



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Ms. Alana Ross
Prince Albert Northcote

[The committee met at 17:02.]

The Chair: — Well good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Ken Cheveldayoff and I'm the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Saskatoon Willowgrove. Members of this committee are Ms. Meara Conway, who's the Deputy Chair; Mr. Muhammad Fiaz; Mr. Ryan Domotor; Mr. Derek Meyers; Mr. Hugh Nerlien; and Ms. Alana Ross. We have one substitution today. Ms. Carla Beck is substituting for Ms. Meara Conway.

And this evening the committee will resume its considerations of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Education. Then we will take a brief recess and then we will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety.

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

The Chair: — Let's begin our consideration of vote 5, Education, central management and services, subvote (ED01). Mr. Duncan is here with an official. Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon to committee members. I'm once again joined by Deputy Minister Donna Johnson; my chief of staff, Mitch Graw; as well as we have a number of officials that will be providing support to us throughout the two hours that we have together.

I do have a number of answers that I want to provide to Ms. Beck that we committed to last night, and so I'll just quickly run through these. I'm not sure if this is any particular order.

So, Ms. Beck, last night you asked about the number of students in home-based learning, online registered with school divisions, online learning with qualified independent schools, and the number of students in independent schools, alternative schools, associate schools, historical high schools, and qualified independent schools that are not online.

So as of September 30th, 2020 the actual head count for K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] students in physical schools was 165,867. The number of students that were home-based learners is 4,662. The number of online students is 13,943. And there were 2,381 students enrolled in associate schools. I also have the breakdown by all three of those categories — in-school, home-based, and online students — for each of the school divisions, which I will just table with the committee rather than going through that entire list. As well, I can table the K to 12 associate school enrolment by school as well. And I will do that as well for the qualified independent schools, the historical high school enrolment, as well as the alternative school enrolment.

I believe we gave the number last night of 9,391 or an approximate number — that's the number of students that require intensive supports. And rather than reading through the list, I do have it broken down by school divisions, and I'll table that as well so you have that by school divisions. The number of schools

and qualified independent schools in the province in 2020-2021 was 714 schools. In 2021-2022 it's 713 schools.

You asked a question with respect to professional development costs. The amount that's budgeted by school divisions for 2020-2021 related to professional development costs is 12.8 million. Approximately 10 million of this is through instruction, with the remaining amounts in the other areas such as transportation, administration, plant operations. These represent non-salary costs; that is, it does not include sub cost to cover time away for training. Operating funding for professional development is included in various components such as instruction, transportation, administration, plant operation, and not funded as a separate item within the funding model.

You had asked questions about rapid tests and who administered those rapid tests. Saskatoon Public did a pilot at one school only with staff, and this was supported by the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] that did provide staff to administer the tests. Prairie Spirit worked with the SHA to offer rapid testing to school staff at Warman High School, and they were administered by the SHA at the school. Prairie Spirit is also planning rapid testing in Dundurn tomorrow. The test will be administered by the SHA at the Dundurn Community Hall, and it is initiated by Prairie Spirit School Division.

The SHA planned rapid testing at Waldheim after there was an outbreak declared there. That testing was offered in the community and administered by the SHA. Rapid testing was held in Osler recently at the Osler hall, and that was also administered by the SHA. And just to note, Prairie Spirit prefers that rapid testing be held in the community and not in the school building.

You asked a question about if we, or how do we measure the number of schoolroom days that are lost due to schools moving online . . . classroom learning. We don't have that number as a Ministry of Education in terms of the number of schools as they move online and away from classroom learning as the result of an outbreak of COVID-19. Working with the school divisions, the ministry will be requesting the total number of instructional days for the school year as part of the yearly school calendar approval process.

I will just note, and I think I talked a little bit in terms of the work of the Legislative Secretary, Terry Dennis, and I think I provided some detail. But he did meet with school community council representatives in all 27 school divisions from November 2019 to January 2020. The purpose of the meetings were to better understand how parents can meaningfully engage in their children's learning in the school context by listening to the successes of the SCCs [school community council] and the Conseil des écoles, and the opportunities that might exist.

I would report that there were no structural changes that were made to the SCCs as a result of this work. I also though, at the time, did mention the work that had been done to update the school community council handbook review, which was a separate process. The way I answered it, I think I maybe suggested that it was a part of that process. But that was a separate process outside of the work of the Legislative Secretary.

I'll just note for the record that the SSBA [Saskatchewan School

Boards Association] is leading a review of the school community council handbook. That committee is made up of LEADS [League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents], SASBO [Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials], the SSBA, the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation], and the Ministry of Education. This committee was formed to lead a process to review and update the existing 2006 document, *School Community Councils: A Handbook for School Community Councils and Principals*.

The first meeting of the committee was delayed due to COVID-19. Teleconferences were held in October and December of 2020 and in February of 2021. After reviewing the research of existing materials and through deliberations, the committee will focus its efforts on clarification of the SCC mandate and the supports required to achieve that mandate.

So the focus of the committee is to review the existing document in view of recent research and consultations conducted by the SSBA as well as the Legislative Secretary, review the SCC handbooks or guides developed by school divisions within the past two to three years and similar materials from other jurisdictions, update the existing document to reflect effective practices as well as recommendations from the research, engage boards of education and a sample of SCCs to provide feedback on the revised handbook and materials, and draft a communication and implementation plan for the revised handbook and materials. A specific focus will be directed to support SCCs to facilitate engagement and co-construction of the school-level plan.

You asked a question about an allocation that was supposed to go to the WE Charity for mental health. The Ministry of Education did not have an appropriation for WE Charity. The mental health work being completed was part of inter-ministerial work being done on the mental health priority.

You asked about the small schools of necessity. For the 2021-2022 school year, there are 57 small schools of necessity based on projected enrolments. In the last school year there were 55, and I have a list of those schools that I'll be providing to you or to the committee.

And you asked, a list of the people that had been consulted on curricula and the list of reference committees and those that were consulted. So I'll just share with you the . . . So the reference committee members, there are 10 invited members from the STF. There's one from the STF executive, one from LEADS. We currently don't have representation from either the FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations] or Gabriel Dumont Institute. We have one from the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] College of Education. We have a second from the University of Saskatchewan. We have one from the northern teacher education program at Northlands College, one from the Saskatchewan urban native teacher education program.

We have a spot, but not a person that has yet filled it, from the Indian Teacher Education Program, one from the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, four from the University of Saskatchewan College of Arts and Science, three from the university Faculty of Arts, two from the First Nations University of Canada, and one each from the University of Regina Faculty of Education and the University of Regina programme de Bac

[Baccalauréat en éducation].

And I have the names here. I can provide that for you just rather than reading all names into the record, but I'd be happy to give this to you as well. And I think that was the issues that we had to follow up with from last night.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Ms. Beck, the floor is yours.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and to your officials for compiling that list in short order. I know you've had a couple of other things, I'm sure, today to deal with as well. So sincerely, that is appreciated.

I do have a couple of follow-up questions based on the answers that you provided, first with regard to rapid testing. The tests in the community, it wasn't clear to me — are those available to students or are those available to the broader community?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — No, the ones that I spoke to were specific to the school environment. They may have just been performed in some cases in a community setting rather than the school setting.

Ms. Beck: — And in terms of when these tests are indicated in the school setting, is this an instance where maybe you've had one or two cases in a school and you're looking for more spread? Or what is the indication for when boards would make the decision to employ these tests?

[17:15]

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — So the decision will be made by the school division working in conjunction with their local medical health officer. The case in Dundurn was related specifically to an outbreak that they were responding to. And I think the examples from Saskatoon were more as a way to test the system, so to speak, as they prepare to bring students back to class.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I have a few follow-up questions from last night or a few questions that might seem disjointed, but they're pieces that I realized I forgot to ask last night, before I get on to early learning and child care. The first is under vote 5, subvote (15) and it is the literacy line. There's a small increase there. But I wonder if you could provide a list of programs or agencies that are funded by that line, that million dollars, and how that funding is allocated?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — So there's \$550,000 for the family literacy hub program. So that supports the provincial network of family literacy hubs. It includes \$125,000 to the family literacy network, so that's 550,000.

And I think the other portion of the amount that you're talking about is the \$500,000 for the summer literacy camps. And so the allocation for those will be divided amongst eight divisions that deliver approximately 20 summer literacy camps. So it's Creighton School Division, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Light of Christ Roman Catholic, Living Sky school divisions. They will receive \$20,000 each. Northern Lights School Division receives \$315,000. Prairie Valley receives 40,000; Prince Albert Roman Catholic, 20,000; Saskatchewan Rivers, 20,000; and the PNLs

[Pahkisimon Nuye?áh Library System] library system, 25,000.

Ms. Beck: — And the decision where to locate or where to fund those programs, how is that determined?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — The allocation is based on the communities that would be served within those school divisions that we see the greatest needs. They go back quite a number of years, so it may take a little bit more time to give an answer in terms of how they were initially established. But certainly they have been funded for a number of years going back.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. One thing that I didn't canvass yesterday when I was talking about some of the issues around bullying and supports in schools was around support for GSAs [gay-straight alliance] and any positions around conversion therapy. Is that something that's been discussed at the ministry level? And if so, is there any position or statement about those things?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for the question. In October 2019 we released the Deepening the Discussion tool kit. Certainly it's our desire to have open and inclusive schools for all of our students, and there have been no discussions regarding conversion therapy within the ministry on that issue.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I'm going to move to vote (08), the early years. The first question I wanted to ask is around the equipment grant increases, the nutrition grant increases, and the start-up grant increases. How much is allocated in this budget for each of those? And where is that found in the budget?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Ms. Beck. So in early . . . vote (ED08), so the increase in grants are contained within the child care allocation. So the 75.526 million for 2021-2022.

And then in the breakdown of that line of the budget, there's close to two dozen different program summaries. And so equipment is a part of that, nutrition is a part of that, and the third one is the start-up grants. And we're just trying to clarify what sub-line of that line it's found in. But certainly the equipment and nutrition are a part of that child care, and I think the other one as well.

Ms. Beck: — Would you be able to table the breakdown? I guess the question that I'm looking for maybe more broadly that might get us there is there's a \$2 million increase to that line in this budget. Where do those increases come from?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question. As a part of the \$2 million increase, 330,000 of that is increasing in the equipment grant; 1.153 million is the increase to the early childhood services; 528,000 is the increase to the nutrition grant.

There's a \$12,000 increase related to the family resource centres, and there's a minor \$4,000 adjustment. It's basically listed as miscellaneous FPT [federal-provincial-territorial].

Ms. Beck: — So the bulk of that is in the early childhood services. And what would be funded by the increase there? Is that an inflationary increase, or is it funding something new there?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — So the early childhood services assists with the monthly costs of the child care centre operations, primarily the staff wages and benefits. So this represents the major grant of the child care centres and supports approximately 50 per cent of the operational costs of the centres.

Ms. Beck: — So there were some goals stated in the budget documents around increasing the number of spaces. How much will it cost to fund those additional spaces? And where is that found in the budget?

[17:30]

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — The 176 that we're planning to add this year, 51 of those are school based and so they will be a part of the new Legacy Park Elementary School that's opening in Weyburn this fall. And the budget amount for that does come out of that increase in the child care allocation under the (ED08) early years vote.

And the remainder of those we're going to work with the sector to identify spaces, either through existing centres or existing home-based providers, perhaps some that currently are home-based providers that maybe are not licensed and would like to look at the opportunity of becoming licensed. So that's part of the work that the ministry's going to be doing over the next year to identify where those additional 125 spots will be found.

Ms. Beck: — How are those numbers arrived at in terms of the spaces that you're looking to create this year?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — So the 176 is I think based on past practices of the ministry and kind of what the capacity that the ministry would have and the system would have to be able to bring those online. Part of this obviously was the 750 commitment that was made, but also an understanding of the number of schools that would be opened over the next four years and the number of school-based centres that could be opened as a part of that. So it's a combination of home-based as well as the school centres that we knew that would be able to be opened because of the schools that were going to be opened over the four years.

Ms. Beck: — So the majority or the entirety of those centre-based spaces are school-based spaces. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Certainly the 51 for this year. I can't speak with the same amount of certainty in terms of the other centre-based and whether they will all be located with new school builds, but certainly the 51 are slated to open with the new school in Weyburn.

Ms. Beck: — Minister, I know that both you and I have had opportunity to speak with representatives from the sector and one of the concerns, the number of concerns that have been raised, some sort of concerns that existed prior to the pandemic and some of those concerns were either new to the pandemic or exacerbated by the pandemic.

One of them was just in terms of the viability of centres. And they operate, as you know, on a very, a very thin margin at the best of times. And they've seen increases to their costs, decreases to the number of children in their centres. In some cases, you

know, their bingos or other fundraising opportunities have dried up of course because of COVID. I'm wondering, are you aware and do you have a number for the number of centres or spaces that have closed over the last year due to the pandemic?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Ms. Beck, it's going to take a little bit of time, but we will be able to provide that answer. I would leave it for you to decide, do you want to ask another one in the interim? Or do you just want to . . .

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Yes, I appreciate that.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Okay. Sure.

Ms. Beck: — There's a lot going on, as you know, in child care right now, so I'm trying to hone my thoughts here. So one of the issues prior to the federal announcement, prior to COVID, was around workplace strategy. The turnover, as you know, within the sector is very high, some centres turning over, you know, over 50 per cent of their staff in a year. The other piece is the availability of staff, the number of seats coming out of Sask Polytech.

Obviously the wage is not a huge enticement for many people to go and undertake a one- or two- or three-year course. I'm just wondering, all of that to say, are there any plans for a workplace strategy within the early years and child care sector in the province?

Ms. Johnson: — Thanks for the question. And again, we do have our child care experts watching us and providing us with some responses. So if I say anything amiss, I trust I will be corrected in short order and I'll provide the correct answer.

But today to my knowledge, while workforce strategy has certainly been on our radar screen, we don't have significant progress to report. We have been anticipating the workforce strategy work that is to happen at the federal-provincial-territorial level since the feds had announced, I believe it was in the fall of 2020, some support for future workforce strategy development. So on that basis we were anticipating working with our counterparts across Canada to work on a workforce strategy. So that is where we're at on that front.

And just checking my messages here, back to your previous question, we are not aware of any centres that have closed as a result of the pandemic. We understand that there were certainly some temporary closures, but nothing permanent that we are aware of.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Initially child care workers were eligible for the Saskatchewan temporary wage benefit. In the second phase of that they were not. Can you provide any insight as to why that was the case?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for the question. We'll try to provide as much as we can.

The program was administered by Trade and Export Development, that ministry. But our understanding is that after the first round, when it went to a subsequent round, few of them would have been eligible based under the program, based on the previous earnings that they would have had.

Ms. Beck: — I have the minister in committee next, so maybe I'll ask him those questions as well.

Maybe I'll just read into the record some of the concerns around . . . and I know that you're aware of these, Minister. The majority of those responding to a survey that was conducted last fall were concerned about their program's viability over the next six months. Unfortunately we're well beyond that point at this point. And 58 per cent reported that their finances were worse than before the pandemic.

I am hearing some concerns from home-based providers about the inability to access the recovery grant. Have you heard any of those concerns and is that something that the ministry is looking into?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Sorry, Ms. Beck. Could you just clarify? The recovery grant? You're not speaking of the . . .

Ms. Beck: — I was hoping you weren't going to ask me the . . . Let me endeavour to get you the actual name of the . . . I'm having trouble finding it on my phone here.

Some of the recommendations . . . And I know that you've heard this, but I think that it's important that we canvass it. I understand and I think, you know, many people appreciate the increase in spaces in the province, something that's needed for sure.

[17:45]

The concerns coming from the sector are around that that's not a complete measure, that if we just increase spaces without looking at labour force strategy or viability, subsidization to staffing costs for example, that it puts a very big strain on those existing centres or people trying to open centres.

Just wondering, I know that the bilateral agreement of course was extended for a year this year and now we've got the big federal announcement that we're hearing details about. I understand you might have been in meetings today about that. Is there a willingness or an undertaking to work with not only the feds but with the sector in the province to develop an early years early learning and child care strategy in the province? Is this going to be . . . Put a different way, are we going to continue to just add spaces, or is there a willingness to look at a rethink of how we deliver this programming in the province?

I guess the other piece I would add to that, and I know I'm being wordy, is that the early years document of course is expired as well. So you know, all of those things sort of intersecting — with the ESSP [education sector strategic plan] as well if you want to pull that in — to provide perhaps some opportunity to look at a strategy for the province for child care?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for the question, Ms. Beck. I would say that in terms of the early years plan, it is something that we do need to work on and are working on to update that. And certainly the sector, SECA [Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association] and others, we will certainly be consulting with them on that as we will with other ministries as well, much like we do with the K to 12 education plan and the renewal of that plan.

I think certainly there is a lot of interest in terms of what the next four years looks like, and we'll be working with the sector as we continue with discussions with the federal government. We don't have all the details in terms of . . . certainly with the most recent budget that was announced.

And the ministry is engaged with their counterparts. I think I spoke today about I'll be having a conversation with the federal minister in the coming days. I would just say that just keep in mind there's about \$13 million already committed, so whatever that next four-year plan looks like we have to . . . There will be additional money is our expectation, but 13 million is already committed that needs to carry forward each and every year.

I think just the last comment I'll say is on the workforce strategy. We are waiting for some information from the federal government in terms of some of their thoughts on that in the next few weeks. And of course the sector will be involved in the work that we do on that as well.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. My understanding with the federal announcement is that there's 3 billion allocated for this budget year. Do we know how quickly that will flow to provinces, or what Saskatchewan's allocation will look like?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — We don't at this point. My expectation is that the minister, Minister Hussen will . . . It's my hope he'll have some information for me in the next couple of days in terms of what amount that may look like. But at this point we don't have a confirmed number.

Ms. Beck: — And I know that you're aware but just to highlight it as well, it would, you know, require training seats as well within Sask Poly to ensure that those seats were available to fund the additional spaces.

The grant that I was talking about is the COVID deficit grant, and I've had a number of concerns come into my office about operators not being able to access the grant. And I wonder if there's any further investigations into that, or those who haven't qualified. We're hearing people in the magnitude of losing 8,000 and more over the course of the last year. Is there any plan to support those providers? I was just looking for an update there.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yes, thank you for the questions, and certainly if there is a child care centre that you'd like us to follow up on, we certainly can do that. What we did with the remainder of the 20-plus million dollars from the federal Safe Restart, we canvassed all the child centres, essentially seeking their financial information. And so based on the information that came back to the ministry, there was a one-time grant that basically targeted to wipe out those deficits.

So I don't know the situation. Perhaps we didn't hear back from some centres, but those centres still would have been eligible for the one-time grant that would have gone to all the centres as well. So about \$8.3 million was allocated to essentially eliminate the deficits at the child care centres that responded to the ministry request for information. And then an additional 10.5 million was allocated on a per space basis to all the providers.

Ms. Beck: — I'm wondering, Minister, if you could table the breakdown of the Safe Restart funds as well as the bilateral

agreement funds, how those funds were distributed?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yes, we'll be able to provide that to the committee.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I appreciate that. I did hear a willingness, I believe, in your answer previous to this, but I want to put the request on the record. And this is a request that's coming from the sector, and that is around the creation of an advisory committee made up of leaders within the early learning and child care sector to support the planning phases as you've discussed.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — I'll just say the ministry does meet and has, I think, a very good relationship with SECA and with . . . I know that there are regular meetings with the directors of the child care centres. I won't . . . I guess I'd take the request under advisement at this point. We'll do some thinking about whether maybe at a . . . if there is perhaps a need for this as we move forward with plans over the next year. So I guess not saying no, I just . . . We'll consider that within the ministry.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. And I'm sure that's appreciated. So with regard to COVID within the sector, is the ministry tracking numbers? Or do you have access to numbers with regard to the number of outbreaks or cases or closures within licensed centres and homes around COVID?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Health does provide a breakdown or a spreadsheet like they do with K to 12.

Ms. Beck: — Is that something that's available online, or is that something you can share?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — We're just checking. I'm not sure it's online, but I don't think it's something that we can't . . . I think it's something that we can share with you. We'll see if we have that number.

Ms. Beck: — Do you have a ballpark number?

[18:00]

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — As of today, 318 cases.

Ms. Beck: — Right. Minister, I believe I heard in your answer in the Assembly, and it's been subsequently reported on, that there was a decision announced today with regard to vaccination of school-based staff. Could you provide any update or details about that to this committee?

Ms. Johnson: — If it's all right, I'll just provide an update to the number of cases. The spreadsheet that I was referring to tells me that there are 318 cases or have been 318 cases since inception, since the tracking began.

But that 318 are not all in licensed child care centres, so that would include unlicensed child care facilities. So I believe according to my officials on the line here, they're telling me that about 220 of those cases are tied back to licensed child care facilities.

Ms. Beck: — I think it's worth putting on the record gratitude

for the work that's been done there by those providers and in those centres. You know, they haven't closed at all during the pandemic. I remember in the early days of the pandemic, you know, the bulk of calls that I was getting as critic was from centres who, you know, don't have the same infrastructure that the K to 12 system has and, you know, a lot of dedicated folks who put in a lot of extra time in looking for supplies and such. And I say that only as thanks. And I think it's actually in some ways quite remarkable that the number is that low within centres. So it's always good to remind myself to be appreciative as well.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Sure. I'll add a little bit of information. You may have some follow-ups after that. So once we reach the . . . As we work our way down in terms of the age eligibility criteria for vaccine eligibility, once we get to all residents age 40 and over eligible, then at that point the eligibility will be expanded to include a number of citizens based on, essentially, occupation. And so police officers, fire fighters, correctional staff, border security. And included in that list is teachers and educational staff that are working directly with students in schools.

Ms. Beck: — So the trigger is reaching that 40 threshold. What's the current . . . I believe there were comments in the House today about next week, to get to 40. Is that your expectation, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — It is my expectation, Ms. Beck, but I think as you recall from the House last week it was my expectation that it was going to be earlier this week based on what we knew at the time in terms of vaccine supply. Based on what the SHA knows today in terms of supply on hand and supply expected, we believe that a week from tomorrow — so next Wednesday — is when the province will reach 40 years and over for all residents. And then at that time the pool of prioritized people will be expanded to those groups.

Ms. Beck: — So for clarification, once we reach that 40 threshold, those who are in qualifying occupations will be able to attend a drive-through clinic or book an appointment online. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yes, that's my understanding.

Ms. Beck: — Do you have a number — an estimated number would be fine — for the number of school-based staff who would qualify under that 40 threshold or who would be under age 40, I guess is that question that I'm asking.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Just over 7,000.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Was there consideration to have child care providers in that priority list?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — We're working to clarify that, whether they would be included. Certainly I've already received questions about certainly the early learning providers that are school-based, so they're right in the school with the rest of the kids and the staff. So we're working to clarify that and hope to have that soon.

Ms. Beck: — For what's it worth from the critic in committee, you know, any consideration or advocacy on the part of yourself, Minister, to have that done, I know would be greatly appreciated

by not only those working in the sector but the parents who take the children to those sectors. I think it would be really unfortunate if we were to see a situation where, well providers wouldn't be vaccinated in priority but, you know, you'd have a situation where those based in schools might receive priority vaccination but those in a larger centre outside of the school perhaps wouldn't. So I just leave that on the record.

So in terms of priority vaccinations, so we've canvassed the drive-through and the appointments. One thing that's been brought to my attention . . . and perhaps this has been discussed. You know, for the majority of school-based staff, they're in school — outside of the city of Regina — right now for the majority of the day. And often by the time they get off school the lineup is complete or they've taken their allotment for the day. Has there been any thought given to, you know, holding a clinic say on a weekend or something for priority for school-based staff? Is that something that's been discussed or that's been brought to your attention?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — I don't know if that's been a consideration at this point. I think what the SHA is trying to do is keep their clinics open, the existing clinics open. And when we did have the mass vaccination clinics operating in Regina, they were operating on the weekends. And they'll soon be rolling out . . . And I know they're starting with a pilot through the pharmacies which, you know, I think that encompasses many hours of the day or of the week including the weekend.

So I don't have any information on whether or not they're looking at something as you've suggested. I think they're trying to maximize the hours, including on the weekends, of the existing clinic system that they have.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. I just had to pull up my calendar while you were speaking just in terms of — and I'm sure you're aware and share this concern — we're looking at May, you know, in another few weeks for that first vaccine to have its full impact.

So we're running up against June very quickly here, and I think that's where the urgency is coming from here to salvage . . . Salvage is probably an unfair word because I know there's a lot of work going into providing education in the context that we find ourselves in. But you know, a real desire to have kids in seats in schools as much as possible. So that has been the concern and the push behind that push for the vaccine. And I will say on the record, you know, I think that is a hopeful development to hear about that priority.

I'm going to ask a few more questions under vote (08), outside of the child care line. I note that there's a decrease here for KidsFirst funding, and I'm wondering what is being cut within that line and what the reasons are for that decline. Excuse me. There is a slight increase there. So the increase, it's very slight, and I think we've seen this line fairly flat for a number of years.

Can you just remind me of the programming that is provided and if there are any substantial changes to that programming over this year? I wonder if the flat line is due to a lack of uptake or if it's a budget constraint that's seeing that flat funding for KidsFirst.

[18:15]

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — The increase of \$256,000? That's as a result of the lift that was provided to all CBOs [community-based organization] in this year's budget.

So the overall funding in the budget is 16.3 million; 15 point, just under five, 15.5 million is provided to KidsFirst targeted program, and just over 800,000 is provided to the regional KidsFirst program for this year. So the targeted program serves approximately 1,700 vulnerable families, provides almost 74,000 services. And the regional KidsFirst served just under 30,000 children and adults, and they hosted programs in 288 communities across the province.

Just for the member's sake, KidsFirst targeted provides vulnerable family supports such as home visiting, mental health services, and connections to community programs to vulnerable parents and children aged zero to three. They focus on supporting families to build strong attachments, problem-solve to positively address their challenges, and build positive social networks.

And the regional KidsFirst provides group opportunities, events, and tools to families in smaller urban and rural communities across the province. And the program is focused on making early learning opportunities more accessible and growing parent knowledge and skills.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. Similar question for the ECIP programs, the early childhood intervention programs. Again a little bit of lift there, but a funding line that's been fairly flat. I'm just wondering, that's the CBO lift that we see there, the number of families served. And any change with regard to wait-lists or demand for the program?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — So the funding increased by \$70,000 to \$4.464 million. Through three quarters of the 2020-2021 fiscal year, Saskatchewan ECIPs served 1,044 children in the provincial program. And 138 of these children successfully transitioned to school, and another 28 had overcome their assessed delay.

Last year's funding did increase, which enabled ECIP to move families off of their wait-lists, especially in Regina and Saskatoon.

Ms. Beck: — Is there, in the funding for the ECIP programs, is there a budget line for staffing? One of the things that's been raised with me is difficulty recruiting staff because of compensation. Just wondering if that exists, the line within their funding for compensation, and if there's been any lift to that this year.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — So it is an area that is, can be difficult to recruit into, and so the lift this year was to support a lift in the salaries.

Ms. Beck: — And how is that allocated? Is it a per-hour allocation? Or it's a block amount for each of the programs?

Ms. Johnson: — We don't have a specific budget line for staff salaries for this because these programs are, for the most part, delivered by community-based organizations. But the increase that they've received for the last three years, the CBO lift as we call it, has been going essentially straight to salaries. So it does

translate straight into the pockets of the people working in these CBOs.

Ms. Beck: — That's good, thank you. Has there been any report back in terms of the effectiveness of that lift? Has that made recruitment any easier or do those recruitment concerns continue?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for the question. So I think generally speaking these ECIPs, it's the recruiting in that is the bigger challenge. Typically retention hasn't been as much of an issue, is my understanding, and even the recruitment has improved. I don't have numbers to share with you, but that's what the ministry has shared is that the recruitment challenges have eased.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. One specific question that I had for you that I forgot at the beginning again and that was, in 2019 — now I'm going back to the K to 12 system — there was a report commissioned by CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] or reported by CUPE around violence experienced by their members in the K to 12 system. And I believe there was a letter and a copy of that report sent to the Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry of Labour and Workplace Safety.

There were a number of recommendations in that report and asks of the ministry. I'm just wondering if there's been any work towards those recommendations largely centred around OH & S [occupational health and safety] within schools and, as I said, violence experienced by non-teaching staff in schools.

Ms. Johnson: — Thank you for the question. And I want to certainly acknowledge the wonderful work that the CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] employees do in the school system. They are an invaluable group of people who absolutely valued greatly by the system, particularly given the many challenging environments that they find themselves working in.

Now I am aware of the CUPE report that you're speaking of. I unfortunately do not recall the recommendations specifically. And in the ministry I'll need to follow up with our staff to find out what work has been done with school divisions in relation to the CUPE report.

I would just for the record acknowledge as well that the safety concerns that our CUPE members find themselves in are particularly challenging, because it generally does arise from students who have certain behavioural issues and of course are not intending to harm anyone, but that still results in some kind of injury to staff on occasion. And oftentimes staff will find that they are not willing or interested in bringing OH & S into the conversation because they know that the student did not intend to harm them.

But having said that, it is a matter that ... Their recommendations are a report that we do need to get back to. So I'll endeavour to undertake that and report back.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. And I'm sure that's appreciated. As I noted earlier, I have opportunity in about half an hour to meet with the Minister of Labour, so I will mention it to him as well. I think it was addressed to ... well I know that it was addressed to

both ministers. Thank you.

I'm going to spend some time on libraries. And of course that's going back to subvote (15). And I note here that it is exactly the same allocation as we saw last year for libraries. I'm just wondering why the decision there was made to not increase, or at least to a factor of fixed costs and inflation, for libraries.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — There was a small increase, just under 1 per cent, to libraries this year — 14.437 million, up about 44,000. A small part of that is the CBO increase for family literacy, and the other part is to recognize a general salary increase. And also recognizing that we, particularly for the large urban libraries, we're not the sole or main funder of those library systems, so there are other revenue sources, other partners involved.

[18:30]

Ms. Beck: — Certainly that's the case for the larger urban libraries, not the case for the regional libraries. I believe I remember hearing in the preamble or your opening statements, Minister, mention of the important role, of course, that libraries have played specifically during the pandemic in terms of, you know, providing a source of entertainment. And they operate help lines and programming for their patrons. I want to acknowledge that as well.

I wonder if you have any data with regard to the use of online books and programming usership within the library system over the last year.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — We'll get that information.

Ms. Beck: — Yes, of course things are going to be skewed because of, you know, many libraries have been closed for . . . Most libraries have closed for a long time but continue to operate programming and such.

And it sort dovetails into a question around the funding formula for libraries. We know that after the 2017 budget work there was a promise undertaken to conduct a library review. And that report was tabled in 2019, I think the fall of 2019 although I don't recall the exact month.

The purpose of the survey was to look at the future essentially of libraries and what that might look like in the province. Of course, the minister for Canora-Pelly undertook, I think, part of a review of that system. And I think when that was tabled there was some indication that over the next few months, in collaboration with libraries and some of the key themes and responses, would develop a public sector library plan.

I'm just wondering if there are any major initiatives or plans to look at the libraries Act. I think the last time it was substantively looked at was 1996 and the funding model which I understand . . . 1996 is sort of before we relied on the internet, for example. I do remember those days, you know those early days. So just wondering if there are any plans to undertake some of that work that was promised in the report.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for the question. Just to go back to an earlier question, library online usage increased 72 per cent.

And with respect to the work on a library sector plan, the public library directors met with the ministry officials back in June of 2019 to review a schedule for sector planning and agree on a draft scope. The discussions continued. There were three meetings in November and December of '19 as well as February of 2020. The sector agreed on high-level priority areas and had expected to finalize a plan by the end of 2020. There was a meeting scheduled for March 25th of 2020 that was cancelled and everybody I think shifted to focusing on COVID-19.

In September of 2020, the library directors met with the ministry for a teleconference and indicated that most of the focus for 2020 was, in fact, going to be on service planning and response to COVID-19, so really the sector plan work had been put to the side for this time. But the ministry as of last week has re-engaged with all of the officials and the library directors that are working on the sector plan and are starting to re-engage in that process.

And I just wanted to say I think it's — because I think you did reference the library Act and the date of it — I think it's too soon to say whether or not there will be legislative changes. But certainly my expectation is that, one way or another, a recommendation out of this work of the sector plan team will either recommend making changes or not. But we haven't made a decision on that yet.

Ms. Beck: — And is that published? Or could you provide the list of people who are on that sector plan team?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — The group that is working on the sector plan is made up of all 11 library directors.

And just further to my previous answer, the ministry has — the team working on this — has scheduled monthly meetings and will be meeting with the library boards after all of their spring AGMs [annual general meetings] are completed.

Ms. Beck: — So I believe I heard you say, Minister, that prior to the pause for the pandemic, which is understandable, there was a high-level . . . there was a draft document at that point. Do you anticipate when that document will be released or made public?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — No, I think that — and I'll make sure I clarify this with the deputy — but I think at the time of the meetings that were in late 2019 and early 2020, there was agreement on some high-level priority areas and that they expected to finalize a plan by 2020. And then, in the interim, COVID hit.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, thank you. That's extraordinary — maybe not totally surprising — but 72 per cent. I expected an increase; that's maybe a little more than I even expected. But what a good resource for folks who have been isolated over the period of the pandemic. And thankful to all those who are putting the programming.

Little personal note. I tried to do a beading — online through the library — class, and I was very terrible at it, but I appreciate their efforts at trying to educate me. So thank you to them as well. I don't know if anyone's listening in, but there are all sorts of people who have been working very hard during the pandemic and deserve our appreciation.

Just noting the time here and wanting to make sure that I get through some sort of high-level questions, but ones that I usually try to ask anyway. With regard to any cost-saving or efficiency measures, are any of those initiatives undertaken this year by the ministry?

Ms. Johnson: — Thank you for the question. I'm just going to take a moment to make sure I get my information straight here.

Finding efficiencies in the education sector has been a piece of work that's been ongoing for quite some time, and in March of 2019 we had a revitalized, sector-driven approach to sector savings that began.

A governance structure was set up that was comprised of an advisory group and functional teams. The advisory group has members on it from the ministry as well as the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials, and League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, or LEADS for short. The functional teams are also comprised of reps from the SASBO and from the LEADS association, again along with some support from the ministry.

So when these people get together, they will take a look at what they're doing, share best practices. They'll find out from one another what each of them might have done individually that has been particularly successful, and then they'll work to see how to scale that up across as many school divisions as possible, always on a willing basis. So some of these sector efficiency options work for some school divisions; they don't work for other school divisions, depending on the nature of the item.

[18:45]

One of the most recent success stories, I think, coming out of the work is with respect to the LED [light-emitting diode] lighting contract. So that was fairly significant. And you know, it is for the most part, an opportunity for school divisions to come together and use their combined buying power to get better prices on any number of things. But again, I think the most recent example we have of efficiencies is with the LED lighting contract.

Ms. Beck: — So it's not a targeted reduction; it's a table where they'd get together, find the efficiencies, and then reinvest ultimately in the classroom or into learning? Okay.

Ms. Johnson: — Exactly. Any of the savings that are achieved stay with the school division and they make good use of those funds in whatever way they see fit.

Ms. Beck: — There have been a number of initiatives, I suppose, with regard to this sector that we've seen over . . . You know, I'm thinking continuous improvement and — what are some of the other ones? — transformational change and you know, I'm probably forgetting. I have a whole document of them. Any of those overarching frameworks or initiatives that are currently under way or the ministry's looking at undertaking in the next year? I guess that's the full question.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — I guess I'll maybe respond by saying that while there's no overarching framework that's in place that kind

of guides the work, there are a number of tools that have been incorporated from some of the previous frameworks, like continuous improvement or transformational change, that are still in place. School divisions have been, I think, working hard over the last number of years to achieve savings and efficiencies where possible, and so they may still utilize some of those tools. But as I said, there's no real overarching framework that's in place as would have been in place with continuous improvement or transformational change.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. I believe you mentioned in your opening statements as well, Minister, some initiatives or improvements with regard to CommunityNet. And I wonder if you can just describe that in some detail, please?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — So I'll just provide a little bit of background. Ministry of Education worked with at that time Ministry of Central Services and eHealth to negotiate a new agreement with SaskTel. That was completed in September of 2020, and it was effective April of that year. And as a result of the agreement, the core infrastructure of CNET [CommunityNet] will be upgraded in 2020-2021 from 20 gigabytes per second capacity to . . . I'm not the tech person to be asking, so we may get some additional support if you need to go deeper than that. But it was upgraded from 20 gigabytes per second to 100 gigabytes per second ensuring adequate network capacity for years to come.

Local school connections are being upgraded to a minimum of 0.4 megabytes per second per student and public libraries are upgraded from 3 megabytes per second to 5 . . . Sorry from 3-megabyte and 5-megabyte circuits to a minimum of 10 megabytes per second in small rural communities, to 100 megabytes per second or higher in the province's cities.

And as a part of year two of the agreement, regional libraries that are currently at 3 megabytes per second of bandwidth will increase to 10, meaning faster internet access for library patrons and staff.

Ms. Beck: — Sounds like good improvements, Minister. Is there allocation in this budget? You mentioned it's in partnership with SaskTel. What's the cost to the ministry for these upgrades?

Ms. Johnson: — Thank you for that question. And my expert online is letting me know that all of the increases to bandwidth are happening within the existing budget. The new agreement had lower prices, so we are actually getting better services for the same price.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Who would have thought, you know, 10 years ago, we'd have to build bandwidth for personal use in schools? Certainly not 20 years ago. But it's good to see those upgrades.

There probably are things that I could delve into, but I think I've reached a reasonable conclusion to my questions this evening. To the Chair, if you wanted us to make closing remarks?

The Chair: — Yes, certainly we can do that if you're finished your questioning. We've got about five minutes to go, so if there's anything that the minister would like to expand upon and talk about, the floor is yours.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think at this time, just want to express my appreciation to all the committee members for being here for the last two evenings. And I want to thank Ms. Beck for her questions, and I want to thank her for her patience as well. She knows she's dealing with a new minister, and I'm trying to find my way through this as quickly as I can. So I want to thank her for her questions over the last two evenings.

I also want to thank Deputy Minister Johnson for all the great support that she provides to me in this role. I want to thank Mitch Graw, my chief of staff, as well as the staff that work in our office here in the building. And I especially want to thank the ministry staff. Obviously it takes a big team to not only prepare the deputy minister and I for this evening, but all the work that goes into putting together the budget and the collaboration with the school divisions and all the other partners in the education sector.

I also want to express my appreciation to the Premier for asking me to serve in this role. I will say I'm excited by this challenge. I also feel at times a little bit of trepidation knowing how important this role is for the kids of this province and for the future of our province. And it's an honour and it's a privilege that I don't take lightly.

And so I want to thank everybody that I've had an opportunity . . . and that have reached out to me over the last number of months to provide support and advice and direction and some correction as well. And so I just wanted to put that on the record. But with that, Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Ms. Beck, did you have some thank yous that you want to pass along?

Ms. Beck: — Sure. Well first, thank you to yourself and to Stacey, the folks at Hansard, in the broadcast booth. Committee members, I hope there was some interesting bits in that. Certainly to Ms. Johnson, thank you and I wish you well in the role. And to the minister and to everyone who's listening, I'm not sure where, at home or . . . and providing answers.

I would echo, Minister, some of your comments. We'll get agreement today for sure on the importance of this work and I think probably agreement as well on just what's on people's shoulders this year. And I want to acknowledge that and thank those who have, you know, have done their best to get us through a very difficult time and a very difficult time for kids.

It's important that we get this right. And hopefully some of what we've done over the last two nights is in service of that, and you know, providing answers and clarity to those who might be listening at home or might be reading this on the record — hopefully not watching the video unless they, you know, can . . . It's not always riveting watching, but I do think it's important. And again I will say, Minister, I did appreciate the readiness with which you endeavoured to provide the answers from last night. That is very much appreciated. So with that, I will conclude my remarks.

[19:00]

The Chair: — All right. Thank you very much, Ms. Beck. And I must echo the respect shown here throughout the estimates is

very impressive and I congratulate all of you.

Having reached our agreed-upon time for the completion of consideration of the Education estimates this evening, we will now adjourn consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Education. Thank you to the minister, the officials, and the critic, and all colleagues.

We will now take a quick recess to bring in the minister and officials from the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety in approximately five minutes.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — Well welcome back, colleagues. Welcome to the minister and his official. Because we are still implementing measures to facilitate safety in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, if the minister needs to confer privately during proceedings he may do so in the hallway or the vestibule at the front of the Chamber.

And as a reminder, please don't touch the microphones. They are fragile and sensitive. The Hansard operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee. Cleaning supplies are located at the tables by the side doors for members and officials to use if they require them.

General Revenue Fund Labour Relations and Workplace Safety Vote 20

Subvote (LR01)

The Chair: — We will now begin our consideration of vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, central management and services, subvote (LR01). Minister Morgan is here with his official. Minister, please introduce your official and make any opening comments that you may have.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I begin with introductions, I want to recognize and remember Karen Aulie who was the deputy minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety at the time of her passing in February of this year.

Karen was a career public servant. She'd just celebrated her 35th year with the Government of Saskatchewan earlier this year. She exemplified what it meant to be a dedicated public servant. I deeply appreciate her thoughtful leadership and advice during her time as deputy minister. My thoughts are with her family.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Donna Johnson for the time that she spent in the deputy minister role. I'd worked with Donna initially in her role as ADM [assistant deputy minister] at the Ministry of Education and later on at this ministry and wanted to wish her well in her role back at Education.

To my right tonight is Greg Tuer, acting deputy minister for Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, who is joining me for tonight's session. Also joining me virtually is Phil Germain, chief executive officer of Saskatchewan's Workers' Compensation Board, and Jonathan Swarbrick, Labour Relations Board registrar.

I also want to thank and acknowledge the senior officials from the ministry that are available to assist virtually this evening: Ray Anthony, executive director, occupational health and safety; Sameema Haque, executive director, employment standards; Denise Klotz, executive director, Office of the Workers' Advocate; and Louise Usick, executive director, corporate services.

Before I answer your questions, let me share with you how the ministry will use the 2021-22 budget to help this province protect, build, and grow Saskatchewan through the pandemic and economic recovery, and how their work will make a difference in the lives of Saskatchewan citizens.

I'd like to talk briefly about protecting citizens by decreasing serious injuries and workplace fatalities. Workplace health and safety are vital to a strong Saskatchewan. While the pandemic has certainly made many activities more challenging, I am pleased to tell you that the ministry's occupational health officers have continued their work to ensure workplaces are doing their best to put health and safety first. They are helping to protect citizens every day that they are on the job. In 2020, total injury rate decreased by 10 per cent and time-loss injury rate decreased by 4 per cent. Accepted workers' claims also decreased by 16 per cent in 2020.

As our government continues to build and grow Saskatchewan with 100,000 jobs to be created by 2030, along with increases in the manufacturing and value-added agriculture sectors, we need to ensure that we are reducing the number of serious workplace injuries and fatalities.

[19:15]

With a priority on health and safety, the ministry will continue its targeted intervention strategy. In this last fiscal year, approximately 4,000 work site visits have been taken place and over 30 per cent of these have been COVID-19 related. I want to thank the officers for their continued diligence. I am pleased to tell you that through the hard work of the ministry's occupational health officers, they're on target to meet a significant milestone in reducing the total injury rate for the province.

With this budget, we continue to put more occupational health officers into the field. New funding will support one occupational health officer working in the health care and ergonomics unit as well as one manager. The officer position will have a strong focus on health care, where unfortunately we see a high number of injuries occurring. As we are not yet through this pandemic, our health care professionals are more important than ever, and having another officer in place to assist in inspections will be welcomed.

This past fiscal year, 18 summary offence tickets were issued, more than 1,700 notice of contraventions were issued, and 21 convictions of violations resulted in more than \$2.2 million in fines. These statistics are impressive, particularly given the year we have just experienced, but our work is not yet done.

I'd like to move on and talk about building and growing Saskatchewan by developing a level playing field. As dedicated as the ministry is to safety, they are equally committed to ensuring an environment of fairness and making this province

competitive. This budget provides \$130,000 for employment standards to help meet the demands of their work in supporting employees and employers.

Funding in this budget will allow us to continue to help young workers know their rights and responsibilities, and to offer young workers readiness certificate courses for 14- and 15-year-olds. This year alone, 8,400 certificates have been issued, which is lower than in a normal year, due to the pandemic. Education and engagement are key to success in this area, particularly with young workers.

In labour relations and mediation, the ministry has been working together with many unions and employers to negotiate agreements that will help employees to carry on their roles without any disruption.

The Office of the Workers' Advocate continues to assist injured workers or their dependents receive the consideration and entitlement that they are due. All of this work will help set the right environment for us to build and to grow Saskatchewan. This is the right path for our province and our citizens.

I'd like to conclude by saying that this past fiscal year has not been easy for any of us. But despite the pandemic, the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety staff have continued their work serving the citizens of Saskatchewan.

The 2021-22 budget will allow them to promote and enforce healthy and safe workplaces, will ensure a fair and balanced set of rules are followed that protect the rights of employees and employers, ensure that we're able to offer workplace conflict and mediation services, and finally to provide advice to help injured workers. In doing so they create a playing field by helping to protect, grow, and build this province so that everyone has the opportunity for a better quality of life.

Mr. Chair, with those remarks, we are prepared to answer questions of the members that are present tonight.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. And if I may I would like to echo your comments regarding Karen Aulie. She was an excellent worker and friend. I had the opportunity to work with her for many years, and certainly we pass on the deepest sympathy to her family. With that, Ms. Beck, the floor is yours.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister for those opening remarks. And thank you to your officials who've joined us here today, and I know who are listening in as well remotely this evening.

I'm going to preface some of my questions by just acknowledging that, Minister, I believe this is your 11th year in this portfolio. This is my first time in estimates with you in this committee, and I welcome the opportunity. In preparation for committee this evening, I was watching tape of yourself and the former member, my friend and friend of this place as well, Mr. Forbes.

And it was a good exchange. And of course as you might expect, last year a lot of it centred around COVID. And as delightful as it was to listen to both of you and to see David, a lot of the remarks centred around, you know, thinking we might be out of

this in a month or two. So, unfortunately we're not there. And I do also acknowledge the extraordinary and difficult year that people right across this province have been through. And I'm sure it's no different for your ministry.

And perhaps not surprisingly, some of my questions this evening will centre around that response to COVID. One of the first things that I wanted to ask about, Minister, was, fairly early on in the pandemic there were changes made to payment in lieu of notice, initially for a short period and then that was extended. I'm wondering if you can describe those changes and what next steps might be with regard to those pay in lieu of notice provisions . . . or amendments rather.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure. A number of steps took place early on in the pandemic to try and work through the various pieces of legislation and changes that were made pursuant to the emergency measures processes that took place. The payment in lieu of notice in ordinary circumstances will require an employer when they are terminating or serving an employer without just cause to pay a certain number of weeks payment in lieu of notice to that employer.

When the pandemic started, employees started receiving the CERB [Canada emergency response benefit] benefits from Ottawa and started later on receiving other benefits. A number of provinces, including ours, took the view that they did not want to sever the employer-employee relationship permanently.

So what the purpose of the deferral was that it did not eliminate the employer's obligation to pay the pay-in-lieu, but deferred it. So that if the employee was called back after 6, 10, 14, whatever number of weeks they were called back, the employment relationship wasn't terminated. The pay in lieu of notice would not in fact have to be paid. The employer and employee would carry on the relationship as soon as the employee was recalled.

As the pandemic continued, it was extended a number of times and continues to be extended at this point and time. And although I think we were hopeful last year at this time that we would work our way out of the pandemic relatively quickly, we didn't. So we're still at this point wanting to preserve the employer-employee relationship.

It would be, I think, too easy for an employer to say, okay I'm paying the payment-in-lieu, and then the relationship is severed. They would get the record of employment, would be eligible for whatever other benefits might be there, and then the employer would be under no obligation to recall that particular employee.

So by having the deferred payment-in-lieu, there was an incentive on the part of the employer to call back that particular employee as the economy started to rebound or as they've started to rehire people. And it's being done I think in virtually every other province and I think continues to be done. And I'm not able to make a comment as to how long it might continue because we're not sure what the numbers might be. I think we're all optimistic, but as you'd mentioned in our exchange with David Forbes last year, the optimism was not well-founded. So I don't know if that is a detailed enough answer but in any event, the situation continues.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Thank you for that. I think we can all agree

we hope that it's over as soon as possible, but we don't know that for sure. Minister, can you characterize the conversations that were held with stakeholders, be they workers or employers, prior to these amendments being put in place last year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't believe there was any. It was part of the emergency measures. I wasn't privy to any formal consultation that was done.

Ms. Beck: — So, Minister, I'm not sure if you know or you can answer this. Do you have a sense of the number of employees who would have been laid off under these provisions, or the number of employers who laid off employees that continue to this day to be laid off?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you for the opportunity for us to try and inquire from the individuals. The simple answer is we don't know how many people would have accessed the right to leave to come back from work.

We can, you know . . . We thought maybe by looking at the number of CERB recipients, that might be a number to consider, but CERB would have included students and a variety of other people that would not have been in the workforce. And we also have had people that have gone, come back to work, and then gone off again. So the simple answer is, we don't know.

What we can say is that the number of complaints that have come in to the labour standards officers for people that are concerned about the return to work or whether their job is kept or not has been virtually negligible. It's a handful of complaints I think, well under a hundred, and they're more in the nature of an inquiry rather than a formal complaint.

[19:30]

So the simple answer to yours is we don't know. Our hope is that as the various emergency orders are lifted and people have returned to work in the ordinary course that those people find their way back to the original workplace, go back to work, and the employer-employee relationship is continued after that.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. As you just noted, some employers had recalled part of their workforce and then shut down again. What about the employees who were not included in the first recall? Are they eligible for pay-in-lieu now or do they continue in that abeyance?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm not sure if I understand your question correctly. If an employee goes back, and is recalled, and laid off again?

Ms. Beck: — No, if there's an employer who has laid off say part of the workforce and recalls part of them and now everyone's laid off again, those original workers who had not been called back, they continue to be in the state of abeyance or do they have . . . [inaudible].

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That would be correct. There would not be an obligation on the part of the employer to pay those people unless it became apparent that the employer was going out of business, or was not going to be recalling those people. But yes, as long as . . . And I think we don't know whether an

employer would call back some or which of the employees, depending on the nature of the employer's business, who or how many of them they would call back, or how many would be deferred recalls. But there was certainly nothing in the rules that were put out that would require them to be recalled, all or none, or how it was determined. Those would be business decisions that would be made of the employer.

Ms. Beck: — In your answer you mentioned unless it was apparent that the employer was going out of business. What changes in that case if there is the business . . . it becomes apparent that the employer is going out of business? What happens then to those workers?

Mr. Tuer: — Thanks for the question. If they are in fact terminated, so the employment relationship has ended, then they would be eligible for pay instead of notice and then the old rules would apply.

Ms. Beck: — So obviously the pay-in-lieu notice rules existed pre-pandemic, and there would . . . I would assume the instances not COVID-related where workers would be laid off in this period — are they able to access pay-in-lieu? But not until the termination of the employee relationship that's . . . Okay.

With regard to another COVID-related question, we continue — and I think the latest report again indicates that workplaces are one of the main places where COVID is spreading — we can continue to see outbreaks. Many of these are retail, restaurants. Many of those workers in those sectors don't have sick leave provisions. Given that data, is there any consideration to introduce paid sick days?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it was a question that came with the media. And at the present time there is no paid sick time in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and BC [British Columbia]. The two provinces that have it are Quebec and Prince Edward Island. And I think with one case it starts after five years of employment, you're eligible for one or two days of paid sick time. And the other one was something relatively small.

So at this point, none of the provinces have come forward and included anything. Most of the provinces are availing themselves of the various federal programs to maintain payrolls.

And I don't know if you want to add anything on that. Go ahead. I'm going to let Deputy Minister Tuer provide a little bit more background.

But that's the position that we're taking right now. Our hope is that the pandemic continues to wind its way down and that we have people back at work relatively quickly, but I don't know that.

Mr. Tuer: — Just to clarify the other jurisdictions that provide paid sick leave. Quebec currently pays two days of sick leave, and Prince Edward Island provides one.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for that. I do understand that as quite recently that looks like Ontario might be considering . . . given the rates of hospitalization and ICU [intensive care unit] rates.

Unfortunately our rates here in the province are rivalling those in

Ontario. I think what's being suggested is a COVID measure, an interim measure. I'm sure you're hearing these concerns as well, Minister, but you know, workers who have exhausted options are faced with the decision, you know, if they've got symptoms, whether to go in to work or to stay home and risk, you know, not being able to pay their bills.

Am I hearing any willingness to look at sick days as a temporary measure to help get those rates of transmission under control and provide some relief both to the ICUs and to those employees struggling with those decisions?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There is some things that are taking place already. We introduced vaccination leave, which gives employees up to three hours paid leave to go and get the vaccine. And I've talked to people that have gone through the lineups and sometimes the lineups are incredibly long, depending on when they go. Sandy went last week. Went up, no lineup whatsoever. But I talked to somebody that had gone the day before and it was several hours long. So in any event we're providing up to three hours paid leave.

We've also created a public health emergency leave which can be accessed if an employee or a physician or the government requires an employee to stay home for public health reasons. So we have that if there's the direction for them to do it.

We've also extended job protection to employees that are accessing the federal Canada recovery sickness benefit, which provides employees up to \$500 per week, or the Canada recovery caregiving benefit, where they're looking after a family member. So we encourage employees to use those federal programs.

Our province still offers job protection to employees who've got short-term or serious illness, which include 12 days of sick leave, a leave for serious illness, 12 weeks for personal illness or illness of a family member, or leave for a work-related injury.

So I'll give you a quote and this is the quote: "It's really important that we don't put up barriers — or, in fact, that we actually take down barriers — that prevent people from getting the vaccine." That was a quote from Ontario NDP [New Democratic Party] leader, Andrea Horwath. And I may not agree with people that wear that particular political jersey, but on that one I absolutely do.

I think our path through the pandemic is one that leads through the vaccination clinics, and our immediate goal is to get as many people vaccinated as we've got vaccines for. And we're continuing to work with the federal government to try and get more vaccines here. And I think our front-line workers are doing absolutely wonderful work getting it into people's arms. We have the highest per capita number of vaccinations anywhere in Canada right now.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. I think there's some points that we can agree on there. Certainly the vaccine leave is appreciated. The work of the front-line workers is appreciated, both in those vaccine lines but also those workers who have been on the front line since the beginning of the pandemic.

So I'm thinking, well, there are a lot of workers who would be impacted here, but you know, young workers under 40 who are

looking for — you know, hopefully soon but maybe months until they get their vaccine — who are being told on one hand, if you have symptoms of COVID that you should not go to work, but on the other hand they still have bills to pay. And that really does present them with a very difficult choice to make and a choice that impacts them, unfortunately, but also impacts their workplaces. And again as I'll note, just a highlight, we continue to see transmission in workplaces because people have not been able to follow those orders because of financial imperatives really.

One question I have, Minister, is the emergency leave provisions that you noted. Are those available to workers who have symptoms and who stay home? Or are those only available to workers who've been ordered to isolate because they've either tested positive or they've been contact traced?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Both.

Ms. Beck: — Both. So if they're symptomatic, how would that worker go about accessing that benefit?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'll take a minute. We promise we'll be back.

[19:45]

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members. The federal program is called the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit. The provisions within the province require the employer to protect your job while you're gone or while you are accessing the program. The program provides employees up to \$500 per week, and I understand the program is being changed with this week's budget. It's going from how many weeks to . . .

A Member: — 15 to 26.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. Generally speaking, we match the leave requirements that we have with what the federal benefits might be. So under the previous rules or existing rules, it is 15 weeks of benefits that there are under the recovery sickness benefit. We're understanding that that will go to 26. And while I can't . . . What I can say is we have always in the past matched our regulations so that the time that the employers require you to be mirrors what takes place with the federal benefit.

Ms. Beck: — I know that there have been calls really since the beginning of the pandemic from workers and labour leaders. More recently we've started to see calls from medical professionals suggesting that this is a way to curb transmission in a temporary fashion. I'm wondering if the cost to provide a subsidy to employers to implement a paid sick benefit for the COVID period, if that was costed or anticipated at all in preparation for the ministry's budget.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We did not include that in our budget. We have had the federal benefit in existence for some time and we were expecting that that would continue. And in fact it appears that it is going to not only be continued, but in fact extended.

Ms. Beck: — With regard to the existing sick leave provisions up to 12 days, is there consideration, or what happens if . . . I understand that some of the isolation periods right now, for

example, with the variants, some households are being asked to isolate for longer than two weeks. What happens in the case of an extended isolation period, due to the isolation?

Mr. Tuer: — The actual leave that we have has a pretty broad application and so, as long as the employee is still being impacted, the leave really has no limit. I think the other piece of that is, of course, they have to work with their employer, notify the employer, but they don't have to provide a doctor's note. So I mean, this is employees and employers working together to make sure they're home, protected.

Ms. Beck: — But just to confirm, that is an unpaid leave. It keeps your job so you won't incur job loss in that period. I'm trying to remember. The latest study that's been quoted in this Assembly several times is that there's a significant portion of the population that, you know, at the end of the month, if they were to have an extra bill for \$200, for example, that would be disastrous to their finances. So I'm sure that the leave provisions are appreciated, but that doesn't take away the financial imperative for those workers.

Okay, I guess in a way not unrelated to what I just mentioned, there have been calls for sure for an increase to the minimum wage. Most recently we've seen the feds introduce a \$15-an-hour minimum wage for their employees. Do you have a sense, first of all, of how many front-line workers — those working in retail, food and beverage services positions in the province — are currently earning minimum wage?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, I don't know that we have that. I'll let Mr. Tuer give you the information that he has and then I'll make a comment after that.

Mr. Tuer: — This is based on 2020 information from Stats Canada. But we have currently about 46,000 low-wage earners, and those are employees who are kind of right at the minimum wage or around 15 per cent above minimum wage. So we're looking at 46,100 is the number we have at this point.

Ms. Beck: — So these would be people who, you know, might reasonably or most likely not have sick leave benefits and also would likely not have savings amassed to be able to weather, you know, even a day or two without pay. Any consideration for an increase to the minimum wage, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We made a conscious decision some time ago that we would index the minimum wage at a midway point between the consumer price index and the average hourly wage in the province. It's adjusted annually based on . . . that's so the employers have a reasonable period of notice to adjust.

And at the same time, we changed the low-income threshold before people started paying any tax. So the effect of that was to take some 112,000 people off of the tax rolls completely, so those people are paying no income tax whatsoever. And in other provinces, there is a much lower starting point. So we feel that was something that the province was doing to try and support lower income individuals, was to ensure that they were not in a position that they were paying tax and that we are consistent now, as we have been for several years, with the method of calculation that we're using for minimum wage. And at the present time, it's not under contemplation that it would change.

Ms. Beck: — Remind me what the last increase was to the minimum wage.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, it increased to \$11.81 per hour, which will take place October 1st of 2021.

Ms. Beck: — That rate is the lowest in the country. Certainly, sort of, I think it's an issue that I'd like to raise and ask you about on its own, but I think it also lends to this larger context in terms of those low-wage employees, many of them who have been working on the front lines at exposed increased risk throughout the last year without access to paid sick time. I think it's reasonable. It's clear to me that it's contributing to spread in workplaces that we continue to see, but also contributing to a very difficult year for those workers on the front line.

So, Minister, I'm hearing you say that there's no consideration despite that we see other jurisdictions moving more quickly to increase their minimum wage. That's not something that you're considering?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're looking at what they are across Canada. What they are: 11.75 in New Brunswick; 11.90 in Manitoba; ours will go up to 11.80. At this point in time it is not under active consideration, no.

Ms. Beck: — As I mentioned, Minister, when I was preparing for committee I was watching a tape of you and the former member of the opposition, Mr. Forbes. And I do recall that he asked about that number, the number of people taken off the tax rolls, and at that point he asked if there was any data to back up those numbers. I think there was an undertaking to provide that. Do you know if that was provided to this committee?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can look and find out whether it was provided or not.

Ms. Beck: — And if not, if you could do that, that would be most appreciated. Excuse me, my screen has gone blank here. I'm going to ask some questions about the temporary wage supplement, Minister. When it was announced — so this was something that happened fairly early on in the pandemic in April of 2020 — the stated goal was that the federal government would cover 75 per cent and the remainder, the 25 per cent, would be covered by the province. In the '20-21 budget, there was a note that the federal government allocated 53 of the \$56 million allocated to that. What was the reason that the government's, the federal government share was so much larger than initially indicated?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a matching program or a program that's shared by provincial government and by the federal government. The money does not flow through this ministry, maybe through Trade and Export, I'm not sure exactly where it goes. [Inaudible] . . . was inquiring as to where it is. But it is not money that we have control over in this ministry, nor do we have data on how much money flowed from the feds and how much money is paid for by the province.

[20:00]

Ms. Beck: — We were talking about the Ontario context and I was paralleling, unfortunately, the ICU rates and COVID rates in

Ontario with those of Saskatchewan currently, particularly in Regina. I'm going to read something into the record. The Science Table COVID-19 Advisory for Ontario put out a statement today, a policy statement, published this today. In their recommendations for stemming the transmission, the terrible transmission rates that we're seeing in Ontario: "What will work." The second bullet point states, "Paying essential workers to stay home when they are sick, exposed or need time to get vaccinated."

Now, as I've noted, you know, that's one part here that is much appreciated, the vaccination.

But it goes on to say that COVID:

. . . the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads when people go to work sick or after having been exposed to the virus. Workers who do this, often do so because they have no choice: they must feed their families and pay their rent. Compared to other models that appear to have limited spread, the federal program is cumbersome . . .

So this is comparing the current model under the federal government:

. . . the federal program is cumbersome and does not provide enough financial support. An emergency benefit that offers more money, is easily accessible, immediately paid and that, for the duration of the pandemic, is available to essential workers — when they are sick, when they've been exposed, need time off to get tested, or when it's their turn to get vaccinated — will help limit spread.

So Mr. Minister, I read that into the record just to further those calls for paid sick leave in the interim until we can get those rates under control.

Going to continue with the temporary wage supplement. Minister, in September of last year, the *StarPhoenix* reported that only 24 of the 56 million had been allocated. Do you have any figures about what has been spent on the STWS [Saskatchewan temporary wage supplement] since then? Do you know if that's the full allocation?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't. It's not our program.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Okay. I will save those questions for the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. You know, I'm not trying to be difficult. It just does not flow through here.

Ms. Beck: — No. No, I understand. Yes. Okay. Move on to ask some questions, I guess, high level questions about WCB [Workers' Compensation Board] at this point. Allocations in this budget for WCB, were there any increases to FTEs [full-time equivalent] within WCB in this year's budget, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, no increases in number of FTEs at WCB. I think in my opening remarks I mentioned that in the previous year there'd been a reduction in number of claims, so there's not a need for an increase in staff at WCB.

Ms. Beck: — You noted the reduction. I'm looking at a news

article from November of last year indicating at that point there had been 232 COVID claims from employees since the start of the pandemic. Can you provide the updated numbers, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — In 2020 there was 347 claims accepted. In 2021, there has been 446 claims accepted for a total of 793.

Ms. Beck: — How many claims were denied during those periods?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — In 2020, 252; in 2021, 117 for a total of 369. The aggregate is 31 per cent and there is, in this calendar year, 41 claims where there's a decision pending.

Ms. Beck: — The reason for the denial, is there something that stands out as a common reason for denial of those claims?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There's many reasons, but the primary reason when you look at the 2020 numbers, were that the person did not have COVID, that the medical information that came was they did not have COVID. And the other reason would be that it was from a source other than work-related.

Ms. Beck: — When someone is making a WCB claim, I believe there are three tests that have to be passed in order for them to be able to access it. One of them: confirm workplace exposure. How would you go about confirming or denying if COVID-19 came from a workplace if this is, you know, a large workplace with a lot of people coming through?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. This would be a factual determination that would be made by the WCB officers. And I can give you a couple of suggested things that they might look at. If there was a workplace that had a handful of similar claims that arose in the same time period there would be every likelihood that those would be workplace related. If there was a social event that the worker had gone to where there was a number of cases that arose following that, there would be every likelihood that that would be the source of transmission. I know that they're being, or trying to be unbiased, and to try and be thorough in the work that they do to make the determination.

The initial number of claims in their first year were, at the beginning of the pandemic, a lot of people thought if they had a cold or something else they immediately made the assumption — and I'm not faulting the people in any way — assumed that they had COVID, applied for workers' compensation, did the follow-up medical. Fortunately for the worker it was not COVID or not a COVID-related illness. And then they went about whatever it was after that.

As we've gone on into the 2021, we have more claims but fewer of them that are disallowed. So I think people have a higher level of sophistication as to what . . . [inaudible] . . . or hearing better information from their doctors when they're going.

Greg, is there anything you want to . . .

Mr. Tuer: — Sorry, I'm in touch with the folks in the back here. And so what Phil Germain has said, the WCB claims officers primarily are making these determinations based on interviews with the people, you know, who they've been in contact and then also just through the contact tracing process. So they collect that

information, and that helps them figure out whether or not this is actually a COVID case. A workplace COVID case, sorry.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Do you have numbers around the duration of claim, the average duration of claim?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, I do. The accepted time-loss claims, so these would be people who would have went off work, is averaging 14.5 days.

Ms. Beck: — Have there been claims . . . Or I don't know if you have a number. Something that I think we're all hearing about is long haulers, so people who perhaps have COVID and then continue to have symptoms weeks and months afterwards.

Has there been recognition of long-haul symptoms? Have you had those claims through WCB? And how are those being handled?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Each claim is assessed and dealt with on its merits. When a claim comes in, no one is really aware of how long the claim is going to last. And whatever it is, there's not a separate category set up for somebody that would be — to use the member's term — a long-hauler, or somebody that's got a prolonged . . . It's whatever the nature of their actual illness is for however long it happens to last. As you're likely aware, Workers' Compensation doesn't have a time limit on any of their claims, so if the medical information supports that the claim is ongoing, then they would continue to pay the benefits until the worker had recovered.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. Has there been any consideration of a WCB presumptive clause for COVID to cover workers off the job due to the virus?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not at this point in time. They work through the process that they're going. And the presumptive provisions that are available, for example the firefighters, are situations where the exposure was many years earlier or was over a longer period of time. With COVID, the exposures are very recent and easier to sort out where the likelihood of transmission comes from. Not saying it's not impossible or without difficulty.

I think I could say this: that even though there's a significant number that are disallowed claims, a lot of times it's a matter of explaining to the worker that they don't have it or where it came from. And there would be a timeline from when the application was made until they sort of went through the process. I think it was, it would be explained and they would work with the people, either through the Workers' Advocate's office or through their worker.

[20:15]

We have a remarkably low number of appeals that have taken place from it. So as of April 9th, there's been a total of nine appeals. So I think it's probably fair to say that in all cases, they work with the employee to try and explain to them what the entitlements are, are not, or how they seek further assistance. And I think the process appears to be working well, so we're not considering a change to make presumptive. We aren't at that point.

Ms. Beck: — Have there been . . . I understand there's been psychological injury claims related to COVID that have been made. Have any of those been . . . Do you have a number for those? And how many have been rejected?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, there was only one has been accepted.

Ms. Beck: — And how many have been rejected, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Twenty-seven — 23 in 2020 and four in 2021.

Ms. Beck: — Is there a common reason for rejection of the psychological claims?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The requirement for it to work would be that they would have to show that the psychological injury relates to COVID-19. So it could be that a person has stress from a variety of other reasons. But they would have to demonstrate that the psychological injury relates to COVID-19.

Ms. Beck: — Now I haven't been present in those workplaces but I can imagine, you know, outbreaks at care homes or some of the conditions that are being described within hospitals. Have any of those psychological claims been appealed, psychological injury?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not that I'm aware. The general reason why the claims would be denied would be that they don't have a diagnosis for a psychological injury. As you're aware, there's a process that a worker has to go through to demonstrate that they have a psychological injury, that going through a difficult time does not constitute a psychological injury. And I appreciate that these workers may be going through some of the most challenging times of their life, but that doesn't necessarily constitute a psychological injury.

Ms. Beck: — So a diagnosis such as PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] or major depressive episode, anxiety disorder, would those be some of the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They would have to go through the process with their medical professional and make the application.

Ms. Beck: — I did find the WCB fact sheet on when COVID might be work-related. And just for my own confirmation, I did remember that there were three but just to read into the record. So the conditions that would have to be met: there's a confirmed exposure to the disease in the workplace, plus the time period that the illness is contracted is in close proximity to the confirmed workplace exposure, plus the nature of employment creates a greater risk of exposure for the worker than the general population.

It was the last one that I was wondering about. How is that measured, the notion of greater risk of exposure? How is that determined?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I will inquire.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, thank you.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They suggested that some of the people have come and said, I know where I got it; I got it at a friend's barbecue. In those cases, your claim's likely going to be denied. So sometimes they just ask; the person volunteers the information.

But in any event, the third part of that test would likely apply to a worker that was regarded as essential. So where that worker would have a greater chance of exposure, such as a front-line health worker, a person working in a grocery store, or any area where there was a greater chance or greater likelihood that there would be a transmission. They would also look at a workplace where there was multiple infections, where there was a multiple number of workers that were arising. They would also look at what the contract tracing had yielded as where the contacts were or were not.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for the clarification. I guess I can imagine situations perhaps where, you know, you've got a small . . . service employee, a retail employee, small business, and that customer coming in is their exposure point. That's why I had questions about, you know, greater risk of exposure, that it might still be a one-off chance but that worker still did get COVID at work. So that was the concern.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's why the interview process that takes place with WCB and the worker would indicate, and that might be where contract tracing might be supportive. When I look at the low numbers of disallowed claims, I'm thinking they're doing a reasonably thorough job on that. When I look at the total number of claims that were accepted compared to ones that were denied, it's low.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. And of course, WCB claims continue outside of COVID. There are other pieces that continue to go on. I'm just wondering, I believe you mentioned previously that numbers were down this year over last. Wondering about the trend with WCB claims and trends with regard to time to resolve those claims.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The number of claims has dropped. And your question is about the duration of claims?

Ms. Beck: — Yes. Were there targets that you had within WCB for resolution, time resolution of claims? Or am I mixing that up?

[20:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Chair and colleagues, thank you for your indulgence on this. I remember in previous years we used to turn around and the officials would be behind and would give you their whispered response, which the microphones picked up, and it was a quicker and sometimes more embarrassing process. This time, I'm hoping, next year that we're not doing one of these again. In any event I have some information that I can provide.

The number of applications received — and I'm not sure even if they were all accepted — in the last year were 28,865. The previous year the number of applications were 23,746, so a decrease of 17.3 per cent. The member also asked about the duration of the claims, and it went up from an average of 41.5 days to 45.27 days. I asked the official that I spoke to, in anticipation of what the member's question was so we didn't

have to have yet another caucus, what the reasons for that might be. And I also asked about the reason for the drop in the number of claims. But in any event, they said it could be because of delays in getting medical information because the worker wasn't able to obtain or deal with whatever medical assistance might be necessary, or it was possible that the worker didn't have a job to go back and may have stayed longer on Workers' Compensation. Not saying that in a critical sense, but they may have worked harder or longer at their recovery.

I also asked about the decline in the number of cases and in all likelihood, the pandemic would be the significant cause of that. And there's a variety of reasons how that might affect it: fewer people working or fewer people working in close proximity, so there would be less likelihood that an injury might take place; or a variety of other situations where the numbers would fall off. So I think that's something we could spend a large amount of time. But in any event, the reduction in claims was 17.3 per cent and the duration increased slightly.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. Either I'm highly predictable or you're good at mind reading because those were the two questions I was going to follow up with.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I've done this long enough with David Forbes that I could usually read his mind and know what he was going to ask before he knew. But with you I'm not that capable yet, but give me another four or five years at this portfolio and I'll try and be able to be of better assistance.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. Categorization of those claims, are there themes or areas that you're seeing those claims come out of, nature of those claims? Any classification of that data in terms of where those claims are coming from and, as I've said, the nature of those claims?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The occupational health and safety officers try and look at the data as it comes and try to work with the employers that have got the highest number of claims. We used to talk about random inspections, and we don't do random inspections. We do unannounced inspections in areas or employers where there is a likelihood of a problem to be. So that's what they're focusing on.

So the higher areas ordinarily are ones where it's construction industry. Mining has become incredibly safe. Open-pit mining is one of the safest industries to be in. In the hospitality industry there's far too many slips and falls, so that's the type of thing that they're working at. They also have added the OHO [occupational health officer] that's going to be dealing with ergonomic industries from people that are using repetitive-type work or how they're sitting or how they're using computer equipment.

Ms. Beck: — It's regarding OH & S claims.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's regarding which?

Ms. Beck: — OH & S claims?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Correct, yes. I probably should let Greg speak to it, but one of the additional workers this year is dealing with ergonomic issues because of the number of claims that have come out of repetitive work. Go ahead please, Greg.

Mr. Tuer: — We've actually added two positions in occupational health and safety, both in the health care area. For exactly as the minister says, the injury rate is significantly higher there and so we're trying to put our resources to where the biggest hurt is.

Ms. Beck: — That's what I've heard. People are working from all sorts of unfortunate positions at home, for sure. Okay, so with regard to the WCB claims, do you categorize those claims by type or workplace? Where are you seeing those claims come in from?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The claims there, I don't know the total number of. It's by codes for the type of workplace it is and it would be construction or hospitality or that type of thing. So that's the breakdown that's there. So if you look at the WCB annual report, it lists what happened to the codes for that. It doesn't necessarily mean what the injuries were. It means the dollars paid out or the percentage of dollars paid out, so it's a financial calculation.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I think we'll have time to spend a little bit on OH & S after, but there were a few things that I wanted to make sure I asked about. The first was around supervisory employees' provisions. As you're well aware, the labour board recently ruled that supervisory employees will not be barred from participating in existing bargaining units. How will this impact the related provisions in the employment Act? And does this impact any of the directives of the ministry?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I'm familiar with the decision and have read the decision. We are not certain what step forward necessarily we want to take, but we have sent out letters to a number of stakeholders which would be labour law practitioners, unions, and a variety of public employers, asking them for input as to what steps we might want to take with it. Steps could be that the section be repealed, amended, altered, or the matter could be dealt with in other judicial matters. Anyway the simple answer is no determination has been made, but we're certainly aware of it and want to consider options.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Another issue arising from the federal budget, employment insurance took the move to extend the maximum week for sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks as you're aware. What changes to the employment Act will be necessary to reflect these changes? And what implications will this have on total compensation for workers with sick leave? I guess the first question is the necessary changes to reflect these changes.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Our legislation provides for unpaid leave for a variety of different leaves that there's a benefit payable by EI [employment insurance]. So in almost all cases we have had our legislation amended to mirror what's taken place in the federal legislation. The federal budget, as you're aware, just came down, so obviously that's something we would want to look at quickly and decide whether a legislative change is necessary, or whether something could be done by way of regulation, or what position we would want to formally take on it. So we watch those things, or the officials at LRWS [Labour Relations and Workplace Safety] watch those type of things very carefully, very closely, and come to us with a briefing note. And I can't believe we're now 48 hours post-budget and I don't have

one yet. But in any event — pardon my bad humour — we'll certainly have one and want to work our way through it in the near future.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I know that we've canvassed this with regard to the funding of the temporary wage supplement program. Did the ministry have any role in the determination of scope and eligibility of that wage program? No.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — None at all.

Ms. Beck: — None at all. Okay. So that was all determined within which ministry?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It was largely a program determined by the federal government. We mirrored whatever, but that would have been, I'm told, determined by the Ministry of Finance, who would have done that in conjunction with the federal government.

Ms. Beck: — Finance, okay. Thank you. Chair, I'm unsure of how to have my colleague recognized. Does she need to be formally recognized to ask a question?

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Ms. Beck. Ms. Bowes, the floor is yours.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you. Minister, a pay equity policy framework was introduced in March of 1997 and last updated in 1999. The intended purpose of this policy was to set out minimum standard requirements for public sector employers in relation to job evaluation, with the goal being to achieve equitable compensation practices and pay equity. The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission recommends pay equity legislation, but the Saskatchewan government so far has yet to pursue enacting this legislation.

[20:45]

As you know, Minister, Saskatchewan is one of four provinces in Canada that does not have pay equity legislation, and Saskatchewan also has one of the highest gender wage gaps in the country. Minister, could you let us know if there's been any consideration given by your government to pursuing pay equity legislation? And has there been any work done towards this?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Right now we've got some supports within *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*, but we also have got equal-pay-for-similar-work legislation already in our province. Section 2-21 of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* stipulates that an employee of one sex is not to be paid less than an employee of the other sex who performs similar work at the same workplace where the skill, effort, and responsibility is the same.

In 2013 our government expanded the provisions so that the employer could not pay one employee a different rate of pay based on the prohibited grounds in *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*. Those would include things such as race, colour, religion, or sexual orientation. So that's the current status in our province and we're not looking at doing anything right now any differently than that.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. I just want to clarify because it seems that there are a couple of different points . . . has been some maybe confusion between what is pay equity and what is equal pay for equal work. So I am aware that we've had equal pay for equal work for quite some time here in Saskatchewan. But as you mentioned, what that refers to is where a man and woman hold the same job, as you said, in the same workplace, whereas pay equity is dealing with female-dominated work versus male-dominated work and making sure that there is equity there in terms of female-dominated positions being paid equitably against male-dominated positions. So I don't know if that changes your answer at all, but that's what I'm getting at here.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I provided you an indication of what *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* currently says, and I actually read the section so that I was abundantly clear as to what the current status is. And there's not any active consideration given right now to making a change to that.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you.

Ms. Beck: — Yes, just noting that, you know, the continued gendered wage gap . . . I happen to also be critic for child care, for example, in the province, a place where people have three years of formal education to be paid an average of \$16 an hour for very difficult work. Certainly a lot of the caring professions that we see that are female-dominated tend to be lower paid, and those implications are certainly financial but they have larger social implications as well. So I'm disappointed to hear that that's not being considered, but I hope at some point we can discuss that being considered in this committee.

I've got some questions I guess about OH & S. Minister, you did provide some numbers about, I believe you mentioned the number of inspections. Did you note the number of . . . Now I know you and Mr. Forbes had an exchange about random versus unannounced inspections. How many unannounced inspections took place last year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you again, Mr. Chair. The purpose in trying to be more scientific or more than just simply to say we're doing a random inspection was, you know, to go out and avoid having a one-person business get inspected when, you know, they'd been there for 28 years and it was a bookkeeper working from home. It shows off, yes, a tick box on the thing.

So I've got a number of stats which I'll give you which might give you a sense of sort of how the OHOs are operating. So there was a total of 4,038 workplace visits. Of those, 1,802 would be called targeted intervention, where they would be likely a series of visits to the same workplace. One or two of the earlier ones might be a meeting with the employer to try and develop an improvement plan or a plan to try and develop it, and then follow-ups that would be unannounced that would be there.

There was an additional 1,130 that were officer-initiated. That would be for a variety of reasons: that they were looking for a particular industry that was problematic where the officer said okay, we're going to go into such-and-such a community and we're going to go in a new area of town and look for people that aren't wearing tie-offs or whatever. So whatever their current program was. Some of those would be . . . virtually none of those would've been a notice given to an employer. Those would've

been ones where the officer chose to, for whatever the reason they had.

In addition to that, 563 would've been as a result of a complaint; 543 were where there was notifications or follow-up from something else, a harassment issue or whatever else had taken place. So there would be a follow-up from that. Now they don't log which ones were totally unannounced or unexpected by the employer, but that's sort of the process that they're following.

So of that 4,038, this is what took place as a result of them: 1,739 were given a notice of contravention, meaning something had taken place that OH & S wanted remedied, improved, whatever else; 145, a compliance undertaking, which is a less serious form, were given; an officer's report was made on 1,920; and 234 had a note placed on the file of some form. So of those, that was sort of how the disposition of those that took place.

Now I want to point out we're dealing with numbers that ended February 28th because we're not out of the fiscal or we don't have information up to the end of the year. So of that year ending March 31st — so we're going the full fiscal year — 27 files were sent to the Ministry of Justice. Twenty-two prosecutions were initiated. Of the 22 prosecutions, there was 21 convictions, \$2,227,800 in penalties.

So of the summary offence tickets that were issued, there was 137 of them that were issued and then there was guilty pleas on 125. Twelve of them were granted a stay or withdrawn or a finding of not guilty. So the success rate on the prosecutions is quite high, as are the fines.

The member will be aware that when we made the changes to the legislation, we did a substantial increase to the level of fines that a judge could impose. So we have summary offence tickets for lesser offences — failing to keep a proper record or failing to have a piece of equipment updated — but where there's been a serious injury, a formal prosecution is often launched. And because of the nature of the employers in our province . . . We go from the smallest employer to some of the largest multinational employers on earth, so we need to have a range of penalties that could be given out by the courts. And the courts would take into account the size of the employer, the nature of the offence, as well as the impact, or where there's an injury or a fatality on the worker.

So I'll give you some numbers as to what fines have been generated over the last number of years. I know at the time we increased the fines, there were certainly some employers that were deeply concerned and troubled about the increasing numbers. And we were able to tell those employers that the courts would determine things based on the size, but in all cases, would encourage those employers not to look at it as something to be afraid of; what they should be is very afraid of it and deal carefully with how their businesses operated to ensure safety for the workers.

So when we formed government in 2007-2008, there was a total of \$65,540 in penalties given out; '08-09 we increased it to 385,000. In subsequent years it went up 467; then . . . [inaudible] . . . in 2011, 262; 2012-2013, 514,000; then 647.

Anyway it gradually went up until 2017-2018 when it went up to

1.4 million. 2018-2019 went up to 1.447 million; 2019, 1.66; and in 2020-21 as of March 31st, \$2.27 million.

So I want to thank the prosecutors that we have and as well as the work that the occupational health and safety officers have done. They've now all taken, or most of them have taken, training from police investigators so that they're able to understand the need for retaining evidence, maintaining proper reporting, and knowing the things that they'll need to do if they're called upon to testify in court. So I think that speaks to the high conviction rate that they have once charges are laid.

[21:00]

So having said all of that, I'm still troubled that our injury rate is as high as it is, and as much as it's been coming down for the most part for the last number of years, we still have a long ways to go before we can hit the Mission: Zero target that we think is the only acceptable target. Sorry for the long answer.

Ms. Beck: — No, thank you, Minister. And I certainly have some understanding of the targeted approach and some of the effectiveness that has been found with that approach.

I do have a question. I think you've answered most of it, and I might have some questions when I get to the work plan around reviews. And I understand there's a review that's scheduled at OH & S, but I'll get to that. But I don't want to forget this first.

Minister, in 2019 I believe, in the fall — which seems like a year ago but that was longer ago — CUPE released, the education workers released a report that found high rates of workplace violence in education, reported violence in educational settings. I believe that there was a copy of that report sent to yourself and the Minister of Education. And there were a number of recommendations contained in that report request. Can you report any consultation that maybe happened after that report and any actions that have been taken with regard to those concerns around workplace safety?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I was given a heads-up briefly as the Education minister was leaving the room that that would be a question we should anticipate. We don't appear to have any immediate records on that, but we'll undertake to have a look and see what happened. I remember discussions coming out. I remember the concerns being expressed about violence in the schools, and I remember meeting with some members of some of the different unions. CUPE I think was the one that I met with, workers that had the concern over what was taking place. And I don't remember whether it was some suggestions were made back to the divisions or whether there was anything formal done, but there wasn't a change in legislation.

I think any time that something like that takes place I think it's incumbent on the ministry officials, when they inspect or do inspections, to look for any form of risk to employees. And so I don't know, I can't speak to whether that's something that they're more aware of now or not. But I can certainly make the undertaking that we'll follow up and see what took place between our ministry and Education. I understand that they gave you a similar undertaking, so it's something that should be taken seriously. So I'm not sure what happened as a result but we'll follow up and find out. Oh, hang on, no.

Mr. Tuer: — So thanks, Minister. So we are currently working with Workers' Comp on a violence . . . or a fatality and serious injury strategy, and violence is a component in that. Right now in the plan, we've referenced both education and health care because they have similar types of issues. So it's part of our partnership with SASWH [Saskatchewan Association for Safe Workplaces in Health] to look into that.

Ms. Beck: — Great, thank you. That was the parallel I was making. You made reference to the high number of injuries within health care, and as you've said, I think some similar risks there with regard to unpredictable behaviour from people who, you know, often through no fault of their own, but those injuries certainly occur. And that was the concerns expressed in that report, so I appreciate that.

The Saskatchewan Employment Act, as you've referenced or you referenced before I believe, has regular intervals for review scheduled. So you've gone through four sections already they reviewed. I'm just wondering, and I think that there's reference to it in the plan, but if you could just canvass a little bit of the reviews that are scheduled in the next year and what the scope of those reviews will be.

Mr. Tuer: — Yes. So this year we are going to be conducting a review of part 3, occupational health and safety. Included in that will be the radiation safety regulations. So that's the plan for this year. We'll be kicking that off probably late spring, start of summer. And then the year following, we'll be looking at employment standards.

Ms. Beck: — Could you describe a little about the process of that review, how that's conducted, the scope, who's consulted, what that looks like?

Mr. Tuer: — It's similar to what we mentioned about the supervisory provisions. What we've typically done is either develop a discussion paper with, you know, issues that we're aware of from environmental scans, post that. We also invite a number of our key stakeholders, you know, an arm's-length list of different associations that we've dealt with over time, invite them to respond of course, post it on the internet. We would have a website devoted to it so anyone could provide us with their thoughts on it. And then, you know, for a number of stakeholders and if necessary, we would meet with them in person to collect more information.

Ms. Beck: — Or via Zoom.

Mr. Tuer: — Yes, fair enough. Yes.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, thank you. I'm just going to take a minute to make sure I've organized my last minutes here. I'm going to go through the plan for the upcoming year and just go through the goals a little bit and ask some questions.

Minister, as you mentioned in your comments, you know, the ultimate target being Mission: Zero, I think that's something we can all agree on for sure. There is a goal on page 3 to reduce the provincial time-loss injury rate by 25 per cent by 2030. Can you describe what the current rate is and what the trend is, please?

Mr. Tuer: — Thanks. Yes, the current rate right now for

time-loss injuries is 4.46. The minister mentioned earlier our targeted intervention strategy, and so when we started with that, we were at 8.65 per cent. So over that period of time, we're just a hair below 50 per cent. We had a difference. So that's where we sit today.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think I would comment on that. While it's laudable to set targets and goals by meeting or exceeding them, it should not be taken as a sign of success. It's only a milestone on the way. You know, if a target is met, then the target should be readjusted downward till you get to the zero. It's not a matter of saying, oh geez, our goals are great. Because each one of those injuries is a person that was hurt or a person that was killed, a person that didn't come home at the end of the day, a person that ended up in the hospital. So I mean, it's absolutely unacceptable and in most cases absolutely unnecessary. So it's certainly an indication of more work to do.

We've got some great employers in the province. Over 90 per cent of them have met Mission: Zero already and do it consistently. But for those that have not yet, we have to work with some of those employers to try and make them accountable, make them adopt best practices. I've met with some of them myself. And we'll continue to do everything we can to try and ensure that everybody uses best practices.

Ms. Beck: — Minister, that is very important. It's an important reminder I think to keep in front of all of us that, as you said, these are not percentages. These are people's loved ones. And I concur.

I'm going to look at the second goal. I have to read my own chicken scratch here. The second goal is around increased compliance with employment standard and foreign workers' protection provisions to ensure a level playing field. So I have another question that stems out of this, but the first. the term "level playing field" — and it's something that's been mentioned a number of times in your opening comments and throughout — when you're talking about that level playing field, what are the considerations there? What's being said? It sounds like there's something more that that means. What are you referring to?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, there's actually two fairly distinct components. One is the labour standards issues where you're ensuring that an employee is not disadvantaged by their youth or the fact that they're a new Canadian or whatever — that they understand what their rights are, what the obligation of the employer . . . I think we want to level that playing field to make sure that that employee is understanding that they're entitled to breaks, that they're entitled to be safe, and a number of other things.

But in the strategy when they talk about those things as well, well also there's the broader issue of what you do with trade union and Labour Relations Board and those things which are a part of our ministry as well. Greg, I think, has something to add.

Mr. Tuer: — I think another part of, sort of, the fair and balanced or level playing field really, is one employer to another. You know, what we see sometimes is, you know, employers might look to cutting corners on paying overtime or other pay or benefits to employees. And when they do that, you know, within whichever sector they're in, they really do have an unfair

advantage over their competitors.

And so part of what we say that we do is go out and we make sure that, you know, we're treating everyone the same. We're going to go out and investigate the complaints, and if we see that an employer isn't paying people appropriately, then we're going to take action. And what that says to the rest of the people in that sector is, okay, if we're going to play by the rules, we know their company's going to play by the rules. And now it's a level playing field.

Ms. Beck: — One question, and this again stemmed out of listening to estimates from last year. Mr. Forbes was inquiring about a temporary foreign worker program and the role that the ministry plays. Now my understanding, if I recall, is that the registration of workers and employers happens within the ministry. Is that correct? How many employers are registered under that program? How many employees? And what is the code or what is the area that most of those workers are being employed in?

I guess the other question I'll pile on there is just one of the things — and this is just more out of curiosity — is just the impact of the last year and what that's had in terms of the numbers of temporary foreign workers in the province.

Mr. Tuer: — So we provide certificates of registration for employers who are interested in hiring temporary foreign workers, and so we don't actually register the employees. So the other piece that we license is immigration consultants and recruiters. And so the intent behind that is to ensure that no temporary foreign workers are being charged to get a job, which of course has been noted as an issue elsewhere. And sorry, you asked numbers?

Ms. Beck: — The numbers, yes. And the sectors, I guess, is second, and then trend over time, if you saw a decrease in the last year and how significant that decrease was.

Mr. Tuer: — So we have 3,610 employers currently registered in the program. We processed 370 applications for recruiters last year. And sorry, we don't have the codes handy, the employer types.

[21:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you again. The prospective employers are required to register every two years. They register and we don't dictate or control the number of workers that they have, and it may vary from one year to another depending on the situation of that employer or the availability of workers. We can tell you that most of them that come here will be working in agriculture or trucking, transportation. The federal government has provided us with a figure of how many are in the province at this point in time, and there is 5,750.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — And I'm anticipating your next question is how much COVID has affected that. We don't know that and probably won't know until we get some more information from the feds.

Ms. Beck: — Perfect. Thank you.

There was one issue that I wanted to raise with you, is a concern that I believe you were made aware of February 17th. I've got a letter here from the member from Douglas Park that I was cc'd on, and this is around OH & S and contract work and sexual harassment. I know that you replied to this letter, but I'll just read the nature of the concerns.

This is about a constituent who had a complaint submitted to OH & S, was around the instance of sexual harassment in the workplace. There was denial on the basis that *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* and OH & S did not provide harassment protection for contract workers.

At that point I believe there was an indication of review of OH & S, which we've canvassed. And I'm just wondering if there is any progress towards the concern there that was brought forward, specifically harassment protection for contract workers.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you again. The technical response is that there has to be an employer-employee relationship found to exist, and if there isn't an employer-employee relationship, then the benefits or the remedies that would be available under labour standards wouldn't be there. The person may have other options available to them either through Human Rights Commission, police, or wherever else.

But we are doing, as we'd indicated earlier, a review of some of the legislation. Employment standards is a year out, but there are reasons that we may want to do that or look at that piece as well. One is this particular situation and the other one is whether they're avoiding other responsibilities for paying source deductions or ensuring worker safety or a variety of other reasons that are there.

So the ministry officials are aware of the situation. We've received the letter that the member has indicated and it's something that — without wanting to make reference to the particular instance that they raised — but it's something that . . . To deal in a workplace, you simply can't call yourself a contract worker and avoid some of the responsibilities that are there. It's something that we'll want to take under advisement as we go through the reviews that are under way. I thank the member for having raised it.

Ms. Beck: — Certainly appreciated the response. Just looking through again the plan for 2021-22 . . . Just looking for my own notes here, excuse me. Maybe I've exhausted the questions there.

Within the ministry, and I believe you provided, Minister, some high-level numbers, but were there any FTE reductions within the ministry? No?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, there was not. I think earlier in the year there was an increase last year of three OHOs.

Ms. Beck: — Occupational health officers?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Correct, sorry.

Ms. Beck: — No, no, that's okay. Picking up the lingo. Thank you. Have any of the ministry programs had a funding reduction

over the last year or anything planned for reductions over the next year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. The programs that are there have all continued and the new one that Mr. Tuer had indicated for this year's work plan was radiation safety, which is a new area for them to become involved. And it includes a variety of different areas where radiation is exposed, often dentists' offices or that type of thing, where there's equipment being used so the staff have to become trained. So your question was whether there was a reduction and in fact, there's actually new programming available for the employees that are working in that area.

Ms. Beck: — So with regard to the review of the radiation, what does the scope look like? How is that work organized and undertaken? Just if you could walk me through that, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Tuer: — We actually completed the review of part V of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* which is "Radiation Health and Safety," in 2019-20. So what came out of that is we actually provided some additional enforcement mechanisms in that area. In the past, the only enforcement mechanism we would have would be to go to prosecution.

And so we've basically given our radiation safety area the same sort of powers as our other occupational health and safety officers so they're able to issue notices of contravention, compliance undertakings, again sort of that full spectrum.

The other piece that we've done is establish an appeal process where an employer that's impacted by those decisions can make an appeal to the director. And then subsequently beyond that, if they weren't satisfied with that, they'd be able to appeal to an adjudicator that would be assigned by the Labour Relations Board. They'll also be available to take advantage of exemptions from the director, again similar powers as we have in other areas in the Act. So we've really just sort of brought the radiation safety piece up.

But what we are adding to our occupational health and safety review this year is a review of *The Radiation Health and Safety Regulations*. So we did the Act piece last year, and then when we're doing part III, "Occupational Health and Safety," we're also going to include *The Radiation Health and Safety Regulations*.

Ms. Beck: — You mentioned exemptions. What kind of exemptions would be available to employers?

Mr. Tuer: — So this would be one of the powers of the director of occupational health and safety. And essentially what that position can do is recognize and establish standards, so like a CSA [Canadian Standards Association] standard where it wouldn't have to be written into our Act or regulations. If it's been established at that level, the director can say, that's the standard that we're going to use.

Ms. Beck: — Interesting. Okay, thank you. With regard to the labour standards, and within the Act, there are provisions for modified work arrangements. How many of those . . . I'm going to ask for numbers around both modified work arrangements and permits to deviate from employment standards. How many are

currently in effect? And if you have high-level numbers about the sectors, the number of workers impacted by the modified work arrangements and the permits to deviate.

Mr. Tuer: — So we don't actually track the number of modified work arrangements because those are negotiated in the workplace. What we've done in our regulations is establish basically the parameters, the borders in which they can play. At any point it has to average back to 40 hours a week. So you know, if they extend it four, six, eight weeks, at the end of the day it averages back to that 40-hour threshold.

But the number of permits issued by fiscal year: in 2020-21 we issued 251, and so that's . . . you know, you asked about the modified work arrangements. The year before we implemented *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*, we issued almost 1,200 permits. What we found was a huge . . . like, the vast majority of them were those types of, like, four 10's, you know, some pretty standardized work arrangements.

So that's why we came up with the modified work agreements; thought okay, if we're seeing a lot of these come through, then employers and employees can enter into these. At any point, one party or the other can decide to withdraw, and we would go back just to the typical rules under part II.

[21:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sometimes they're done by negotiations that are done in a collective agreement, where it's a unionized workplace. And we have a lot of health care workers are working four 10's. So that's a really common one. And then there's others that are a variety of different ones working in northern or more remote locations. People choose to want to work more hours and then have more consecutive days off. So for the most part it's worked out remarkably well and we think it's something that's . . . By the guidelines that have been set out by the ministry and by the permitting arrangement, I think the ministry is doing a good job of balancing the flexibility that's needed with employer and employee, as well as ensuring safety and reasonable periods of rest. So I think it's . . .

Ms. Beck: — Is it the modified work arrangements or the permits to deviate that have to be renewed every two years? I can't recall.

Mr. Tuer: — Both.

Ms. Beck: — Both do. Okay. And what does that renewal process look like?

Mr. Tuer: — Well on a permit, they would be submitting an application to the ministry and we would review that. And a modified work agreement, again as the minister said, that would be negotiated locally and they would have to come to an agreement. And they have to keep a copy on hand so if we were to ever receive a complaint from an employee, we would go into the workplace or — as you mentioned earlier — virtually request a copy of their signed-off agreement.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, your official. And Ms. Beck and Ms. Bowes, thank you for your questioning.

Having reached our agreed-upon time for the consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, we will now adjourn consideration of the estimates. Thank you to the minister and his official. Are there any closing comments, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank you, the members that are present here tonight, the building staff that work around the clock to keep one of the most spectacular buildings in the province in great shape, the Legislative Assembly workers — Stacey, who I'm glad to see here again tonight — as well as the people in broadcast services.

But specifically tonight I want to thank the officials that work within this ministry and Workers' Compensation Board and Office of the Workers' Advocate. These people genuinely care about the safety and well-being of our workers and work hard to make our province a better place. I can't thank them enough, not just for the work that they did in preparation for today, but what they do each and every day all year long. So with that, Mr. Chair, thank you for the evening. So thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister Morgan and Mr. Tuer, for your time this evening. And thanks to all of the officials who are listening behind the scenes. I have some folks back in the office who have been very helpful in helping me prepare for this evening that I'd like to thank, as well in addition to all of those on the committee and the Chair and everyone here this evening.

It's appreciated, your patience, Minister. And this is a new file for me and I found out, I think, late yesterday that I was going to be in here this evening. So I appreciate your indulgence with my questions and my curiosity at some points as I work through this. Thank you for the work done to keep working people safe in this province, and just thanks for your time this evening.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Beck. I would now ask a member to move a motion to adjourn the committee.

Mr. Domotor: — I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Domotor has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

[The committee adjourned at 21:34.]