well off families whose parents are too busy to make them a lunch, whatever. The programs at the school actually make sure the kids get fed.

And yes, in an ideal world it would be very nice if the parents would do that but we have a problem, not just with poor families but with better off families with the kids arriving at school without lunches and not fed.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well, Madam Minister, I would say to that answer that we're going to continue to have the problem if we don't at least agree that parents in most cases are capable of feeding their children, given the resources to do that. You're telling me that in St. Mary's School, 200 of 200 children's parents aren't feeding them. I have a fundamental issue with that. I don't believe there are 200 bad parents in that school.

I think the issue is they don't have the money to feed their children, so subsequently they send them to school to get them fed.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Again I think I was quite specific how we've been addressing the adequacy issues. We're working on making sure all the levels reach the market basket measure and this year we had the largest increase we've had in several years to create an increase of between 4 and 12 per cent to the adequacy of families' incomes. The shelter supplement provides more money into families so that it removes some pressure off their food budget.

So I think we're quite aware of this and have been approaching

it from a number of perspectives — increased the child care supplement. And all of these things take pressure off the family budget so there's more money to feed the kids.

**Mr. Merriman:** — When you talk about this food basket and that you raised it 4 to 12 per cent, what exact number are you talking about? Is this the \$10 a month that we give?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — No, no. It's the combination of all the different initiatives in the budget and there's actually a chart with coloured bars on it that shows . . . I'll just show this to you here. This chart . . . The coloured bars show all the increases in the different areas of the budget and how much they added to each category of family that gets support from the department. And so these coloured bars would be the additional resources that were added in this year. I could give you, you know, give you some specific examples here if you would . . .

**Mr. Merriman:** — That's fine, thank you. You know, the fundamental issue is, how do you get at the problem? Do you continue to feed more and more children in the schools or do you enable the parents to look after their children? We now have in those same schools we have clothing depots, you know. We have community-based organizations providing just about everything from lice shampoo to glasses to you name it for these children. In our last discussion you had talked about moving some, potentially moving daycare centres to the schools. And you know, so now we're feeding them, we're clothing them, we're providing glasses for them, we're providing lice shampoo for them, we're providing everything within the school, and we're not enabling the parents to look after their own children. I have a fundamental issue with this.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'll disagree because under the Building Independence program . . . Take for example Regina. We had 9,000 families on assistance. Today we've got 6,000. So 3,000 more of those families are working and providing for their own families; 6,000 still aren't. So I would call that moving in the right direction. I mean, there's no miracle solution. You know that. And I would say that there's been a very responsible approach. If you look at the ratio of support to families and parents versus the school feeding program, there's no question that the most huge amount of money has gone directly to the families. The school feeding program is just a backup when those other things are not still producing the results you would hope they would.

And there's no question people are living on very slim incomes. The fact is that one of the problems we had with social assistance in the province is that the number of people on assistance was going up and up and up and up every year until we designed the Building Independence program, which was to get people off assistance and into jobs where they actually had a future as a productive member of the workforce. And since then we've had a 41 per cent decrease in the number of people on social assistance. And quite frankly, I think that's the way to go.

You want to have that as adequate as it can be, but it is never meant to be a complete lifestyle. It is meant to be a support in transition to employment, education. We're not trying to replace what a person would make if they had a job. But even if a person had a job and worked full-time at minimum wage, they would still be below the poverty line.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well we'll get to those other figures later, Madam Minister, of where we're juggling things. We'll stick on this issue here for another moment.

When you talk about the school feeding programs, I can assure you the ones I'm involved in in Saskatoon that the amount of food being provided is not being provided by this government. It's being provided by organizations and others who donate frequently to those programs. And you are not paying 100 per cent of that bill, I can absolutely assure you.

So you know when I come back to it, I'm not critical that we're feeding children. I understand that. You and I have had this conversation.

What I'm critical about is unless we enable parents, those that can, to provide this for themselves, how do they ever get to the point where they become independent, if the government does everything for them? You pay the rent. Pardon me, you give them a cheque to pay their rent. You pay their hydro. You pay their telephone. You don't . . . Give them the money; let them do it. Let them stand on their own two feet and let them become independent.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I have to tell you that I've had way more calls from landlords who are upset about how independent we're having people be as I have had from people urging the direction you're proposing. That being the case, we still are moving very firmly on building independence, and as I've said, have had a 41 per cent decrease in the number of people on assistance. So I think we're doing something right.

The fact is that under the transitional employment allowance, it's much less invasive to people in terms of what they have to produce to justify every cent that they get. So there's more dignity there. There's more independence there.

There are some adequacy issues but our goal again is to achieve the market basket measure that's set out by Stats Canada as a reasonable amount of money for living, not in any flashy way but living in the various communities in which it's established for. I don't know any other way to measure it than that. And after that people have to make their decisions.

And as you know, there are many troubled families out there where not only addiction but lack of education and a whole range of other things all come into play in the resources the government dedicates towards treatment centres, towards educational programs, towards all the various things you need to do.

So would I like parents to be more involved? Yes. There's even parenting supports in the community schools. I think there's actually been quite a bit done in that area.

In fact when I was out with the police chief and the mayor touring around in the inner city in Regina, some of the most successful households we were in were where the parents were engaged in the KidsFirst program, which is a large investment that this government has made in working with the early years of parents.

So I think we're doing all those things. I think you and I would

both agree that those are the things that need doing and those are the things that are being done, but there is no magic solution to parents getting engaged in parenting.

**Mr. Merriman:** — But a comment I would make is it hasn't worked for 30 years. It's time to change the plan. When you talk about landlords calling you, I mean we could spend an hour just talking about that. I mean that would really upset me that landlords — especially some of the houses these people are living in, we're paying social services for — would be upset that the tenant's paying the rent. I have very little sympathy on that side of it.

You know, when we get into the issue of how we're going to solve this problem, if we continue to put all of these things in the schools, most schools of which are not equipped — they're old schools; they were 1920s, 1930s; they were built for all of the services — they don't have the room or the capacity for all these additional programs that we're putting in. We have teachers who are looking at being social services, justice, health, and trying to teach a classroom of varied children.

You know, I don't know how we can say we're going to continue to do these in the school. We need to find an alternate method to take the delivery of these services out of there, and I think that most parents are capable of providing that service on their own.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — There have been a wide range of things done to support children, or families to support their children. In Saskatchewan we have the Saskatchewan Child Benefit. There's the National Child Benefit, the child tax benefit, the Saskatchewan employment supplement, the supplementary health benefits, the rental supplement.

There's just been a wide range of ways in which we're supporting families and children. But at the end of the day, we're still suffering the repercussions which I'm sure the member is aware of, the ripple-through effect of children who came through the residential schools. There's many issues that people are dealing with.

So I would just say that when you can say that since the Building Independence program started, which was only a few years ago, we've had a 41 per cent reduction in the number of people on assistance and now independently pursuing their own occupation, I would have to call that a success.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well like I said, Madam Minister, we'll get to those points later. The Saskatchewan Child Benefit credit was also decreased by \$5.2 million. Could you explain that?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes, I can explain that. When the federal government and the provincial governments decided to move forward on the child benefit, the federal government was slower in funding it and we wanted to start doing it right away. So we did it in such a way that we funded it upfront. And as they put their money in, we draw ours down because the national program gradually is replacing it. So our intention was never to be having theirs plus ours. It was to have the national program but to provide the money until that one was fully up and funded. And so as they put more in, we put less in and it keeps it at the same level. And the whole intention of the design

of that program when the federal government put it in was that any money we then save gets reinvested directly into programs for children and family like KidsFirst.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well I understand what you're saying but if it started last year with 13.2 million and the feds put money in and now it's down to 7.9 million, where did the additional \$5 million . . . It's not funded totally. There's a reduction in that line item.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'm going to get Gord to go through the details but the program actually started in 1998. So Gord Tweed will answer that question.

**Mr. Tweed:** — As the minister described, the design of the program when introduced back in July 1998 was that the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Sorry, is that better? It could be just me.

The program, the Saskatchewan Child Benefit, introduced in 1998, as the minister suggested, the province at that time made a decision to invest additional provincial funds to simulate what would be a fully mature children's benefit paid through the federal government.

So each year that the federal government increases their contribution through the National Child Benefit supplement initiative, that program, the province reduces its investment in the Saskatchewan Child Benefit. The net effect for families: they continue to receive the same amount of benefit but paid through different sources. Or the relationship of the NCBS or the National Child Benefit supplement increases, the Saskatchewan Child Benefit decreases. So that's why you'd see each year, line by line if we went back to '98, a decrease in the investment for the year, or decrease in the allocation for Saskatchewan Child Benefit.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes, but the families themselves are not being cut. The money is just coming from a different source.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Have the number of children receiving this Saskatchewan Child Benefit increased or decreased since last year?

**Mr. Tweed:** — The number of children receiving children's benefits — what I would refer to as the combined benefit — would not have decreased. The actual . . . To answer your question explicitly, the number of children receiving the Saskatchewan Child Benefit portion would decrease and that's again the relationship to the previous piece.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Then I rephrase my question: of the total number of children receiving the benefit.

**Mr. Tweed:** — I don't have that information but I would expect not.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Would you be so kind as to forward me that if it's different than said? I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Are you finished, Mr. Merriman?

**Mr. Merriman:** — When we look at the caseload, when it

comes to Aboriginal families in the province, what would be the total number of cases of Aboriginals on social assistance in the province today?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Are you inquiring about just those on provincial assistance or those who receive their assistance directly from their band, from the federal government?

**Mr. Merriman:** — Provincial.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — About 40 per cent of our total caseload would be Aboriginal and 25 per cent First Nations.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Do you have the total numbers, both federal and provincial? Of number of cases, please.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — We can get that for you, but I don't have the federal numbers offhand. I know that about two-thirds of First Nations people live off-reserve today and in the one-third that remains on-reserve there would probably be a higher dependency level than there is off-reserve. Not necessarily a huge amount higher but it would be higher because there's less employment opportunity.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Would that number be close to 28,000 as a total? On and off?

**Mr. Tweed:** — There's approximately 28,000 provincial social assistance cases. The number of cases that are on-reserve, I don't have that information today.

**Mr. Merriman:** — What would be, you know, the number of Aboriginal youth between the ages of let's say 18 and 30 that would be on social assistance?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Again, if I can, I'll provide that information to your office, Mr. Merriman. I don't have it with us today.

**Mr. Merriman:** — . . . I have it in front of me.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Oh do you? Okay.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. Let me give you the information. There's 4,560 between the ages of 18 and 29. Of those, what percentage would you . . . have completed their grade 12 education?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Again, the specific information I don't have. You may have it in front of you. With respect to the general adult population of the social assistance caseload, it's approximately 70 per cent have not completed their grade 12.

**Mr. Merriman:** — It's actually 87.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — That is one of the areas when . . . I don't know if you'll be involved at all when the Learning minister is doing his estimates, but that is one of the areas where progress is being made with the number of people attaining higher levels of education in the province. In fact Saskatchewan was recognized in the world as one of the places with the highest level of educational achievement across all socio-economic groups.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well I guess highest would be one thing to say but successful would be another. You know we have 4,560 young adults on social assistance, both First Nations and Métis, in the province and of that 87 per cent of them have not completed their grade 12 education. Would there be a correlation between those two numbers?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I think there definitely would. But I also think this is not a problem that government alone can solve. In order for someone to be motivated to stay in school they have to believe someone will hire them and there hasn't been exactly a big rush out in the community to hire First Nations and Aboriginal people. I'm certainly responsible for one of the corporations that has the best hiring record in that area, being the Casino Regina.

But I think this is one of the big problems, and I think there's lots of business people aware of this and I think they're working to increase employment opportunities. But I think the perception of opportunity is directly re-linked to pursuit of education.

And we certainly have provided substantial resources to the First Nations University, to the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology, to the Gabriel Dumont Institute, to regional and northern colleges to try to create additional access to education.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. You know when we have this high percentage and you say, well you know we need people to hire them, well I would think if you check with the business community there are jobs available but what they need is an educated workforce.

In the city of Saskatoon, 17 per cent of Aboriginal children complete high school — 17 per cent. Those numbers have been holding pretty steady for the last four years so it would just seem to me that whatever we're doing isn't working. And when you have 17 per cent completing high school and the comments are, well people won't hire them, well there may be a correlation to the education system and the requirements of the marketplace.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I think that's something that both the Minister of Learning and myself would agree with you on, that we need to emphasize specific job-related training. And certainly in this budget there was a huge increase in the number of directed training seats through the kind of institutions that would most likely lead to employment because certainly our regional colleges and our technical institutes have the best record of people actually getting employment. And in fact SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] has done, I think, a pretty outstanding job in having a representative student population of Aboriginal people in the province.

So you know have we achieved perfection? I know that our housing area we are participating in projects where the students that you're speaking of are involved in building houses in various locations including there's a fairly large project going on in Saskatoon with two high schools. So I mean there are initiatives. There are positive things going on. Are they enough? Well I guess you spend the money you've got but certainly those initiatives are there and there's substantial investments

being made. And our career and employment services was moved out of Learning and into our department to create a more direct link between people who would be on assistance and the labour market, so that we can again help people bridge into employment in a very specific way.

But certainly with the tools that we have at hand and you would have heard recent announcements of the Crowns and others being more involved in the Aboriginal training, mentorship, co-op positions — all of those things. So there's a lot of work being done on all those fronts. There's just a lot of young people. If you look at the youth population of the North, it's the substantial majority of the population there.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Madam Minister, I wouldn't disagree with you on the large population. I guess where I was trying to get to is on the social services. We have, you know, nearly 5,000 young Aboriginal men and women on social assistance; 87 per cent of those haven't received their grade 12. Statistics I have, 17 per cent of Aboriginal children in Saskatoon are not graduating high school. We have 85 per cent of Aboriginal children in jail. So it would seem to me that we have a lot of work to do and that we need to get the two systems aligned to produce, if you will, a product that can be moved into the workforce that is fully trained. And I would say that we have not done a good job on that certainly over the last five years and we need some movement in that.

What is also disturbing on the statistics I have is that almost half of those young Aboriginal adults are single parents. So we now have, you know, doubled the load on them. Not only haven't they completed their education but they're living on social assistance as a single parent, and I'd like to know what programs you have to assist in that area.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well I'll just first of all mention that in the general area of participating in the labour market, in the '04-05 budget there is an additional 28 million to create 14,000 opportunities for people to participate.

But as well a huge amount of our resources in the department are targeted at single-parent families, both in the form of child care spaces so that the parents can then go to school or be employed, and as well targeted to the employment supplement, the child benefit, the various things that make it possible for those single parents to have an opportunity to continue their education. And certainly we have put child cares as well into high schools and other places. And the provincial training allowance is specifically targeted as well to get people into training who are both single parents and family people.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Again the only one comment is we're putting things back into the schools. We keep putting more and more into the schools where pretty soon, you know, they're going to be a one-stop shop for everything. And I don't believe that they currently have the capabilities or the facilities to provide all these additional services we keep placing upon the teachers in our province.

I'd like to switch now and talk about, a little bit about your Building Independence program. What are the total number of persons receiving social assistance and benefits from the Building Independence program?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — The portion of people who are not on social assistance but are in the supported employment part . . . Okay, those on the transitional employment allowance, and those would be people who haven't settled into social assistance, I think that's an average stay on that program of six months . . . oh, four months. Okay.

And then the Saskatchewan Child Benefit supplemented families, that would be 11,000 families. The Saskatchewan employment supplement families would be about 7,800 families. The family housing supplement families would be 10,000 families. The disability supplement families would be 3,000. The families that receive a childcare subsidy would be 3,700. The provincial training allowance participants is 1,154. Now that's specifically related to our programs, not Learning's programs. And that's it.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. You know you were throwing those numbers. I'm not sure I got the answer to my question, but I'll just try and . . . For the young people that are on the Building Independence program, I take that to be the 1,154 number that you brought out, and I take that to be that that's a four-month program. Is that correct?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — The transitional employment allowance is the one that bridges people from being on their own to coming onto the need for some support and then going back in to work, and that's 4,500 people.

Probably the best one to get a sense of the . . . is the families receiving the child benefit is 11,000 families. The people who . . . It's hard to divide it up the way you're asking the question. If I had a little better idea of what you're trying to get at, we could maybe give you a better answer.

Yes, if it's a total number you're looking at it — everybody who benefits from components of Building Independence — it would be about 20,000 families.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. Thank you. Of those 20,000, how does that compare to the number of people receiving social assistance prior to the introduction of this program in '97?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well 41 per cent reduction. I'll get you an actual number. Figures coming from everywhere here. The 41 per cent drop reflects over 6,800 families and 15,000 children that have left social assistance. So the part that would be the 59 per cent would be . . . What's he's looking for is what the figure started at. See I've got the drop. But I . . . Is that close enough? It looks like in 1997 it was 37,190 people.

We did one year get a big increase — what was is, 10,000 people — when the federal government changed their policy about how they funded First Nations people. And that caused 10,000 people to join, just like that, the provincial rolls because they used to pay for one year after people left the reserve and now they don't provide any transition. As soon as they're off the reserve and in the city they're a provincial responsibility now.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. So this Building Independence, it's a shift. And you say we have shifted 6,800 people from social assistance to working families

or people, individuals, I'm not sure. I would assume that's individuals. How many of those people are still employed full-time working?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well again because there's a 41 per cent drop, then whether they're the exact same people, we know that overall, there are 6,800 more people working on an annualized basis, and that number growing every year, than there were before.

The evaluation that we did of it found that 40 per cent of social assistance clients were employed within 14 months of their original application. Of these, 71 per cent full-time and 65 per cent working in jobs providing incomes in excess of 30,000 a year.

And what he's asking is the retention question. The number who are on, who stay on. And I know that someone mentioned that to me a while back and I just can't remember what the number is.

Can you get some kind of an estimate of that? Yes. But I think our retention is pretty good because people are better off. They have more money. And so unless the job that they are in ends, you know, there's a fair bit of incentive to stay with it under the Building Independence because it's an incentive-based program to create more incentive to be employed.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Yes. I appreciate what you're saying and I see that it's a gap between the one and the other and supplements, I mean that. What are the roles of the community-based organizations in this Building Independence program?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — In any situation, for example KidsFirst, where there's work being done with the family who is trying to be more independent, they would be involved with whichever agencies most appropriately would support the needs that their family has. Whether those are counselling needs, whether they're addictions needs, whether they're training needs, whether they're basic literacy needs, the organizations that they're involved in are based on what their particular needs are.

So I would say that every organization that receives funding for government is providing a direct service because they're held to an increasingly high accountability standard for actually working with the people that they're paid to work with.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you, Minister. Well, how many . . . I'll rephrase that. How many community-based organizations are currently contracted to deliver this employment assistance program as well assisting children in poverty?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — The organizations that we contract with for multi-year career and employment services include the Gary Tinker Federation for the disabled; The Keewatin Career Development Corporation; P.A. [Prince Albert] and District Community Service Centre; the Prairie Employment program; Radius Community Centre for Education and Employment Training; the Regional Employment Development committee; Saskatchewan Abilities Council, Saskatoon Branch; SEARCHS, the Saskatoon Employment Access Resource Centre for Human Services; Saskatoon Open Door society.

Just a few more, Young Women's Christian Association of Saskatoon; the Regina Work Prep Centre; the South Saskatchewan Independent Living Centre; the Regina Open Door Society; the Saskatchewan Abilities Council, Yorkton branch; Weyburn and Area Supportive Employment Services; and Community Advocates for Employment.

**Mr. Merriman:** — If it would be possible at some time if I could get a copy of that. I couldn't write it down fast enough, but thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — yes, it will be in the transcript but we'll provide that to you.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. Do we also allow for some of these people that are independents to go back and take training in post-secondary education systems that we fund?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes, we have both GED [general educational development] programs as well as the provincial training allowance. But there's no question that there still could be more work done and certainly with the new training positions that were approved in this budget there should be more opportunity.

What I'm asking the department to do is to ensure that as we start to roll out more of our child care resources, that we strategically target some of these child care resources so that they're supporting people to have a more successful education — as well as our housing resources — a more successful education and employment outcome so that we have less people being discouraged and giving up. Because what happens now is you get quite a few people who enter the university, who enter SIAST and then a bit of the way into the year all the difficulties of housing, of child care, of transportation, overwhelm them and they give up.

And so we're trying to strategically target some of the new resources to strengthen the support system that . . . As well as the counselling supports seem to be very important as well because people get discouraged. Quite often people coming from the North are in a new environment. That seems to be a very important part of helping them stick with it.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. I just had received the . . . I'm just going to kind of jump ship here so I don't forget this. You had sent out the report on the information I had requested on the advisory board on early learning and childhood. And briefly reading it, because I just got it, was that they tend to meet three times annually and once with the minister, and yet when you look at it the past year here they've had frequent meetings. I would assume that's due to the federal funding that's coming for early childhood learning. Would that be correct?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes that would be correct. We want to make sure that as we're deciding how to spend that money that we're very actively engaged with the community that delivers those kinds of services.

The other difference that's taken place is, child care used to be looked at just as child care — you know, to a degree a good, safe place to put the kids while the parents were working. With the new early learning and care, there's a stronger emphasis on

the developmental, child development components and also ensuring a high level of programs that exist in care centres for kids because of the impact on their early school experience. So there's more different kinds of people coming together in these discussions now than used to be the case.

**Mr. Merriman:** — And again it may be here, and I just haven't had a chance to read it completely, but in part of our discussion was that this group of 10 to 12 members would consult with the community and other stakeholders. Have any of those meetings happened since April 1, 2004?

**Ms. Barry:** — April Barry, executive director of the early learning and child care branch. There was an extensive consultation done in the spring of 2004; 26 consultations held throughout the province to advise both the two departments of Learning and Community Resources and Employment and the Minister's Advisory Board related to policy framework development for early learning and child care.

In addition to that, the early learning and child care Minister's Advisory Board met with the Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association, that represents the child care sector broadly, in June of last year. Since that time the Minister's Advisory Board has not formally consulted with the agencies and the public, but through their roles they've had informal discussions with the sectors that they represent.

**Mr. Merriman:** — And so if I take your answer correctly, you have met with private daycare people in that sector?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'll say two things there, and then April Barry can add to that. But certainly there's always been discussions with child care homes. But I've made a commitment to have a specific advisory group on family child care homes because it's clear to me when I talk to child care home providers that they believe some of our policies work; some of them don't work. They feel that they want to be more engaged in setting some of the policy and regulations in that area. And certainly I've been convinced by my discussions with them that we need to take a hard look at that.

The Saskatchewan association of family child care homes has put forth names of potential providers to include in the discussion, and we have names of unlicensed providers from letters that we've received from providers.

So what I want to do is bring a balance of licensed and unlicensed home providers together at the end of June, ensuring that rural, urban, and Aboriginal providers are represented, and talk to people who have been caring for children in this way for a long time and see how we can make this work better for the families, for the kids, and for the providers, because people have a lot of different kinds of needs and sometimes it seems that the regulations don't always fit the flexibility of family circumstances. So this will be an area we'll be looking at quite thoroughly.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well thank you, Madam Minister. If I heard you right then you will be advising with all of these groups and listening to their input and I congratulate you on those comments. I don't think I have any other questions on that section. I'll switch over now to housing.

Thank you, Madam Minister, I'll continue on housing. It would appear that funding to the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation was cut. My question is, what programs will be affected by this cut?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — We had a portion of money and the federal government changed the rules, in agreement with the provinces, to allow for money to be used not just directly for housing but to improve the quality of housing through increased shelter supplements and other type of initiatives. So the money was not lost to the program but it moved into the shelter supplement area.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Could the minister further explain to me — I'm not sure on the shelter supplement program — what are we talking about? What is this program? Sorry.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — The shelter supplement program is new. The intent of the program . . . In the past when we raised the shelter allowance what has typically happened is landlords, sort of en masse, have raised the rent and we've not had any increase in the quality of housing. This supplement this time is designed to be linked to quality.

Now if the . . . I'll get Darrell to explain a little more of the detail, the administration. And it is new. We're not sure yet if it'll have the intended result. But in the method we're using now the money is tied to the recipient who is getting it, whether they be on social assistance or whether they be in the Building Independence program. They call the call centre, we go through a checklist, you know, does the house have windows? Is the plumbing working? Is the heating working? Pretty basic stuff but still stuff that a lot of houses don't have.

And if in fact they meet the criteria, it is then linked to getting additional resources for housing. If it doesn't meet the criteria, there's some supports for housing renovation, even if it's rental housing, but also they can achieve the supplement by moving and using that additional money to get better housing, to move into better housing. And Darrell, maybe you want to explain that a bit more. Darrell Jones.

**Mr. Jones:** — Darrell Jones, assistant deputy minister housing and central administration.

I think the minister did a pretty good job of capturing the essence of the program. It breaks down into two components, the family rental housing supplement and the disability rental housing supplement. It'll assist up to 10,000 family households and potentially up to 3,000 households.

It is built outside of the social assistance program so once again it forms part of the Building Independence strategy to assist people, not only that are on the social assistance program or the Saskatchewan assistance program, but also people of low income beyond that, so people that are in the workforce.

**Mr. Merriman:** — A supplement question to that. I would assume that this is not available for landlords to upgrade their facilities for rental by Social Services.

**Mr. Jones:** — One of the features of the program is that it is also linked to the renovation programs that we have available

through Sask Housing Corporation. So if one of the housing units . . . I should say, a tenant is applying for the supplement but the house that they're currently residing in doesn't meet basic health and safety standards, as a result of the questionnaire they go through upon application or as a result of an inspection that would be conducted, that landlord then could apply to upgrade the home to bring it to minimum health and safety standards to one of the renovation programs through Sask Housing.

**Mr. Merriman:** — And we pay for it.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Here, let me just answer that one. If we were to meet all of the housing needs by building the housing new, you could never afford it. It would be billions and billions of dollars. So we had to find some solution to upgrading the housing stock that didn't involve building all brand new places. There's just . . . it's not affordable to do that, and that particularly with the federal government has been steadily exiting house programs. Lately they've had a bit of a bounce back into it.

But social housing units are not . . . well any housing unit today is not cheap to build. It's in the area of \$120,000. So you have to say to yourself, how can you achieve an improvement in your housing stock and your availability of good housing stock without having to spend 120,000 per unit to achieve that?

And I guess one could argue whether this is a good idea or not, but I guess in the absence of another idea . . . We do have home ownership programs. But again, quite often, particularly in Regina, we don't have many available houses that are very suitable for that because a lot of the housing stock is so rundown in the inner city that you wouldn't want to put the amount of money it would take to put into it to bring that house up to any reasonable standard and you'd still have an old house. So this is not an easy question to answer, what the best way to do this is.

Personally, if those landlords are willing to provide a good service as landlords and are willing to upgrade their stock, I don't have a huge problem with the private sector being part of the solution to this problem.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Is this a loan? Or is this just money given to them to do the upgrades?

**Mr. Jones:** — It's a forgivable loan over a 10-year period with a condition that the rents are kept at an affordable level during that timeframe. It's essentially two objectives with the rental housing supplement. One is to assist households with affordability. And one is to assist in the upgrading or the improvement of the overall housing stock to address not only affordability problems, but also to assist with the condition of deteriorating housing stock in the province.

**Mr. Merriman:** — I just find this mind-boggling. You know, I go out and I buy a rundown home, I rent it to social assistance to put people in, and then I go to you and you give me the money to fix it up. I don't understand. You know, if I decide to build a home, you should not be renting the home unless it's in the condition that it should be for people to move in. Why should the government be paying for this?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Again I think I've outlined the problem that we've got. To build all the housing stock new would not be within anybody's fiscal capacity and then the government and taxpayers would pay for all of it. If you find a responsible landlord who's willing to do the renovations, they do have to participate in the cost of those renovations. They don't receive 100 per cent of it. It's a cost-share program. And yes, it does upgrade their housing.

I guess the other way we could do it is pass a law and inspect it and just shut them down. And some of that's going on as well with the placarding of houses, a more aggressive placarding of houses that's ever been done before. And there's no doubt that some landlords will have to either shape up or get into a different line of business.

But certainly I'd be interested in your views on that — whether you think we should use a heavier legal approach rather than a little more stick and a little less carrot. It would be interesting to hear your views on that as well.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Absolutely. That's my view. You know you're talking cost share, your colleague's talking a forgivable loan. I find there's a big difference in that. If I've got a forgivable loan, I'm not paying back anything. If I've got a cost share, we're splitting the amount. And we're also talking about inspection. Do you inspect these homes prior to their — every home — prior to their conversion to a new tenant?

**Mr. Jones:** — There will be . . . first of all there's the questionnaire process when they call in with an application, because the application will be administered through the Building Independence contact centre. So they are taken through a series of questions. If, as a result of the answers to those questions, the home doesn't pass then the client is not eligible for the supplement unless one of two things happens. Either they move to accommodation which does meet basic health and safety standards or the renovations are conducted by the landlord. Once it reaches that stage then the home would have to have an inspection before it would be able to be passed.

In addition to that there will be ongoing post inspections undertaken. Of those that do receive the supplement, and should any health and safety standard infractions be identified, the supplement would cease to exist at that point in time and the tenant would have the same options had they been rejected earlier on.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Okay we're talking about the supplement. When there is a change of house from tenant to tenant, do you inspect these homes prior to a new tenant going in or is it just left to the tenant alone to fill in the form?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I think this emphasizes the design elements of this program because the tenant knows they get the supplement based on that house meeting a standard. We're trying to change people's behaviour and how they think about their housing. We're trying to change landlords' behaviour in knowing that their tenants have a choice. If they get the supplement they don't need to go live in their crummy house. They can go pick a better one.

So this program is designed, and we don't know yet if it will be



successful because it just started, but it is designed with the participation of the police and the building inspectors and everyone else. It's designed specifically to drive changes in behaviour. If it doesn't do that, then I guess we may have to look at a more legalistic approach but this has all been very intentional in the design of this, to drive more choice by the tenant to not have to be in that house, and more obligation on behalf of the landlord to have at least a minimum standard of housing available there.

And it's important too, that we take into account that there is both bad landlords and bad tenants, and there's good landlords and good tenants. So I wouldn't want to paint them all with the same brush, but we are very much trying to achieve a change here in behaviour on both parties.

**Mr. Merriman:** — I attended a conference here in Regina where they're trying to clean up a community and one of the issues they had is that the tenant typically needs a house so bad that they would take anything offered and they would not complain, in fear of complaining that they would lose the occupancy they have, or to say anything against the landlord.

In meeting with the people from the city of Regina and the people from the government organizations that were running it, their problem was they cannot get in to inspect the houses. The only ones that can allow them are the landlord or the tenant and neither one of them are likely to. The landlord because he doesn't want it inspected; the tenant because he doesn't want to lose the facility they have. They talked about houses with no stairs going down to the basement, feces all over the floor.

And my question simply was, do you inspect these homes prior to a new tenant moving in?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — For one thing, I don't think on a universal basis you would want to pay for all the staff it would take to do that. We do, do systematic inspection especially under the new programs now that the police and the city and the health people and everything are involved in, to try to clean up some of these areas.

But with the supplement, people do have the choice to move to other areas of the city as well and not be completely ghettoized because that's the only place where the rents are affordable. There is a 3 per cent, over a 3 per cent vacancy rate now which we assume is enough to give people some choice in what they rent.

And I do find, if you don't mind me just debating a little bit here, these comments a little bit in contradiction of the one before, where we should let parents look after their children but we should inspect their house for them because they can't look at their house and decide whether it's adequate to live in.

So I mean I would reverse that. I'd rather inspect what's going on with the kids and let them figure out whether they're living in a suitable house. Part of the Building Independence is to drive people to be thoughtful about some of these things themselves.

So it's hard to be consistent across a whole range of policy initiatives but our attempt is to get them to be conscious of what

they should be looking for, to have the resources to be able to purchase it, and to have the landlords know that they don't have a totally captive audience any more.

**Mr. Merriman:** — The difference is, Madam Minister, you're paying for the houses out of Social Services. These people are desperate. They need homes. In the inner city of Saskatoon the average child that gets into grade 8 has been in six schools and lives in six different areas. And the reason they do that is because of social assistance housing that they have to change. And most of them are not facilities that are up to date.

What happens with the security deposits on these facilities as the people continue to rotate? How do we police that issue on the security damage deposits?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — We'll just have to get someone for you that can speak to security deposits because Darrell doesn't . . . Do you want us to have him speak to the inspection first? He doesn't handle security deposits.

**Mr. Jones:** — Just your point with regard to the condition of some of the housing units in the inner city neighbourhoods. And certainly we're aware that the inner city neighbourhoods contain the housing stock that . . . it is in the most deteriorated condition. And so the random post inspections that are done are weighted to those areas where the greatest deteriorated stock is, which of course would include the inner city neighbourhoods.

When we look at the demographics of the housing stock in the province, the vast majority of the housing is in a good state of repair and meets basic health and safety standards. So it's not our intention to undertake a lot of inspections on those homes but to try and undertake as many inspections in the neighbourhoods where the greatest likelihood of infractions occur.

**Mr. Merriman:** — On that, I know we both agree on that, and that's where it comes down to the amount of the staff to do it. We're talking of specific areas, and we know where they are. We're not going to sit here and deny they're there, or we'll go for a ride and we'll have a look at them, because we know they're there. We know they're not up to code. We know they're not up to standard.

And my only point is, when they change hands from tenant A to tenant B, that's the time that we should be inspecting them. The tenant will not do it.

I talked to the lady at the city of Saskatoon and the other people that were in the meetings. I mean they were struggling. How do they get these landlords to bring these facilities up to code, because the only way the city can do it is if the landlord or the tenant allows them in. And neither one will allow them in.

So the only other option is you. You're the man with the gold. You're paying the rent. You have a right, upon change of ownership, to inspect it or don't rent from the guy.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well again it's a program designed to have the tenant want the shelter supplement. So therefore to call the call centre, verify whether the house is in the condition that would qualify and then the inspection process, that follows the

random inspection process, that Darrell refers to, because it's not possible to do 100 per cent inspection.

We want the person living in the house to inspect it. We want them to know what they should expect from housing and then we want them to make that decision about their housing. And I mean, I think probably there's some instances where a person is used to inferior housing that they may in fact not in their own mind have a very high standard. But we're trying to change that behaviour.

And I am, again if you can suggest another, shall I say affordable, way to do it, boy, we're totally open to suggestions. But we have worked with the police, the housing authorities, the public health inspectors, the municipalities. They're all involved in the design of this program.

**Mr. Merriman:** — I'll tell you exactly how to do it. Give the city the power and the authority by law to enter the premises. That does it very quickly. You know, when we talk about resources, how many rental units do we have that you're doing in the city of Regina?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I'm not sure what you mean.

**Mr. Merriman:** — How many houses is Social Services leasing, renting, or whatever you want to call it, on a monthly basis.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes, we would have a combination of social housing units and then private sector rental housing and I'll let Darrell dig around. Just while he's looking for that information, I'll just mention that one of the ways that people are getting into the houses and working on this is, it is being done through enforcement of existing bylaws that have always been there, actually for many years, but have never been enforced.

And people are finding that people are letting people into the houses on these inspections. A member from the community association goes with the police and with the inspectors and, yes, in Regina. Now that may not happen differently in Saskatoon, but Regina certainly has a team that's active on this.

**Mr. Merriman:** — Well, Madam Minister, it was a Regina conference where I heard this problem. Not in Saskatoon. You know, when you make the comment that people will report, they should know what their housing is. I mean if you've only lived in these houses all your life, what would you report on? What would be better? If you live in a garage with two cars every year, how would you tell that you've moved up?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well, I would ask you how you would build independence if you don't encourage people to make any of their own decisions?

**Mr. Merriman:** — I think we've had that discussion on the other side and you went the other . . . [inaudible] . . . Anyways, I'm finished, Madam Chair, and I'll pass it to my colleagues. Did you have those numbers?

**Mr. Jones:** — If I understood the question you were interested in — understanding how many social and affordable housing

units there is in the province?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — No. He wants to know how many rentals, how many people we support rental for.

**Mr. Jones:** — Are you referring to the housing supplement? And how many we . . .

**Mr. Merriman:** — No, how many houses do we rent, lease, or whatever on a monthly basis from the private sector in the city of Regina?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes, we may have to get back to you on that . . .

**Mr. Jones:** — I'm sorry I would not have that data here today.

**Mr. Merriman:** — . . . take that number and multiply it times 800 bucks a month, times 12 months, and go to a bank and finance it, we can start building affordable housing. Anyways thank you for my comments . . .

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Not so fast. I will answer that seeing as it was posed, and we have done all those calculations when we designed our housing strategy as to what we could afford to do even if we did what you're suggesting.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Chisholm.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — I've got just a couple of questions on the housing supplement and how it works. I guess that's the first question, how does it work? If I'm renting a house right now and I'm paying say \$500 a month and it's not up to standard and so I fill a form in because I want to receive a supplement . . . Sorry, how does that work?

Let's say the house does get fixed up. I now get a supplement and my rent can't go up, like you said it has to stay affordable. So I'm better off by say \$100 a month because somebody fixed up the house I live in, is that . . .

**Mr. Jones:** — Okay, first of all the . . . there isn't a form to fill in because it is being delivered through the Building Independence contact centre so the person simply needs to make a phone call to the toll free number and provide some very quick information over the phone in order to determine their eligibility. So it's a very quick means of identifying whether the person is eligible for the supplement or not.

They would provide the information as to what their income is, what their current rent is, and based on the market conditions and their income it would be determined whether they're eligible for a supplement and how much.

So for example, in your example, they may very well be eligible as a family for a \$100 a month supplement. If it's determined at that point though that the home — because of the way they've answered the question — does not meet health and safety standards, the tenant would then know that if the home was repaired they would have an extra \$100 available to them to pay for rent or they could actually use that as purchasing power.

So right now they're living in a house that is substandard, they

may be able to upgrade to a house or a home that is at a basic health and safety standard which might in fact cost a little bit more but they in fact now would be able to access the supplement in order to pay that rent.

Alternatively if the landlord won't fix . . . or the existing landlord won't fix up the accommodations, they also have the option of directing them toward Sask Housing to see if they're interested in participating in any of the housing programs that act as an incentive for them to repair the home.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Madam Chair, I have a copy of the Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement brochure that we can get more copies of and provide to committee members and that at least gives some basic information and a phone number and, you know, if you wanted to pursue it in more depth, if there's interest in that we can bring — I'll just bring them or send them to yourself and then to the members.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — The other thing that was mentioned was that it becomes a forgivable loan after a 10-year period as long as the landlord didn't increase the rent more than . . . but I didn't get what was the . . .

**Mr. Jones:** — So we've mentioned that it's on a cost-share basis so we expect the landlord to make an investment as well in the renovations so there would be some funding that would be available to help out with the repairs and some portion of it would also be paid by the landlord. For the portion that is contributed by Sask Housing Corporation, we then provide that on the basis of a forgivable loan. If they maintain their rents at an affordable level which would be no higher than average market rent for that type of home for the 10-year period then it's totally forgiven. If they move the rents up beyond that then the remaining portion would be repayable.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — I guess my question is if you improve the home, is the rent not going to go up? Like, the landlord is going to be spending some of his money to improve the accommodation. I would think the rent would then go up — fair market rent would go up.

**Mr. Jones:** — Yes. The rent may in fact go up. If the home is at poor standard and let's say for example, is being charged at \$400 a month it may in fact go to \$450 a month. The home has been improved and based on average market rent for that quality home it may qualify for a rent increase because it's still being kept at an affordable level within the market place. But at the same time that tenant then has access to the housing supplement which makes that home affordable so now it has both affordability and improved quality and overall what we're looking to see is improved quality of the homes as well as increased affordability for the people living in them.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — So it looks to me like in a typical situation what could happen is the landlord is going to be receiving \$100 more a month and the government's paying for it through this supplement. And I'm not sure what we accomplished.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — If I can say we believe that under the design of this program we believe there's much more of a chance of achieving something than in the past when we raised the rental allowance and it was tied to nothing, when rents just

automatically went up. So here we at least have an opportunity to achieve quality.

And because the money goes directly to the tenant and not to the landlord, the landlord does not always know that the tenant has it or that they have the option. So it puts more power in the hands of the tenant to make choices about where they live.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — I guess my other question was, on this loan that's being given to the landlord, is there interest attached to this loan and if it's also forgiven at the end of the term? Or is the interest still paid or what happens with that?

**Mr. Jones:** — There would only be interest if there was a breach in the agreement which would mean that they haven't kept rents at an affordable level and so then there is the potential there for interest to be charged on the remaining balance. Otherwise it's actually forgiven over the 10-year period.

**Mr. Chisholm:** — One more quick question. You said that there's a cost sharing going on. Could you give me an example, a typical example if there was a \$10,000 renovation required to bring a house up to standards, how much would be available in the way of this loan and how much would be expected by the landlord?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — It's a one-third, two-thirds relationship with the landlord paying the one-third and the program paying the two-thirds.

**The Chair:** — Anything else?

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Minister, regarding housing: Sask Housing does get into helping upgrade homes for people who are on limited incomes. Is that correct?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes, there are programs for renovation and for also accommodation of disabilities.

**Mr. Toth:** — Is there a limit to the amount Sask Housing would put in?

And just to give you a bit of an idea, just when we adjourned last week, a question came in from an elderly lady who's been . . . who went to Sask Housing because there's just nothing left in her budget to do anything with her house and she's got pails all over the place trying to stop the water flowing into the house. And I believe she had someone come in and assess and what it needs is roof, it needs some work on windows, and a few other things. I just don't remember all the details. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of 13,800, and she was told the maximum she could qualify for was 12,000. She'd have to borrow the rest.

The unfortunate part is she really has no equity to borrow or she has nothing in what her current income is to even go to them and borrow that extra \$1,800. And so my CA had followed up and asked, even to start, if possibly the roof could be fixed and this lady was told no it has to be done all at once.

I wonder if you could respond to that and answer where could we go with that issue.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — You'll have to yes. I wouldn't know that kind of detail.

**Mr. Jones:** — There's a variety of programs available and a number of those programs are federal-provincial cost-sharing programs. They're referred to as the residential rehabilitation assistance program, or RRAP for short. It sounds like the program that she applied for was the homeowner RRAP program and it requires that the home be brought to health and safety, and structural standards. And so what does occur from time to time is that those improvements exceed the maximum that's available under the program and so the amount above that does have to be made available through resources of the person that's applying.

Another potential option for this individual, and I would have to and I would encourage you to pass along the specifics because we could look into it, is the emergency repair program which deals with specific items that need to be repaired on an emergency basis and so then it doesn't have the requirement that the whole house be brought up to standard. But it has limits on how much is available on a per household basis as well. So we'd have to ascertain whether something could be done under that program.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Madam Minister, and certainly I will get the information to you and maybe there's a way of somebody addressing the immediate need as we look to the long-term need versus building another house as you'd indicated.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Yes I was just going to say too, I think there is sometimes a situation, when you age along with your house, that sometimes a house can reach the point of no return, especially if no repairs have been done for a long, long time, at which point it might be wiser for someone to go in from one of the other support agencies and talk about whether it might be better to move to a different location.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Madam Minister, and certainly I'll follow up. I have one further question and that's regarding community-based organizations. And we're all aware of the concerns raised over the past number of years about the salary level in these community-based organizations and what they're able to pay their employees. And the ongoing problem they have faced over the past number of years, most recent years, in regards to the fact that when they finally train someone and they've got them trained, there are health facilities more specifically in communities that are actually paying better wages for the same quality of . . . and workability. And I'm wondering, Madam Minister, what the department is doing to address this ongoing issue.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Since 1994 we've actually increased, by about 36 per cent, the wages in that sector, at a cost of \$28.6 million. And I would say that the problems they're experiencing are very real. They are having retention problems. They are having problems . . . I think a lot of people are having problems today with people being willing to do a whole variety of work that needs doing without the pay being attached.

And all I can say is that we have made improvements in every year. But what we're doing right now is looking at the SARC

human resource plan that they presented. At the same time we're looking at a plan for the child care sector because now with the new money that's come in, that's an even lower paid sector than this sector.

And what we'd like to do is do something that makes sense in equity in the CBO [community-based organization] sector more generally. And whether or not we achieve it will depend on the Treasury Board process. But certainly we're actively working on making a proposal for improvements in this area in keeping with the SARC proposal.

**Mr. Toth:** — Well, thank you, Madam Minister. And as you indicated, since '94 a percentage of that has been increased, yes. And you've recognized the fact that it certainly hasn't quite addressed the total issue.

And probably the most frustrating part in this whole question is hiring individuals — yes, they're paid at a lower level — but taking the time to train. And just about the time you've got them trained to the point where they can effectively provide the care, another job opportunity opens up at a higher level. And I think that in itself is part of the frustration too.

So if I guess at the end of the day if the rates could be fair and reasonable in regards to the level of training and in comparison to equivalent jobs in the community, that's . . . I'm certain, Madam Minister, is the concern, and that would address a lot of these issues.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — No, and we appreciate you raising that. And all I can say is it's under active consideration, but it is a budget decision and it'll have to be finalized in that context.

**The Chair:** — Seeing no further questions then, vote 36, subvote (RE01), central management and services, 27,955,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Community inclusion (RE06), 80,806,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Child and family services (RE04), 66,524,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Early child development (RE10), 3,574,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Child care (RE07), 24,792,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Employment support and assistance (RE03), 339,796,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Office of Disability Issues (RE09), 227,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Supporting families and building economic independence (RE05), 71,344,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Housing (RE12), 22,108,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Amortization is a non-voted, non-cash expense and is presented for information purposes only. And that's the 1,334,000 at the bottom of page 37. We have a motion then:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006, the following sums for Community Resources and Employment, 637,126,000.

Can I have a member move that please? Mr. Hagel. We have the motion then. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Agreed. Motion is carried.

[Vote 36 agreed to.]

**Mr. Toth:** — Madam Chair, just before we adjourn, just a thank you to the minister and her officials for the time and their commitment too. And some of the cases where they didn't have the exact answers today but they'll have them for us, we thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — And I'd like to thank my officials as well for the support provided in answering the questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — The next item up for business before the committee are the estimates for the Department of Corrections and Public Safety, vote 73 on page 39 of the Estimates book. We'll allow a few minutes for the change of officials and the minister.

We need leave of the committee to change the agenda, so I'm going to ask for leave. We need leave from the committee to make a change to the agenda, so we can bring the Justice minister forward and have a couple of questions asked of him. Is the committee agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**General Revenue Fund  
Justice  
Vote 3**

**Subvote (JU01)**

**The Chair:** — Agreed. Okay. Welcome the Minister of Justice and his officials then and open the floor to Mr. Toth.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Madam Chair, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I want to do a bit of follow-up on regards to our last period of discussion and first to shared parenting. And a quote as we ended up last time was . . . I'd raised the questions about maintenance and the problem that a lot of fathers specifically are facing and the fact that maintenance enforcement continues to force the issue, push the issue, regarding maintenance payments. And yet at the same time even though the courts have awarded that father the parental right to have time with their children, there are situations where fathers haven't had that opportunity.

And I had mentioned the possibility of maintenance should . . . There should be some ties. And you had indicated that a custodial parent is not following a court order concerning access. The non-custodial parent's recourse is the court. Now the problem there, Mr. Minister — and you know it and I know it — is that yes, they have access. They could go back to the court. Gaining access to the court takes time; plus it costs money.

Now if the court has already ruled in regards to what the level of maintenance will be for the one custodial parent plus the children and has also ruled that both parents would share time with the children and one parent is reneging in that regard, why can't we look at a means of . . . and not taking the money away from the children, but say the custodial parent who is not honouring the court agreement?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Madam Chair, I guess I'm going to ask for clarification of the question. The maintenance is for the children. It's for their food, clothing, housing, and other expenses. If you take away the maintenance to punish or encourage a custodial parent to comply with a court order or just generally be more co-operative to the non-custodial parent, you are — in attempting that punishment or encouragement — you are depriving the children of . . . it's their maintenance for again their food, clothing, and other support including housing.

So again I guess I'm seeking clarification as to how Mr. Toth thinks that that works.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I guess that is part of the question. And it was my understanding that when a couple arrives before the court, that the spouse as well is awarded a sum too so that they can maintain themselves; that there's a difference between just what's awarded to maintain the child and something for the spouse. And if I'm incorrect in that, then I appreciate that.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — And that would traditionally be called alimony, and that's quite rare. We would be talking entirely, in almost every case, about maintenance of the children.

**Mr. Toth:** — So, Mr. Minister, what you're saying then is maintenance, while you're indicating it basically is specifically ordered in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle for a child . . . Let me give you an example. A custodial spouse with four children in one case had just . . . recently is awarded, I believe it was \$400 per person; that'd be \$1,600. And so what you're saying that . . . And that's the only income that person has.

When the court sets a maintenance level of support, while it's

designated on the basis of the child, does it take into consideration the custodial parent not being in a position to work, of having to provide care? Is that how they arrive at that maintenance level of support?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well the maintenance level would, I would think, depend on both the income of the custodial parent and the income of the non-custodial parent. And this may seem a little picayune but just to be clear, we're not talking about a healthy lifestyle. We're talking about a healthy life for these children.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Minister, I also want to do a bit of follow-up in regards to shared parenting. And I'd be interested in knowing what your views or thoughts are. Have you reviewed some of the issues that have been brought forward?

Some of the information that I have in front of me talks about children of divorce, and separated parents have usually been forced by family courts to endure burdensome parenting arrangements that mean very little time spent with one of these parents, usually the father. And that's one of the issues I was just talking about.

Also they mention many jurisdictions in the US [United States] and Europe have now adopted presumptive shared parenting legislation principally because of the undeniable benefits to children. And going just a little further in the report, in a number of states in the United States, they have really pushed for and have brought in adopted shared parenting legislation.

The information I have here is indicating that actually divorce rates have gone down in states where they have come forward with shared parenting legislation. And a Dr. Frank Williams, a child and adolescent psychiatrist and psychoanalyst in Los Angeles, California, says:

There is the myth in some mental health, legal and judicial thinking that joint custody can only be effectively undertaken by cooperative parents. To the contrary, joint custody provides one of the best methods of stimulating a degree of significant and meaningful cooperation in warring parents who would otherwise continue years of battling to the detriment of their children.

It seems to me, Mr. Minister, that there's a fair bit of information that is coming out that is really promoting the idea of shared parenting and recognizing the fact that children need the support of both the father and the mother. And I would suggest we need to make greater efforts in ensuring that there is some more support for both parents and that children have that access.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — In Saskatchewan in certainly the larger centres, we have mandatory parent education now — have had it for, well, starting in 2001 and expanded in 2003 — which requires that if separating parents go to court, they have to attend mandatory parent education. And the two parties wouldn't attend the same session, so they would be dealt with in different sessions.

It's hoped — and it seems to be effective, which is why it was expanded — that the mandatory parent education would show

parents how they affect their children if they drag them into disputes and how beneficial it is for children to see both parents, as Mr. Toth pointed out. And there seems to be some success with this. Education seems to be the best way of achieving that result.

And so that program is successful and for the reasons that Mr. Toth's referred to: children having access to both parents, access to be distinguished from custody. The issue that Mr. Toth refers to as to children having the benefit of being with both parents is a question of access. Custody is a question of decision making.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would just suggest we need to make every effort we can to encourage the fact that children do have as equal as possible ability to spend time with both parents because I believe children do have a general feel for both their father and their mother. And I know one situation where the father is showing no interest and the children are devastated. So it's on both sides, no doubt about it, when every effort we can make to keep some semblance of family, I think, is important.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — The guiding principle in Saskatchewan courts is the best interests of the child as opposed to any dogmatic view on mothers as custodial parents or shared custody or joint custody. The guiding principle is best interests of the child. And I think we agree the best interests of the child in many cases, most cases, would involve access to both parents if both parents are interested. And that's certainly one of the aims of mandatory parent education in the province.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Minister, I'm going to just change the train of questioning just for a few moments. In the province of Saskatchewan, who upholds the rights of individuals?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well that's a very general question, Madam Chair. Hopefully we all play a role in doing that. Certainly the courts have a role in doing that.

**Mr. Toth:** — Who's eventually responsible for the rights, upholding those rights, ensuring that those rights are protected?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Madam Chair, again it might be helpful if Mr. Toth was a little bit more specific in his question.

**Mr. Toth:** — Well I'm going back to the debate we had back on April 6 and regarding the same-sex marriage question. And you mentioned at that time in November 2004, there was a court decision which expanded the definition of civil marriage to two persons to the exclusion of all others. And that is a commissioner that performs a marriage would be under the same legal duty as the marriage licence issuer who was explicitly told in that case, you have to issue a licence to this couple. And we were talking at that time about a couple of marriage commissioners who had resigned from their posts because of . . . or handed in their resignations.

And, Mr. Minister, you also indicated that it was a court ruling. You'd have to follow the rules of the court. And on the other hand, I'm just going to quote from a bit of information I've been digging up here. On February 1, Prime Minister Paul Martin told reporters:

... that no church, no temple, no synagogue, no mosque, no religious official [would] ... be asked or forced to perform a marriage that is contrary to their beliefs.

Then it says:

While the Liberals build promises to protect religious rights, parliament is actually powerless to govern provincial matters. The fact is that provincial human rights commissions from PEI to BC have, when faced in recent years with cases pitting religious rights against homosexual rights, most often ruled against religious rights.

And just a little further on in the article it talks about when the court ruled in December that changing the definition of marriage would not infringe on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It noted in its non-binding decision that the guarantee of religious freedom in section 2.a) of the Charter is broad enough to protect religious officials from being compelled by the state to perform civil or religious same-sex marriages that are contrary to their religious beliefs. But the court also noted that while the state could not compel priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, and the like to perform same-sex weddings, the government Bill actually did nothing to protect religious officials against an onslaught of actions.

And then we have this memo to the Human Rights Commission from an individual who had stepped aside as a marriage commissioner. It started out by saying:

I was a marriage commissioner in the province of Saskatchewan since July of 1983.

And a little further on in the letter it says:

The Justice department issued the decision ordering marriage commissioners to turn in their authorization to solemnize marriages if they were not prepared to solemnize same-sex marriages.

And this is a letter going back to, oh the date isn't here right now.

But it is my contention that this order by Minister of Justice, Mr. Frank Quennell, discriminates against my freedom of religion and therefore is in violation of The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code.

And to follow that up:

The federal Justice Minister, Mr. Irwin Cotler, proposed a way in which the religious liberties of marriage commissioners such as myself could be protected while ensuring the same-sex couples are able to have their marriage solemnized. He noted in real life only a very small number of same-sex couples were likely to seek a marriage. He also thought that provinces should be able to ensure they have marriage commissioners willing to solemnize their marriages without forcing certain marriage commissioners to perform such ceremonies in violation to their consciences and religious beliefs.

And further on in this letter, and I believe you received it, Mr. Minister:

A Manitoba lesbian, Stefphany Cholakis, the first Manitoban to register a same-sex marriage, said that her province should not force marriage commissioners to wed same-sex couples. She indicated that there are enough commissioners willing to perform same-sex marriages. "They should have a choice," she said. "I don't think they should be ... [pressed.]"

This is coming from an individual who is a professed lesbian who feels that by ordering commissioners to comply or step aside that that is not right and it's infringing on their rights. And I guess I'd like to get your response to that, Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well that's an awful lot to respond to. First the two marriage commissioners that we discussed last time in Justice estimates have not, to the best of my knowledge, resigned. So just to correct the record on that point.

Secondly, as I set out last time this question was asked in Justice estimates, we did not as a department require resignations. What we did do was explain the interpretation of the Justice department to the change in law that was brought about by the court decision November 2004.

**Mr. Toth:** — So, Mr. Minister, if that's the case, and given the information that I've passed on and even the fact that a same-sex marriage commissioner in the province of Manitoba, who is a professed lesbian, has stood up and said that regardless of what your views are ... and that was a question I raised the last time. There are enough marriage commissioners in this province.

If a marriage commissioner indicated that they could not in good conscience issue a marriage to a same-sex partner, you're telling me now that that person has the right to say no and offer the name of another marriage commissioner who would be prepared to solemnize that marriage?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Again, Madam Chair, I think there's some confusion about the source of the change of law. Mr. Toth will know that we didn't change the law in the legislature. Nor can we change the law by a directive out of the Justice department. The law was changed by a court decision in November 2004. Our interpretation of the law is that marriage commissioners implicitly, like marriage issue licensers explicitly, are now required to provide marriage to same-sex couples.

There are two marriage commissioners, to my knowledge, who are making the argument, and I think the narrow argument, that they because of their religious beliefs should be exempted from the law. They're making that argument in front of the Human Rights Commission, or they've taken that argument to the Human Rights Commission.

And as I said last time, that's the forum that they chose to make the argument. It's probably a good forum. It is the body charged specifically with adjudicating issues of people's rights in the province of Saskatchewan. And it's the forum that they chose and I think we should wait and see what the result of their

argument is before that forum.

**Mr. Toth:** — Well I guess, Mr. Minister, that was one of the arguments and questions you raised last time: is at the end of the day who creates the laws in this land? When have the courts been given the ability or the authority to decide . . . dictate the law? Members who have been appointed, I might add, whether it's provincial or federal . . . and you can argue the fact, yes, but we go to the Law Society and they present us with a list of names that we feel would be appropriate to fit the bench.

But at the end of the day, you are elected. I'm elected. And if we haven't as elected officials, haven't listened to the public and clarified the law, we allow the courts to make those decisions and then we put people in situations of this nature.

Now you had indicated earlier that you had given an interpretation based on the court ruling and it indicated that in your view everyone would have to comply. And yet there are people even from the homosexual community who would argue that if someone feels that in good conscience they can't or just don't feel that they could perform that marriage ceremony and say no, that they should have that right.

Why can you not indicate that that would be . . . certainly be appropriate within the Charter? And now you're arguing the fact, well I guess they have the right to go to the Human Rights Commission to have their appeal heard or their views heard. I guess I do not believe everyone should have to go to the Human Rights Commission because as lawmakers we're afraid to clarify the law.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well as again, as we discussed last time when this was in Justice estimates and you raised the same question about the supremacy of parliament and activist courts, the compromise that was struck in the '80s and brought into play in 1985 is that we have these entrenched equality provisions. Somebody has to interpret what they mean. They're interpreted by courts. That's part of what courts do, is interpret the law and interpret particularly and especially the constitution of the country, which includes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

But the compromise that was struck, which we discussed last time, is that if a legislature in its jurisdiction or the parliament in its jurisdiction believes that the decision of the court in respect to certain equality rights was mistaken in the wider public interest, then the notwithstanding clause could be invoked.

Now marriage and the definition of marriage and who can marriage is clearly within federal jurisdiction. I think everyone now acknowledges that. That may have been an issue at one point, but I don't think that's an issue any more. So parliament can invoke the notwithstanding clause and change the law across the country in respect to the definition of marriage if parliament wishes to do that. There is no point campaigning with this provincial government or any other provincial government to do that. I suggest that Mr. Toth write his Member of Parliament.

**Mr. Toth:** — And thank you, Mr. Minister, and I guess that's where it boils down to one thing. While everyone has the right

to write their Member of Parliament, it's interesting. On one hand the Premier of this province is in Ottawa arguing for equality in regards to revenue and resource sharing. And he didn't, the Premier didn't go to his Member of Parliament and say, you should argue on my behalf. He's arguing his point because he believes quite strongly in it.

And I believe as well, on issues even of this nature, that the province can take some leadership. This government has shown over the past number of years a willingness to hide behind the courts or to let somebody else make the decision unless there are areas where they feel they can or they would like to take pride in how they've moved, advanced the social issues in the province and we've given leadership. And I guess this is an area as well. If they were prepared to give leadership in health care or many of the other issues, then why can't we give some leadership here? Why do we always have to follow the crowd?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well, Madam Chair, it's not a matter of following the crowd at all. Marriage and the definition of marriage falls within the federal jurisdiction. And federal parliament has decided not to specifically define marriage. Now that may change, because I appreciate there's legislation before parliament. But the courts have interpreted the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to mean that same-sex couples have the ability to get married legally in this country in provinces where those courts have jurisdiction.

Now I appreciate there are some provinces that haven't had court decisions yet. But most Canadians now live in jurisdictions where courts have made these decisions. Again, it's within federal jurisdiction. I think it's apparent what this parliament is going to do, but if somebody wanted something differently done, I think you have to appreciate that it would be done by parliament.

**Mr. Toth:** — The comment, Mr. . . .

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — And in defence of the courts . . . Madam Chair, sorry to interrupt. But in defence of the courts, the decision not to use the notwithstanding clause is still a decision of parliament or of a legislature in the case where the legislature has jurisdiction, the provincial legislature has jurisdiction. And if the courts are making the decisions because the legislature or the parliament in each case, and in this case parliament, has decided not to.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, just one further comment is, I'd indicated earlier about taking some leadership. I note in the April 29 issue of the *Leader-Post*, a poll in the Regina Wascana constituency indicated that opposition to the current definition of marriage that parliament's trying to move forward with is certainly increased and as the debate continues, I think even as we have seen on the abortion issue, more and more people are beginning to take a stronger stance on the question.

So that's all I can say at this time. I know we're going to agree to disagree, but I just felt that it was important that we at least debated the issue because I believe in this province, whether people vote for the governing party or for this party, I know there are people right across this province who have some strong views. And I'd be surprised even within government that



there are not people who have some solid moral views on the issue as well. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Elhard.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to pursue just briefly some of the issues that was raised by my colleague. You know, if we accept the fact as legitimate that the federal government is the only government that can change the definition of marriage, and if we accept the ruling of the courts on what they perceive to be equality issues, is it not still the purview of the province as the primary protector of religious freedoms? I understand that the federal government has, you know, the right to religious freedom written into the Charter and it was part of the, you know, the preamble to the constitution. But nevertheless, does not the primary responsibility for religious protection or freedoms of religion protection fall to provincial governments?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — The federal government has made statements, the federal Minister of Justice has made statements, and think I've made similar statements that no religious organization — no church, no temple, no synagogue — will be required to perform a marriage contrary to its religious traditions and beliefs.

The issue that's raised by the marriage commissioners is whether having been appointed as a marriage commissioner, they are therefore entitled to set themselves up as a one-person church, to say that I will not perform a marriage that's against my religious traditions or beliefs.

And that's an issue that two marriage commissioners have taken to the Human Rights Commission. And again that was their choice. They weren't required to take it there. And I suppose they'll be making their argument in that forum, either before a tribunal or whatever process is considered appropriate for investigation and determination of their complaint.

At one time and for many, actually, centuries — and certainly decades — racial discrimination was justified on the basis of scripture. I think chapter 9 of Genesis, the last three verses, 27, 28, 29, were used to justify unequal treatment of Black people. And whether there should be religious accommodation or discrimination on some other ground is an issue with some history and one that's actually before a tribunal in Saskatchewan, or a commission in Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Minister, you know, I've read Irwin Cotler's comments and statements about no religious leader being required to conduct a same-sex marriage if it's contrary to their religious views. But you know, he can give all kinds of assurances. What we've found is assurances from the federal government really aren't all that bankable and believable when it comes right down to it. We've had lots of reason to be assured in the past and found that their assurances were wanting when push came to shove.

The fact of the matter is, I would suggest, Mr. Minister, that your government is probably prepared to make accommodations to government employees of all kinds for their unique and specific religious requirements. We have seen employers compelled by human rights commissions in the past

to accommodate specific religious views, whether it entailed working on Saturday or Sunday or wearing certain kinds of garments and clothing and other paraphernalia as it suits their religious tradition. And I would suspect that the provincial government now accommodates some religious convictions that aren't shared widely in society. Is that not the prevailing attitude of the government and their obligation?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Well the distinction that we draw, Madam Chair, is that the accommodation of those religious beliefs or multicultural values doesn't involve discrimination on another ground.

The federal legislation — whether one trusts the federal government or not — the federal legislation that's before parliament now, the Bill that's before parliament says:

It is recognized that officials of religious groups are free to refuse to perform marriages that are not in accordance with their religious beliefs.

It's because churches, temples, other religious organizations have these religious beliefs and traditions that people sometimes cannot or do not care to comply with, that we have civil marriage. Civil marriage is supposed to be available to people like our future King who cannot or cares not to comply with the religious traditions and beliefs of his church. It undercuts the purpose of civil marriage to give the same protection to civil marriage commissioners that is given to clergy.

**Mr. Elhard:** — I don't necessarily follow that argument because there are some clergy who will marry and some who will not marry. What is the difference between a civil commissioner who will marry and some who will not marry?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — The clergy that will marry are not required to.

**Mr. Elhard:** — But in this case the civil commissioners who might marry or wouldn't marry are being required to marry. I mean, it cuts both ways. If it's . . . I mean, if the government was really interested in a compromise solution on this, why could the edict not have come down to say that by and large there will be a requirement of civil marriage commissioners to provide marriage opportunities to same-sex couples; however those who object on the basis of religious principle are free to exercise that as long as they can accommodate them in terms of referral.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Madam Chair, let us say we have in Saskatchewan — and I think we do actually — a law that says that facilities that are open to the public cannot discriminate on the basis of race. And you have a town that has one lunch counter, and you have a town next to it that has two. Now the town with one lunch counter, the owner of that facility has no choice, under Mr. Elhard's argument, but to allow people of all races to come and use his lunch counter. But in the town which has two lunch counters, one of those owners has a choice. He can discriminate because the other guy doesn't. That's not the law.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Minister, how many communities have one

lunch counter? How many examples can you give me where there's only one marriage commissioner in the province?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — It doesn't matter, Madam Chair. As *The Globe and Mail* said, is it okay for a bus driver to say that a black woman has to sit at the back of the bus as long as the next bus driver doesn't have that rule?

**Mr. Elhard:** — So, Mr. Minister, what you're telling me is that on the scale of rights in this province, religious liberties will ultimately take last place.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — No, I'm not. And no church, no clergy, has to perform a marriage that they do not agree with for religious reasons. Civil marriage exists for people who do not want or can't have a religious marriage. No one's religious rights are being violated here in my opinion. But this precise issue has been taken to the Human Rights Commission, and I suggest that that is a better forum for these arguments than this committee.

**Mr. Elhard:** — So, Mr. Minister, will you assure us that if the Human Rights Commission results in a finding, if their hearings result in a finding that does not agree with the government's current position, that the government will comply?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — We will review the decision. One of my concerns is that we would have a decision that would result in or may result in my department conducting an inquiry into the sincerity of people's religious beliefs if they're to receive this kind of accommodation. For that reason and others, we will review the decision when we have it.

**Mr. Elhard:** — If the decision came down very forcefully and compelled the government, the government must provide accommodation to the religious freedom of the marriage commissioners, would the government comply?

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Again it's a hypothetical question. Madam Chair, I do not know what response . . . whether we'd be requesting a review or not until I see the decision and we have a chance to work out what the consequences of that decision are.

**The Chair:** — Seeing no further questions, we'll move to Justice estimates, vote 3 on page . . . Oh, sorry.

**Hon. Mr. Quennell:** — Madam Chair, if I could just make a closing statement on this, no marriage commissioners had their appointment revoked. That is the context that we are presently working in. There has not actually been a case that anybody could call discrimination against a marriage commissioner in Saskatchewan because of their religious beliefs because no commission has been revoked. And I consider this to be a fairly large tempest trying to fit into a fairly small teapot.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Now the Justice estimates on page 96 of your budget book, vote 3, central management and services (JU01), 19,345,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Courts and civil justice (JU03), 27,994,000. Is

that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Marketplace regulation (JU07), 4,748,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Legal and policy services (JU04), 19,404,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Community justice (JU05), 109,421,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Boards and commissions (JU08), 22,375,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Again, amortization of capital assets is a non-voted, non-cash expense and is presented for information purposes only on page 99, and that's 480,000,000. Justice also has supplementary . . . 480,000, sorry. Got you all excited.

Justice vote, supplementary estimates, legal services (JU04), 700,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Voting off the main estimates, I need a motion:

That it be resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006, the following sums for Justice, 203,287,000.

Mr. Hagel. I had the motion on the floor then. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

[Vote 3 agreed to.]

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates  
Justice  
Vote 3**

**The Chair:** — Okay now we will go to the supplementary estimates. Justice vote 3, legal services (JU04), 700,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Boards and commissions (JU08), 700,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Thank you very much to the minister. Mr. Toth.

**Mr. Toth:** — Madam Chair, I'd like to just extend my thanks to the minister and to the Justice officials. I want to extend my thanks too and appreciation. I'm just been disappointed a little bit, I have to say, in some of the minister's responses; however that's his prerogative. But I say thank you for coming and sharing your comments. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — The committee has one more motion before Justice is finished and that's the motion to grant the . . . about the supplementary estimates:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005, the following sums for Justice, 1.4 million.

Is that agreed? Who's moving that first? Mr. Hagel. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

[Vote 3 agreed to.]

**The Chair:** — Thank you very much to the minister and his officials.

**General Revenue Fund  
Corrections and Public Safety  
Vote 73**

**Subvote (CP01)**

**The Chair:** — Our next item up for business is the estimates for Corrections and Public Safety, vote 73, page 39 in your budget book. Welcome to the Minister of Corrections and Public Safety. I'll have him introduce his officials.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm very pleased to be joined today by Maureen Lloyd who is sitting on my left. She's the assistant deputy minister of the Department of Corrections and Public Safety. And Mae Boa, who is sitting on my right, who is the executive director of management services in the department.

Also joining me and seated behind me are Bob Kary who is the executive director of our young offenders program, Tom Young who is the executive director of the protection and emergency services section of the department, Brian Krasium who is acting executive director responsible for licensing and inspections, Karen Lautsch who is the executive assistant to the deputy minister, and Syd Bolt who's joining us for the first time and who is a team leader in human services.

**The Chair:** — Okay now we'll just ask that the officials that come to the mike for the first time identify themselves, for the ease of Hansard. Did you have an opening statement?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — I've had the opportunity on a previous occasion to make an opening statement, Madam Chair, so I think today I'll just make myself available to answer questions.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Mr. Toth.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Madam Chair, Mr. Minister, and to your officials. Mr. Minister, I have a few questions centred

around the issue of grievances that we raised the last time. And thank you so much for the responses to some of the written questions as well. And I notice that there are a numerous number of grievances that still have not been settled. And I'm wondering in view of some of the questions we raised last time, what would you consider to be the appropriate time period that a grievance is dealt with and an issue resolved.

Now it may not necessarily mean that the person who's laid the grievance is in total agreement, but at least there's a response that's come to the grievance and given that those individuals, an individual or individuals to respond. It just seems to me that we have a tremendous number of grievances and if it's taking this long, and in some cases more than 100 grievances that haven't resolved for a specific year yet, how in the world, at the end of the day, do we create a work environment that is safe and that people can feel comfortable in working in?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — I mean I think there's not an average time for dealing with this. But I'm committed as minister responsible for this department to get the number of outstanding grievances down over the course of the next year. I hope to be able to report to you, Mr. Toth, at this time next year that there's a significant reduction in the number of grievances.

Just so that you know and so you have up-to-date figures, there are at the present time 172 outstanding grievances, and that's as of March 31, 2005. And I agree with you that that is significantly higher than you'll find anywhere else in the public service. So this is of concern to me as minister.

Now more than half of these grievances are related to hours-of-work issues, which tend to arise in a situation where the vast majority of our employees are part of providing 24/7 oversight in custody facilities. And the bulk of these are on the adult corrections side of the equation. In fact the number I gave you, this 172, is for adult corrections. There's also, I think, 63 outstanding grievances, if my memory serves me right, on the young offenders side.

Now we have put in place in the last few months regular monthly scheduled meetings for the resolution of these grievances, because we were having some difficulties finding common time when we could have both union and management and other appropriate officials present for resolution of some of these grievances. So what we've done now is we've established regular monthly times when grievances will be dealt with.

And we've also . . . the other step that we've taken, which I hope will move things along, is we've looked for grievances that are of a similar nature. And we're trying to deal with those as a set so that when we achieve agreement on one, we can very quickly achieve agreement on a number of ones that are similar. I hope this will move the process along.

But I agree with you that the number that is outstanding is, you know, is too high.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Minister, of the grievances that have come forward, are there specifically more in one institution than in other institutions?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Yes, I think it's fair to say that where

there's an unusually high numbers is in the Saskatoon Correctional Centre where there at this point in time there are 80 grievances outstanding.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That's where my question was going. We have had a number of concerns raised through our office, and one of the major concerns is the concern that . . . I'm not sure if part of the grievance is the fact that people issuing the grievances are feeling that they're not being heard because of falsification of documents, by supervisors not being totally accurate.

So some of those questions have been raised. And if there are concerns of this nature, if there are grievances of this nature, Mr. Minister, would grievances move forward, especially if the department or Corrections looks over grievances? Do they look at the type of grievances that are raised and say, you know, this is something we better deal with immediately? This is something that we need to take more seriously than some of the other grievances so that we can get to the bottom of this issue and create a better working environment. Is that how some of the grievances are dealt with and result?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — I'm going to ask Syd Bolt who's joined me today to assist in responding to that question because he's spending a good deal of time in working at resolution of grievances. So I'll just ask you, Syd, for some additional comments.

**Mr. Bolt:** — Sure. The grievance process is fairly detailed in the collective bargaining agreement between the two parties. And it provides for specific timelines on responses at each stage of the process, right from pre-grievance, right through and including arbitration, the third step. The thing perhaps to remember is that the union owns the grievance, files the grievance, and is responsible for moving it through those steps if there's not agreement at the previous one for advancing it. A number of the grievances get hung up by the union's internal processes and in some cases remain on the books even though they haven't necessarily been advanced to the final step.

**Mr. Toth:** — Just a follow-up to that. If the grievances are moved through the collective bargaining agreement and through the union and if union members feels that their grievance just seems to be stonewalled and not really moving forward and the concerns are not being addressed, what process would those individuals then have to proceed to ensure that the concerns they are raising are actually moved forward and addressed quickly or does it still have to follow this specific process of the union contract and they're just kind of stuck in limbo in that agreement?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — The final stage is always arbitration so if it hasn't been possible to achieve a resolution around a grievance in the first two steps of the process, the final option available to the union is an arbitration process. And at the present time in adult corrections we have 13 cases that are at the arbitration stage.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Minister, as I was indicating just a few moments ago too, one of the concerns that's been raised, and this is coming from the Saskatoon Correctional Centre, is the falsifying or change in documents. Is this something that the

department would be aware of or Corrections or is this information that is still stuck in that process and really hasn't moved into that debate, grievance . . . like out into the public forum, if you will, where the grievance is settled, where you sit down and address that grievance?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — This is getting very specific, Mr. Toth. I'm going to ask Mr. Bolt if he can comment on that question.

**Mr. Bolt:** — Without knowing a few more details it would be very difficult to identify where that specific grievance is in the process. As the minister has said, there are 80 outstanding grievances in Saskatoon. A number have been advanced to a third party forum for resolution over the next six months and we are having ongoing meetings between the parties to ensure that we continue moving towards resolution. But without having some more details it would be next to impossible to respond directly to that one. Off the top of my head I'm not aware of any that specifically identify falsification of documents.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you and thank you, Mr. Minister. And, Mr. Minister, in view of the fact that we're not interested in getting into personnel and bringing personnel into the issue but the overall debate and understanding that there are some issues that I'm still not totally clear on as well, I would like to have a commitment from you, Mr. Minister, that even as this House winds down in the process as we move through and even until the fall session that we shouldn't have to wait that long. As we get more information, Mr. Minister, can we get assurances from you that through your department and personnel we can do some more follow-up to address some of these concerns rather than letting them lag until the next time we have an opportunity to sit in committee?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — What I can do, Mr. Toth, is undertake to give you an update on the grievance issue as of, shall we say the end of September, so that you have a sense of how the outstanding grievances are moving along and what progress has been made. Beyond that I'm not sure what other commitments you're looking for, but I mean you're certainly welcome to call my office and if you wish meet with me to, you know, to continue a discussion on this matter if you want to get an update.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and that's what I'm coming to. When we talk more of specifics I'd like to now do some follow-up in the general questions and get some of the specifics, and especially when it comes to falsifying documents. And if there's nothing really that's come to the forefront, then something is happened from what we're hearing versus where the understanding was where the grievance issue was raised.

And if it really isn't up in the format where you sit down with two people to try and address it, then there seems to be, it would seem to me there's a lag or there's a holdup in that grievance following through its normal process to get to a resolve. And we will endeavour to get back to you and through your office to the department to ensure that this is addressed appropriately. Thank you.

Mr. Minister, another issue that was raised and I'd like to know if indeed this is true. We talked last time about individuals, whether it's correctional or adult facilities and when they're

released, what efforts are being made to indeed prepare these individuals to move back into society and what training is being offered.

I've received an email that's indicating that inmate trades training and production workshops within the correctional centres have been . . . are being closed. And there's only one now in Saskatoon, a partially run one in Regina. And as we look at individuals having completed their time for the offence, it would seem to me that we need to make some efforts to move forward in helping these individuals. If it's training that would help them get on their feet once they leave a confined facility and we're closing down these training spaces, I'm wondering how that really — especially in the area of trades, the trades area — how that's going to help these individuals get back into the mainstream of society.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well I think the first thing I should point out is that in terms of what you're referring to, I think, Mr. Toth, is the Prism program — P-r-i-s-m — that has been operating in a number of the adult custody facilities across the province and that has been scaled down over the last 18 months.

And let me say first that the programs that have been closed in Prism are programs that in general terms were being used by less than three inmates a day. So we've tried to focus on keeping the Prism programs operating that were being better utilized by our adult inmate population, and at the present time there's Prism programs operating in Pinegrove, in Prince Albert, and in the Saskatoon and Regina correctional facilities. But you're correct that there has been some phasing out of Prism programs, but I just want to emphasize again that they're in situations where the actual participation by inmates was very low.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Minister, I guess my question would be: why is there such low participation? Is there no desire on the part of inmates to try and upgrade and open the door for themselves to actually get into some kind of full-time employment by availing themselves of those training trade opportunities in these correctional centres?

Like, it would seem to me that you got to have a desire to want to do more with your life. Sure you made a mistake and you paid your time, but you don't walk out of a correctional facility or a prison and automatically find a job, especially if you don't have any training. And what efforts are being made to work with inmates or people in these facilities to encourage them to look at improving their lifestyle and life opportunities?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well there's a number of programs that are available to inmates while they're in an adult custody facility. And of course one is basic literacy that is being provided in each of the facilities. There are pre-employment skills programs that are offered. There are programs around substance abuse. Anger management is also an important program that is delivered in custody facilities. So these are all in addition to the trades training.

Now as minister I'm interested in enhancing the trades training opportunities that are available. One has to bear in mind that the Prism program is one that was intended to operate on a break-even basis. And in the areas where the program has been

wound down, as I've said, it's in areas where there was very low levels of inmate participation.

Now I'm going to invite Maureen Lloyd to add comments to mine with respect to the question of inmate participation.

**Ms. Lloyd:** — Thank you. I think I would just confirm what the minister has presented here in terms of the numbers of programs that are operating in the correctional centres. It is sometimes difficult to place inmates in certain programs. There's issues of security risk, level of ability to be outside of the facilities. Some cases that was an issue with the Prism program, the nature of the programming, the kinds of equipment, the numbers of high-risk inmates. Those are all issues that we need to balance as we provide programming.

But saying that, we too are very concerned about what inmates are able to do when they leave the correctional centres. Can they attach to a job? Are they open to an educational opportunity? And to that end we're meeting right now — in fact we met this morning — with officials from Department of Community Resources and Employment to talk about the whole area of labour force attachment, which is really their area of expertise now, and to talk about the role they can play while inmates or while offenders are in correctional centres, as well as helping them attach to jobs when they exit the centres.

What activities can our workers engage offenders in while they're in the centre that will aid them to reintegrate? And I mean some of that can be as simple as preparing a resumé, workforce readiness, workplace readiness, how to approach having a job, and whatever skill training that we have the capacity to provide.

We're also meeting tomorrow with the Department of Learning. It's on the area of adult basic education and what is exactly the Department of Learning's position and their role in providing upgrading, adult basic education, you know, 5-10 upgrading, literacy programming. How can we have a partnership with that department in order to enhance the opportunities one more time for offenders both in and out of correctional facilities? So can programming be started in a facility that is actually much more seamless, that an offender could come out in the community and not be looking at a potential two-year wait for a placement into an adult educational programming? Can there be an agreement to have that happen in a more timely way?

And as I say, these are preliminary meetings, but we know that in order to address the really complex needs of inmates, as Corrections we can't do it on our own. And in some cases that has been an effort that's been made, is to provide that kind of programming. But we're certainly finding out that when offenders are discharged from facilities in particular, the connections aren't there in community to support them and have them continue on. And then this also includes a large number of the majority of our offenders are on probation. So as well as that ensuring that offenders on probation have equal access to opportunities in community that anyone else would have.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Morgan.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Minister, we find it troubling that the

programs aren't being used and that the approach of the department is to terminate programs rather than to give inmates incentives to do it. I think our understanding is probably the same as yours, and I hope that it is, is that trade training and life skills training are two of the keys towards successful reintegration into the community and a reduced rate of recidivism as well as a gradual return to the community rather than saying, well you haven't worked out; we're just going to keep you here and then turn you loose all of a sudden. The expectation then, I think, is that there is recidivism. So what we're looking for is a more of a gradual return back to a society with more of a structured environment for work.

But I'm wondering what the department can do to provide positive incentives for workers . . . or for inmates; and secondly, what the department can do for more of a graduated release back into the community. And I personally find it significantly troubling that the approach seems to be abandoning the programs rather than providing the incentives.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — One of the things to bear in mind is that there's been significant resources put into community-training residences in the province. And I've had an opportunity to visit a number of those. Recently for instance, I visited the one in Prince Albert. And, you know, people are moving from the Prince Albert Correctional Centre to the community-training residence and in virtually every case, with maybe one or two exceptions, people who are in that community-training residence in Prince Albert are then either obtaining employment while they're at the residence and in effect holding down a job for several months prior to their release, or else they're, you know, they're enrolled in an educational program which will prepare them for job readiness.

Now not all inmates are suitable for transfer to the community-training residence. You know, in other words, your higher security inmates are not going to be transferred there. But in addition to the numbers that I've made reference to in the correctional centre, you've also got these community-training residences that are performing, I think, the kind of role, Mr. Morgan, that you're looking for the department to perform.

Having said that though, there's definitely room for more opportunity for trades training at the correctional facilities and this is something that I'm very interested in moving forward on and would be pleased to update you on, you know, six months from now.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Minister, I think we're all aware that inmates almost invariably want to move to a community-training residence, and once they're in a community-training residence, want to move to something where they've got supervised release back into the community. The inmates are always the ones that seem to want to progress further.

And I'm wondering whether you can't tie the two together; that you complete the trade training program while you're an inmate and you don't get to go to the CTR [community-training residence] until you've completed that.

I too have attended the CTRs, and there seems to be a very strong support to try and reintegrate back into the community at that level. And I appreciate the security risks. But I'm

wondering if we can't move the incentives back earlier and say, if you want to get into a CTR by a certain date or if you want to advance your release date, that you complete the training. I mean we should be giving the inmates incentives as soon as they enter the facility.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well that's a suggestion that I'm very willing to look at, Mr. Morgan. Certainly there are a number of incentives that are provided to inmates while they're in the correctional facility, including opportunities for work, opportunities for . . . You know, we've for instance in the . . . in many of the facilities you'll see that there are significant opportunities for training in the food industry. And many inmates are employed for instance in the kitchens of each of the correctional facilities. And there's significant training components involved in that work.

So I mean I wouldn't consider that to be trades training. But it certainly is significant training opportunity for inmates. And there's an opportunity to earn some money, up to \$5 a day depending on the work opportunity that the inmate might take up. And these opportunities are all tied to appropriate behaviour by the inmate when they're in the facility.

I think the issue you're raising though is the additional incentive that might be attached, actually completing a trades training program and having the opportunity to perhaps move into a community-training residence a little earlier. And I think that's an interesting suggestion that I'd be prepared to examine.

**Mr. Morgan:** — Minister, when I've been in the institutions, you talk to inmates. They look at every opportunity while they're inmates to try and move forward, which would be taking training if that would advance their date to move to a community-training residence.

And when I asked them about work opportunities, they always mention kitchen opportunities. And I don't think kitchen or cooking opportunities should be in any way regarded as demeaning. Those are classes that are offered through SIAST as professional training ones and lead to permanent long-term careers for which no one should apologize for. I think that your department should be looking not just at cooking, but they should be looking at having inmates do a variety of other types of work that's available in the public sector on a basis as their security warrants it, and there should be no apologies.

My understanding from the inmates that I've talked to when I was there is that they want to work if it means a day out, that they go and do whatever the work is. If it leads to a career, so much the better. If not, the work I think is healthy and it's good for them and everyone that I've talked to is highly supportive of that. So I would like to encourage your department to move in that direction as well.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — And I will be very happy to support that kind of initiative.

I should just clarify that, you know, right now it is possible for instance in the . . . for inmates who are working in the kitchens at the various adult correctional facilities across the province they can complete a SIAST certificate while working in those kitchens. There are other inmates who have employment

opportunities in the custody facilities around maintenance work, work in the gardens at the Regina Correctional Centre, you know. These are just examples. So there certainly are employment opportunities for inmates while they're in custody that also provide . . . that also have a training component to them.

**Mr. Morgan:** — I have nothing else.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Toth.

**Mr. Toth:** — Madam Chair, Mr. Minister, just a quick follow-up to this line of questioning. When it comes to the trades, I know one of the areas that I'm hearing a lot of businesses really concerned about is certainly in the mechanical end whether it's heavy-duty mechanics or the automotive trade area. I'm not sure if there are programs of that nature.

It would seem to me, I sense that we do have a large population of the male gender in our institutions and this is certainly an area that there seems to be more and more job opportunities opening up. I don't know whether that's the type of training that might be provided or is provided or made available. That's something that I would think that maybe some research should be taken into whether or not we move forward and even to help with some of the costs involving, say, manufacturers or automotive groups or farm equipment dealers in helping to fund and provide some of the services so that training can move forward.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well just to clarify, this is not an area of training that is currently delivered in the custody facilities. It's certainly an area that I'd be prepared to see us work with SIAST to explore. Many of our inmates are in a position where prior to taking employment they need work readiness. And we are trying to deliver some of those opportunities, not just in the adult facilities but also in our youth facilities. And you'll also see that in some of our crime reduction strategies for chronic repeat offenders, in this case young offenders.

We have here in Regina, for instance just by way of example, significant opportunities under the Regina auto theft strategy for young people to do in effect pre-employment training and work readiness and support in terms of getting a job. So, you know, those kind of programs definitely exist in our facilities.

But I just want to come back to clarify that when it comes to automotive training, that isn't offered in the facilities. And I mean I think that's a worthy suggestion and one . . . and we should look at the potential of a relationship with SIAST around that, particularly after offenders leave the facility, but trying to link them up in a timely way with a program like that.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I think, as I indicated earlier, just doing some research to determine whether or not a program of this nature would be accepted, like I'm not asking you to spend thousands of dollars to try and put in place some of that training mode, but if it's the type of program that would maybe get some high uptake on.

And I know the need is out there. I hear it every day from dealerships around the province that they're struggling to find employees. And part of the reason they're struggling is they put

the time and effort into training individuals. There are sectors that find it just as easy once these employers or businesses have trained individuals, another sector comes along, offers a little higher wage and then the employees are gone. So they are frustrated in that regard to having put the time and the effort and actually put some financial resources behind that training. But this I think we should certainly look at pursuing.

I want to just quickly go back to Corrections, a couple of questions that I notice I didn't ask, and just to make sure I've covered all of the avenues in that regard.

If there are complaints that are directly related to workplace safety issues at a correctional facility, what steps would the department itself take to investigate the complaints? And I guess that comes back to the question of prioritizing when the grievances actually get to that point. Do we prioritize to make sure we address those types of issues immediately so that these safety issues aren't ongoing problems?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well there is of course well-established process with respect to occupational health and safety and I mean that process applies across government. But I'll ask . . . I don't know. Syd, do you want to respond to that or would you like Maureen to respond? I'll maybe just ask you . . . I'll ask Mr. Bolt to respond first with respect to occupational health and safety issues as it pertains to grievances.

**Mr. Bolt:** — Typically the two processes are quite separate and distinct. If a complaint is filed under the OH&S [occupational health and safety] legislation and Act it is reviewed by the local OH&S committee in accordance with the regulations and it is pursued. There is a number of processes that are outlined in the legislation that must be followed including a review by the local committee. If there's no satisfaction there, moving it forward to the Department of Labour and having an OH&S officer investigate and review the situation, up to and including arbitration if there's no satisfaction at that level. So typically there isn't overlap between the two processes.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you very much. A further follow-up question regarding the falsifying of documents. If a grievance or complaint of that nature comes forward and it's . . . what steps, I guess, would be taken then to investigate and address the issue?

**Mr. Bolt:** — Certainly I think we'd take that very seriously if it was an allegation of falsifying documents. As I said earlier it's not a situation that I am aware of in the grievance process right now filed out of Saskatoon centre.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you very much. I want to move on to . . . and I've got a number of questions in other areas and I'm not going to try and get through all of them. But one question I would like to raise is certainly around the expenditure on the Regina Correctional Centre. As you indicated last time we met, Mr. Minister, you mentioned that I believe you're putting around 3, almost \$4 million, into upgrading the facility in the upgrading or the rebuilding — I shouldn't say upgrading — I believe it's a rebuilding project of a portion of that facility. Will that basically just address the same number of . . . what would I call them, beds or cells, in the facility? Are you expanding that area or exactly what is involved in this construction phase?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Mr. Toth, the number of beds that will be constructed is 216, and that's basically the same number of beds that are currently in the 1913 portion of the Regina Correctional Centre. The total investment will be a little over \$40 million, and what's in this year's budget is \$3.89 million.

**Mr. Toth:** — So what you're saying, Mr. Minister, this is just the initial phase of addressing this and reconstruction of that portion.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Correct. Just for clarification, Mr. Toth, this \$40 million will be expended in this fiscal year and also in fiscal year 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. And I expect the facility to be ready to occupy in April 2008.

**Mr. Toth:** — And, Mr. Minister, with the reconstruction of that old facility and through the new facility, how do we see this meeting the needs of adult corrections in the province of Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well first of all, I think we'll be . . . Well let me say several things. I think first of all this facility will better serve both staff and all those who work in the facility or who have contact in the facility. So first of all, it'll be a better working environment for our staff. That's important because there are some 400 staff working in the Regina Correctional Centre, you know, over the period of a month.

Secondly, I think the new facility will provide more humane conditions for inmates to reside in. Third, I think the facility will be much better suited to delivering rehabilitation programs for inmates.

And fourth, I think the facility will provide improved safety for all Saskatchewan residents in the sense that I expect security to be significantly improved. I think staff have done a very good job in the facility in terms of preventing escapes, but I think it's well known to all that escapes have occurred. And I think we'll see a virtually . . . well a very sharp reduction in the number of escapes once the new facility operating.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, if I'm not mistaken, we do have a number of people end up before the courts or end up committing offences as a result of drug-related issues or problems or addictions. What steps have been taken to address addictions and drug-related addictions that individuals may have? And how many beds do we have available in the province for . . . in our correctional facilities to treat individuals with drug-related problems?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well let me say, first of all, that there are a number of ways in which issues of drug abuse are addressed in our correctional facilities. First of all we have substance abuse programs that are delivered to a significant number of inmates. I can get you the exact number, Mr. Toth, if you wish, but there is a significant number of inmates each year who are involved in substance abuse programs in our custody facilities.

Secondly, and I'll maybe address specifically the question of youth, but I think many of these issues will apply to adult offenders as well. We make referrals to substance abuse programs outside the custody facilities as well. So we deliver substance abuse programs in the facilities, but referrals are also

made particularly for youth.

Elders are also involved in helping to address addiction issues, and they play an important role, again particularly on the youth side where spiritual programming also has been very significantly enhanced over the last three years. So access to healing programs, sweat lodges, and important spiritual ceremonies for First Nations youth is an important part of addressing addiction issues.

If you like, I can get you, you know, I can provide you in writing with a lot more detail in this area, but that's a brief overview.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister, that certainly would be fine. And while you're in that response as well, in the new facility we're building in Regina here, are there treatment services going to be offered in that part of the facility? And also are there addiction treatment programs available to the 82 per cent of offenders serving conditional sentences in the community?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — I just wanted to provide some clarification with respect to the question of what services are offered to remand inmates versus those who are sentenced. And for the most part, Mr. Toth, our substance abuse programs are delivered to those who are sentenced.

What you're going to see in the new part of the Regina Correctional Centre . . . certainly there'll be enhanced physical facilities for delivery of programs, including substance abuse programs, but in terms of the beds, the bulk of the beds are going to be geared to inmates on remand who for the most part are not the primary focus of our substance abuse programs in the custody facilities.

I'll maybe ask Maureen Lloyd to add some comments to the ones that I've made.

**Ms. Lloyd:** — I would just like to add that in the design of the new facility, what we call program space is integrated into all of the units. And the kinds of programming you're talking about will be available to remand inmates, you know, keeping in mind that remand can be one day to two years, I guess, depending on the nature of the offence and the court process. So some offenders take advantage of that kind of programming. Other offenders can even be advised by their lawyer that they don't participate in that program.

So again we need to offer it. It has to be available. It's more on a sign-up basis than would be what we might offer to sentenced offenders who have often, as part of their court process and their adjudication, had alcohol identified as a serious issue. So we will be putting, though, space into there for that kind of suitable programming. And we'll be working on as much motivation as we can to encourage inmates to participate, at least in an educational level of programming.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you. And, Mr. Minister, if you could as well just indicate whether or not there are treatment programs available to the individuals or the offenders who are serving conditional sentences in the community. Is that something that's available for those sentences as well?



**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — We try where possible to have those treatment programs delivered on a community-based level. In other words, they're delivered in the community. They're not delivered in the custody facility. And we work with health districts in terms of trying to ensure referral of offenders into those programs.

And we're finding in general, I might add, that you know . . . I mean we're encouraging people to participate in the substance abuse programs, and we're finding that the rate of recidivism is reduced among those who do participate. So we're finding that the rate is actually quite significantly reduced. There is a 17 per cent reduction in recidivism rates for those who have got a substance abuse program and enrol in a treatment program than for those who have a substance abuse problem but choose not to enrol in a program. So you can understand that this still has to be voluntary participation, but it's something that we very much encourage.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And, Mr. Minister, I wasn't expecting that the services would be provided in a correctional centre or facility of that nature, just a matter of programs being available so that individuals even with conditional sentences have an opportunity to address some of the problems that really created the situation that they were in.

Mr. Minister, last question in this area. Over the past number of years, we've been realizing that FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder] is certainly a problematic issue and a concern, and I think it took us a while to finally begin to realize that this is a problematic issue for many people. We failed to really, I think, recognize that we need to start learning the problems that this creates for individuals, and I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what your government is doing today to provide services to youth or individuals with FASD problems.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well first of all, the staff throughout our youth custody facilities have been trained in recognizing FASD and working with FASD youths. So there's been, I think, very significant improvements in terms of staff training to work with youth who are identified as having fetal alcohol syndrome or serious fetal alcohol effect problems.

Secondly, we're trying to improve our ability to diagnose FASD in our youth custody facilities. And with this in mind we have, I guess, what you'd call a pilot project that has just started in Saskatoon at Kilburn Hall where we're working in conjunction with health professionals to establish a more . . . well as good a diagnostic tool as we can in terms of not only identifying youth who have FASD health problems, but also particularly when it comes to alternative measures working with those youth and addressing their concerns in a way that's specifically geared to recognizing that they're facing FASD.

So we have, for instance, a contract with Saskatoon Tribal Council to work on alternative measures programs for youth who've been diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome, and that piece of work is just taking off, Mr. Toth.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, just one other area I'd like to take a moment to address and that's the EMO, Emergency Measures Organizations and services, and I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what services are being funded in

the protection and emergency services component of the budget at this time?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Sorry, would you mind repeating that question? I didn't catch all of it, Mr. Toth.

**Mr. Toth:** — What services are being funded in the protection and emergency services component of the budget?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Right. Okay. Well I mean, this first of all includes the office of the fire commissioner, which is a very important piece of the work. And that office . . . well first of all, it compiles reports on how major fires have been handled around the province. It does investigation into fires. It has major responsibility for fire prevention programming in the province. So the office of the fire commissioner is an important part of that budget. I can give you a breakdown if you like, Mr. Toth.

Also there you have in that section, you have licensing and inspection services. So this is everything from elevator inspections to amusement ride inspections that are covered off in the budget. You also have the provincial disaster assistance program, and you have what's called the joint emergency preparedness program which is essentially federal dollars that are funnelled through this department to assist municipalities with, just as an example, the purchase of perhaps a hazardous materials unit that a fire department can use in responding to a hazardous material spill.

Now I'm happy to give you, you know, a lot more. I'm happy to give you written breakdown if you would like that, Mr. Toth, because I'm just trying to give you a broad overview of what's in that budget, but I can give you a much more detailed breakdown if you would like.

**Mr. Toth:** — If you can, that would certainly be appreciated.

A further question to public safety is I noticed the provincial disaster assistance program has gone from one point five to 550 — I think that's thousands of dollars, if I've got it correctly — and that's a significant decrease and I'm wondering . . . I guess the question is, why has that part of the program been axed to that degree?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — This shouldn't be interpreted to be a change in what we're covering at all. This is simply a budget adjustment based on looking at what's happened over the last three years in terms of the amount of money that we spent versus the amount that had been originally budgeted for.

And what we've found frankly is that the amount that we've spent has averaged in the range of about \$500,000 and that's why we've reduced the budget allocation. What we've had in other years is in effect a budget that didn't actually end up reflecting expenditure so we've tried to adjust it accordingly. But in terms of the coverage that's being provided, it's exactly the same as it was last year.

**Mr. Toth:** — So what you're saying, Mr. Minister, and your feeling is that the numbers in the budget are reflecting, generally speaking, the emergency services that have been required or utilized in any given year. And that say, should a major emergency happen to hit our province . . . oh just for

example the tornado that went through Edmonton a few years ago, that this province would be in a state of readiness or preparedness to address such a disaster with the current funding that's available.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well just for clarification in terms of what's offered under that program, the provincial disaster assistance program is basically there for non-insurable coverage. For instance, just as an example, it might help a farmer with fence replacement, you know. I'm just using that as an example but what I'm trying to say is it's there to help someone with costs that they've incurred that are uninsurable.

The last major payout that we made on a natural disaster under this program was the Vanguard flood and there's been, you know, very substantial claims paid out there over several years.

What we're finding, Mr. Toth, is that generally speaking when you have a significant disaster like that the claims are paid out over several years. And if we were to face that kind of a flood again, let's say, just to use that as an example, or if we were to face damage that was incurred in a community by virtue of being hit with a tornado and things that are eligible for coverage under this program, and as I say, eligibility for coverage hasn't changed in any way.

So what we would do is probably adjust the budget upwards again to reflect that particular incident because generally the claims will come in over a two- to three-year period. They're not processed all at once. In fact we're really just wrapping up, you know, processing some of the claims that came out of the Vanguard flood and that was several years ago. And the federal government again, you know, they will come in and supplement funding in the event that there is claims associated with a particular incident that exceed \$1 million in the case of our province. And this is again coverage that's available right across the country.

So I just want to assure you that the actual coverage that's available for residents of the province hasn't changed at all. And if there's a need we'll, you know, we'll budget for a higher amount again in the event that we get something like a major tornado or a major flood in the province. We've been fortunate not to have that over the last three years.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I guess that was the other question is the fact that the dollars in here are reflecting what the average has been but if indeed for some unknown circumstance we had a major tornado or flood hit the province that was considerably higher, that the assurances were there that the funds would be available to meet the needs of the disaster assistance program.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — That is correct. See different provinces handle this budget allocation in different ways. And some provinces stay with, you know, what's the average they've spent over the last few years. Other provinces actually don't allocate an amount. They simply budget for it as needed. So it's handled in different ways in different provinces but it seemed reasonable to us that we would, you know, take an average over the last few years and that's what we've done here. And in the event that we faced a major incident we would increase the budget allocation for this item.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Minister, one maybe final question regarding emergency measures services. What does your . . . I would take it that this is the department that those services fall under. And what efforts or what training does your department enter into with organizations around the province to prepare them should a disaster happen to take place and they're called upon to act? What efforts are made to make sure that these organizations are up to speed and prepared to respond to an emergency situation?

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well I think I'll comment on several areas here. One is that first of all we offer training programs to municipal government across the province in terms of preparedness for an emergency, and I think some 200 municipalities over the last three years have participated in these training workshops.

Then there's very specific training in addition to the general emergency preparedness workshops. There's very specific training that is delivered to some municipalities. I'll just use an example: in terms of fighting wildfires we've held, you know, very specific workshops for municipalities in the forest fringe region over the last three years that's specifically geared to being prepared to fight a wildfire. In addition to that, the Office of the Fire Commissioner, for instance, sets training standards that are expected for firefighters in our province.

And I can . . . I'll ask Tom Young to kind of go into some detail around training specifications for instance for firefighters in Saskatchewan and to give you some other examples of the training that's being done in terms of emergency preparedness. Tom, I'll hand it over to you.

**Mr. Young:** — Thank you. Tom Young, executive director of protection and emergency services. The kind of training that the minister was referring to, we do some joint work with the regional colleges in looking at different kinds of training for firefighters, including investigation programs and how they do their investigations. It also includes inspections, how to undertake different kinds of inspections for properties and that sort of a thing. Some of them are progressive; it takes two or three years to go through the program. Others are short kinds of programs that bring them to a basic level. A lot of the standards are with the national protection . . . the NHPA which is National Fire Protection Association standards.

We also do some direct training with municipalities that the minister referred to in the Sask emergency management area, and some of that training includes how to prepare an emergency plan. And some of it goes into some of the other areas of emergency management, just in terms of organizing themselves with a committee and a planning officer and the roles and responsibilities that a community has.

We also undertake some training just within the provincial government that deals with business continuity planning and that sort of a thing when it comes to if their operations are interrupted for whatever reason, for any kind of an emergency.

**Mr. Toth:** — So in conclusion, Mr. Minister, I would take it then that your office and department are quite comfortable that we have been working very closely with the EMOs across the province and that if an emergency did happen to crop up, we're fairly well trained to address those situations.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Well I think we've very well trained in the cities, and I think there's quite a high level of preparedness in most of the towns. I would say that when you get into the RMs [rural municipality], Mr. Toth, that the level of preparedness is more mixed. And what we've been doing increasingly, is the department has also been getting together and meeting individually with some RMs to help them with the updating of their emergency plans.

And I want to encourage, particularly in the case of rural municipalities, some regional co-operation in terms of this approach so that there'd not only be readiness in an RM, but there'd also be, you know, readiness in the . . . to ensure there's readiness in the region as a whole.

In addition to that, I should point out that the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] have emergency plans in place at the, you know, at all their depots across the province. And that's also a significant level of preparedness that we should, I think, recognize here too.

**Mr. Toth:** — I want to thank you, Mr. Minister, and your officials. I know we could get into a little more of a political flavour as well, but I think at this time of the night nobody really cares. So we're prepared to move forward. So thank you.

**The Chair:** — Corrections and Public Safety, vote 73, central management and services, (CP01), 12,841,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Adult corrections, (CP04), 65,450,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Young offender programs (CP07), 40,836,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Public safety, (CP06), 5,323,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Regina Provincial Correctional Centre, (CP03), 3,893,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Again, amortization is not voted, and it's just there for information purposes — 141,000.

I have a motion.

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006, the following sums for Corrections and Public Safety, 128,343,000.

Mr. Borgerson, so moved?

**Mr. Borgerson:** — So moved.

**The Chair:** — Question then. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

[Vote 73 agreed to.]

**The Chair:** — Now we have some motions for the committee to rise and report progress. No . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . oh yes, so we do.

We have one more department that we need leave from the committee to do estimates for: Culture, Youth and Recreation.

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

### **General Revenue Fund Culture, Youth and Recreation Vote 27**

**The Chair:** — Agreed. Okay, that is on page 43 of your budget book, vote 27. Central management and services, (CR01), 6,851,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Culture, (CR03), 25,049,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Recreation, (CR09), 780,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Policy and youth, (CR05), 3,275,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Community Initiatives Fund, (CR06), 5,800,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Heritage, (CR07), 10,294,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Saskatchewan Communications Network, (CR08), 5,137,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Again the amortization is for information purposes, 20,000.

Now we have a motion:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2006, the following sums for Culture, Youth and Recreation, 57,186,000.

Mr. Borgerson then will move. Agreed then?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

[Vote 27 agreed to.]

**The Chair:** — And we have supplementary estimates for this department as well.

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates  
Culture, Youth and Recreation  
Vote 27**

**The Chair:** — Supplementary Estimates book for vote 47, Culture, Youth and Recreation. Culture, (CR03), culture operations support, 100,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Centennial operations support, 180,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Film employment tax credit, 4,800,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Recreation, (CR09), recreation operations support, 1,080,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Heritage, (CR07), Royal Saskatchewan Museum, 130,000. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — We now need a motion.

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005, the following sums for Culture, Youth and Recreation, 6,290,000.

Mr. Hagel will so move. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Motion is carried.

[Vote 27 agreed to.]

**The Chair:** — We've passed out copies of the Standing Committee of Human Services third report. Do we have a chance to . . . sorry.

**Hon. Mr. Prebble:** — Sorry to interrupt. I just wanted to be certain that the supplementary estimates for Corrections and Public Safety had been dealt with and I'm not certain whether you dealt with them or not, but I didn't hear that . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Sorry, I thought that perhaps there was. So I stand corrected. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — So has everybody had a chance to look over the fine report? Can we then have a member move that the draft third report of the Standing Committee on Human Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly on May 25, 2005? Mr. Hagel. All righty. All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Agreed. Seeing no further business before the committee, we stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 18:55.]