



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

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Ms. Lisa Lambert  
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Mr. Tim McLeod  
Moose Jaw North

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit  
Yorkton



[The committee met at 17:11.]

**The Chair:** — Hello everyone, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. I'm going to introduce everyone. My name is Mark Docherty. I'm the Chair. We've also got, substituting for Betty Nippi-Albright, we have Nicole Sarauer. The rest of the committee is Gary Grewal, Travis Keisig, Lisa Lambert, Tim McLeod, and Greg Ottenbreit.

I'd like to advise the committee that pursuant to rule 148(1), the 2021-2022 supplementary estimates no. 1 for the following ministries were committed to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice on November the 30th, 2021: vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; vote 30, Government Relations; vote 3, Justice and Attorney General.

Before we begin our business today, I'd like to table two documents: IAJ 4-29, Ministry of Justice and Attorney General: Responses to the questions asked at the May 4th, 2021, meeting; and IAJ 5-29, Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety: Responses to the questions asked at the May 4, 2021 meeting.

Today the committee will be considering the supplementary estimates for the ministries of Justice and Attorney General, Government Relations, and Corrections, Policing and Public Safety.

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates — No. 1  
Justice and Attorney General  
Vote 3**

**Subvotes (JU03) and (JU08)**

**The Chair:** — We'll begin our consideration with vote 3, Justice and Attorney General, subvotes (JU03), courts and civil justice; and (JU08), boards, commissions and independent offices.

I would ask that if officials who are not seated at the table wish to speak, they take a place at the table prior to doing so. Also officials, please do not touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn them on for you when you speak.

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

**Hon. Mr. Wyant:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To my far left, Mindy Gudmundson; and to my immediate left, my deputy minister, Glen Gardner.

Well good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. I am pleased to attend the supplementary estimates debate today to provide you with information regarding the additional funding provided to the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General for the 2021-22 fiscal year.

Mr. Chair, the ministry requires an additional funding of \$6.849 million to support its very good work in the justice system. Of this funding, \$4.428 million will be used to support pandemic measures taken in Saskatchewan courts. This includes addressing backlogs resulting from postponements in the courts

during the pandemic, including trials.

A few of our tribunals also require some funding. The Saskatchewan Coroners Service will receive a further \$954,000 to support increased demand for its services. The Saskatchewan Legal Aid Commission will be provided an additional \$400,000 due to a number of orders that have been accepted to the court-appointed counsel program. The Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee requires an additional \$200,000 to support the final implementation of its new information technology system.

And the remainder of the supplementary funding will support the criminal justice system review project, including an internal reorganization to better support its outcomes and the long-term vision for the justice system.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I would now be pleased to answer any questions that the committee may have on these additional costs for the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney General. Thanks.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the critic. Please, please go ahead.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks. I'd also like to take the opportunity to welcome all the officials here this evening. It's a pleasure to get to see officials again after what has been a tough pandemic couple of years. I missed getting to see everybody at estimates time so it's nice to see you all, even though it's for only 15 minutes of your time. Because of that, I will move on to my questions very quickly.

You mentioned, Minister, that some of this money is to deal with the backlogs in the court system including some trials. Do you have numbers that you can provide us about the trial delays, in particular, length of time? I'm also curious to know if any charges had to be stayed because of the delays. Any further information you can provide me would be appreciated.

[17:15]

**Hon. Mr. Wyant:** — I'll have Jan Turner, assistant deputy minister speak to that.

**Ms. Turner:** — Good evening. I don't have specific delay numbers with me today. As you can appreciate, it's a bit of a moving target for this. I think as you're aware there was a number of months where trials were in abeyance while we dealt with some of the COVID issues. We started again in September in the Court of Queen's Bench with trials and we've been able to carry on since that time, with having measures in place, including some of the jury trials that we've been holding.

So the court is wishing to dispatch with as much of their backlog as they can. And so some of the expense here is to assist with more juries that we would want to have. I think you're aware also that the panelling of juries is done in off-site locations, again in keeping with the protocols we have in place. So we take on additional expenses such as rental of larger facilities and places to hold some of the trials, some of the additional jury costs for that, and of course our own security both every day in the court facilities, but particularly around trials. We'll do our best, if you would like, to calculate some of those numbers together with our

colleagues in prosecutions in terms of what we think is outstanding.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — That would be appreciated. Are you able to provide any information as to how long the wait time is currently to get to a trial? If you're looking to book a trial today, for example, how far away, how long do you have to wait for . . . any other types of backlogs, as well?

**Ms. Turner:** — I don't have that particular number with respect to criminal or civil matters. The Court of Queen's Bench in particular has been very aggressive about maintaining their chamber days, and they've been doing that virtually. So they're trying to dispense with as much of their business as they can using this different format.

There's been delays of course in Provincial Court with access to some of the fly-in communities as well. And that's created . . . We're dealing with as much as we can by way of video. But we're trying to get into more places, which of course there's a cost element with more flights that we have to take and the kind of readiness we need in those locations so that everyone is safe in that community.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — In the past there has been the ability to provide the information, information around a point-in-time waits for time to trial for Provincial Court matters in particular. If you don't have them available this evening, could you endeavour to, if possible, provide them to me in the future?

**Ms. Turner:** — Yes. I shall. Yeah.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Could you indicate what specifically this money is for to help with this backlog issue?

**Ms. Turner:** — So the majority of the funds will be spent with additional staff. In the summer of 2020 we received permission to take on additional deputy sheriffs to help with the security and the screening in the court facilities. We still have them in place, and we took on an additional 44 deputy sheriffs at the time, because it was important that everyone coming into court facilities were properly screened and that there was proper security in all of the court facilities.

There's also additional court clerks, both in Provincial Court and Court of Queen's Bench. We have additional folks who are working in video installation and our technology sector to be able to bring all of those different modifications as quickly as we can into court.

There's other costs attached. We continue to be high users of PPE [personal protective equipment], of masks, of shields, of other protective equipment for all of our staff, and to offer some of that to the public as they're coming in as well.

I've mentioned that we have additional flight costs. We've been very diligent about how we move people in and out of the fly-in communities, which sometimes means we're in larger aircraft, or in fact two aircraft so that we can do it in the safest possible way.

I've probably said "safe" now about 20 times so far in response. I think that gives you an indication. Together with renting some of these additional larger spaces, so that we can do the jury

selection, we've been using different places outside of our court facilities.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Those 44 deputy sheriffs, are those permanent hires?

**Ms. Turner:** — Not at this point, no. These are term positions that were hired specifically for this purpose and remain in that capacity because we still need them for this.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay, thank you. Just cognizant of the time. Thank you so much for those answers. I'm going to move on to ask some questions about the coroners service and the increase in demand that they're facing. If Mr. Weighill could provide some further information as to what his office is experiencing, I'd appreciate it a lot.

**Mr. Weighill:** — Thank you very much. I've broken it down. There's seven main categories that have caused the cost increase. It's all due to utilization. First off, we've seen a big increase in drug toxicity deaths in the province. It's increased from 179 in 2019. We project 403 this year. Of course that cascades down. We have to do more autopsies now because unfortunately, most of these decedents don't have a medical history, so we have to do a full autopsy. So our autopsies have increased from 2019 from 592, projecting to 907 this year.

So that cascades down. Because we're doing more autopsies, we have to do more decedent transport across the province to bring them in for autopsies, so our costs have gone up for that. Additional forensic pathologist we had to hire because of the additional autopsies that we're doing. Additional investigations, we've gone from about 800 investigations in 2019 up to over 800-and-some now. So we're seeing an increase right across the board.

Increase in inquest costs. We have inquests waiting because we postponed from last year, and we're going to try to double up as much as we can this year to catch up pending any restrictions that we might have next year. And then we had to have some temporary morgues during the height of the pandemic in Regina and Saskatoon just to hold decedents waiting for autopsies.

So I can break that down roughly. It's about \$180,000 for the body transport; it's about \$329,000 for the extra forensic pathologist; \$150,000 for additional investigations that we're doing because of the extra cases — so that's paying coroners more money because we're doing more investigations, the community coroners — \$143,000 forecast for the inquests we're going to do this year to catch up; and was about \$58,000 for the temporary morgues that we had in Regina and Saskatoon.

So that's almost the bulk of the ask. It's all utilization. Our other budget lines are right on line.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Well I'm a bit speechless. That's a lot. I wish we had more time to delve into that further. I really do. We'll have to talk about it more in the spring, but thank you for all the work that you're doing. It sounds like there's a lot going on at that office right now.

**Mr. Weighill:** — Thank you.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — If I have time, I'd like to ask a question about the Legal Aid increase and where that money went.

**Ms. Head:** — So you'll be familiar with the court-appointed counsel program from the past. You'll know that that's not a new program. What we've done this fiscal year which is new is transfer the program from the Ministry of Justice to Legal Aid Saskatchewan so that they administer the program. And it is this program that has the shortfall in it which is sort of an ongoing shortfall, which has happened in the past years when the program was with the Ministry of Justice in the past. We can't control the number of court appointments that are being made by the judiciary and so, you know, we have a budgeted amount that is there but it's not always sufficient to cover the demand.

Saskatchewan's not alone in having its legal aid plan administer this program. We've kind of filled in the hole. BC [British Columbia], Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario all have this program administered by legal aid, so we've joined their ranks in doing this.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is Legal Aid provided additional funding to be able to administer this program?

**Ms. Head:** — Yes. So \$1 million was transferred from the Ministry of Justice to Legal Aid. It's sequestered, so it does not affect the rest of Legal Aid operations. And so if this program runs over, we don't require Legal Aid, you know, to take money from their main programming and cover off this program. That is why we're here today for estimates for this specific program, is to make sure that it has enough money to cover its separate costs from the main program.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And just for the purposes of the record, can you explain when these court appointments typically happen? What sort of files?

**Ms. Head:** — Oh okay, yes. So it would be for people who can't qualify for legal aid in that they earn too much money, but they would be facing a serious criminal charge and can't also afford a lawyer, so kind of in that middle ground. And it can also be for some child protection cases as well, would be the other area that it's mostly used. But it's mainly criminal appearances.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is children's counsel, is that included under this as well, or is that still separate?

**Ms. Head:** — That is still separate. That is still with the Public Guardian and Trustee office with the ministry. Yeah.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you so much. I hear I have two minutes. It gives me time for one more question. So if someone could provide some further information about the criminal justice review project, I would greatly appreciate it.

**Mr. Gardner:** — I'll introduce it, and then we'll let Shannon speak to it. So that area reports to Shannon now. It was originally set up as a joint piece of work between CPPS [Corrections, Policing and Public Safety] and JAG [Justice and Attorney General] with the intention that we take a look at sort of all aspects of the criminal justice system.

We do pretty good analysis of pieces of it, and we do analysis

when we have a particular pressure or problem. But the intention of this is over the next couple of years to take a look at all aspects right from policing, corrections, prosecutions, courts, criminal justice issues more broadly, currently working on some short-term projects. But that's the intention overall is to examine how the whole flow goes across the system and what changes we might make and what the impact will be on other pieces of it. It's just it's never been done before and it seemed timely.

Anything you want to add, Shannon?

**Ms. Williams:** — No, I think you've covered it well. But yes, it's just to sort of do an overview of the system to see if there's ways that we can make it more efficient, effective, and responsive to the needs of the citizens of Saskatchewan. So it's really looking at that system in a holistic way across our ministries, but also looking at some of the impacts it will have on other ministries as well with some of the changes that might be initiated.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I'm looking forward to hearing more updates on this project in the future, and hopefully we'll have some more time to discuss this in the spring.

**Mr. Gardner:** — We'll keep you posted.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I believe my time is up, so I will take this opportunity to thank all the officials for coming here today and their heartfelt answers to my questions. I apologize for this being such a brief encounter. Thank you, Mr. Gardner, as always, and Minister Wyant. I very much appreciate this opportunity to ask questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Thank you for that. We have reached upon our agreed-upon time for consideration of supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. So seeing no more questions, we'll proceed to vote. Minister, do you have any closing comments before we get to that point?

**Hon. Mr. Wyant:** — I'd like to close, Mr. Chair, just to thank you and the committee for your attendance today. I do want to thank the officials who came today, not just for tonight but for the excellent work that they do in supporting me as the minister and the people of Saskatchewan. I want to thank Hansard for being here tonight, and of course Ms. Sarauer for her very respectful questions. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Okay, so supplementary estimates no. 1, so we need to vote. Courts and civil justice (JU03) in the amount of \$5,295,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Boards, commissions and independent offices (JU08) in the amount of \$1,554,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Justice and Attorney General, vote 3 — \$6,849,000.

[17:30]

I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2022, the following sums for Justice and Attorney General in the amount of \$6,849,000.

**Mr. McLeod:** — I'll so move.

**The Chair:** — Mr. McLeod. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. That concludes our business today for Justice, and we'll have a brief recess in order to change officials. But thank you all for the time spent today. Thank you.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates — No. 1  
Government Relations  
Vote 30**

**Subvote (GR07)**

**The Chair:** — Hello, everyone. Welcome back. We are with Government Relations estimates. And we'll now consider the supplementary estimates for vote 30, Government Relations.

I would ask that if officials who are not seated at the table wish to speak, they take a place at the table prior to doing so. Also officials please do not touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn them on for you when you speak. Also when you're about to speak and you're sitting at the table, please introduce yourself as well. And with that, Minister, please introduce your officials, make your opening comments, and yeah, I think we're good to go. Go ahead, Minister.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Great. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for allowing us to be here through supplementary estimates. I'm joined by my deputy minister to my left, Greg Miller. And to his left is Sheldon Green, the assistant deputy minister of municipal relations. We have Susan Carani here as the acting assistant deputy minister, First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs; Jeff Markewich, acting assistant deputy minister, central services and standards; and Jeff MacDonald over to our left here as the executive director, municipal infrastructure and financing. And to my right is my chief of staff, Max Waldman. I just have some very brief remarks and then would be glad to answer any questions that the committee may have.

Government Relations has two pressures that arose during this fiscal year. First, Government Relations requires an additional \$60 million to distribute to the Saskatchewan municipalities through the federal top-up for the Canada Community-Building Fund, formerly known as the Gas Tax Fund. This fund, which I will probably be referring to more than the community fund as the gas tax, but formally it's known as the Community-Building Fund. This funding is added to the 69.5 million that is already provided in the '21-22 budget. Through this fund, Saskatchewan municipalities will receive support to fund local infrastructure priorities such as water infrastructure, local roads and bridges,

and recreation. This is fully offset by federal revenue already received by the province.

The second pressure is, on June 18th I announced that \$2 million in provincial funding would be provided to the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations to support community research into undocumented deaths and burials at the sites of former federally operated residential schools in the province. The FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations] has received this funding.

So that kind of quickly outlines the two pressures. With that it concludes my remarks, and I'd be more than willing to answer any questions that the committee may have.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. I was remiss; I did not introduce . . . Matt Love is substituting for Betty Nippi-Albright. And you'll have an opportunity at the end for some closing comments if you'd like. The floor is yours, Mr. Love.

**Mr. Love:** — No hard feelings, Mr. Chair. Happy to be here tonight. Thanks to all of our officials and committee members who are here. We'll see if we use the fullness of our time. I think that, you know, most of my questions will be on the fund formerly known as the federal Gas Tax Fund, the Community-Building Fund. Just wondering if the minister or any officials can just provide any more updates. Is there anything unique about the funding in this year that would be, you know, dissimilar to previous years as far what municipalities can affect how that funding will be rolled out, when it will be delivered? Is there anything different than the other years in this agreement between the province and the country?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So there would be no difference as far as kind of the rollout of the dollars, and municipalities are pretty used to this. The difference is it's not quite doubling, but doubling the funding that's coming from the federal government. And that's what brings us back here. But as far as the program itself and kind of the eligibility of what projects would be eligible, that still remains the same.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, I think that answers my question. As this is a doubling up, I just wanted to check in and see if there was anything different than what is done in a typical year, which this is certainly not a typical year by any means.

I guess I'm wondering if the minister can comment at all on have you received any feedback or criticism from municipalities on how the program is administered, as far as I did notice on the government website that there's several tools there to help municipalities to file their infrastructure investment plans and there's some checklists and other supporting documents. Have you received any feedback from municipalities, you know, this year or in previous years that you've used to improve how these funds are delivered?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — What I would say is that, you know, this has been a program that's been around for a while. So it's quite stable; you know, there hasn't been a lot of changes. Municipalities are very familiar with the program. We haven't really received a lot of complaints, you know, with that money flowing out to the municipalities. Quite often we don't receive complaints when money's flowing out to municipalities. But



having said that, sometimes there is some issues with a particular program, but this has been very stable over the last number of years.

I would say, and this is just not necessarily specific to the gas tax, but meeting with a number of mayors and again meeting with the mayor from Moose Jaw today, just some of the issues — and I guess some councillors from Fort Qu'Appelle that I was talking to just the other day — is the kind of inflation or the costs have risen of so much of the infrastructure that they want to put in place.

You know, they would have budgeted certain things a year or two or three ago, and you know, due to some of the pressures with supplies being delivered, supply chains being broke, contractors being very busy, there has been quite an inflation rise in projects that they thought they were going to come in at a certain price. And that has changed, which has nothing to do with the program.

It has everything to do with kind of where we are in the world today and in the economy today here in Saskatchewan where, you know, depending on what you're contracting, what your business is as far as a contractor, you're in demand. And there's not too many that are sitting around looking for work. There's more work than there is time for so many of them. And as a result, that tends to inflate the costs for municipalities that are putting, you know, together whatever the projects may be.

So that would be the concern, but not concern necessarily with the program itself. Right, and just to mention that the money from the federal government was received on July 23rd and distributed to eligible municipalities in August. So the money is out there. It's doing its work. But that's, you know, what they're running into as far as inflationary costs.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, I guess that that kind of leads . . . a follow-up question does have to do with like inflationary costs. And as you rightly pointed out, you know, these projects are getting more expensive. For my own sake of clarity, I understand there's some indexing with this fund, like year-over-year indexing. Do you have any comments on that? Like that's obviously not keeping up right now with our inflation, but I think in most years it would be in the ballpark. Have you received any questions?

Or you know, and I hear what you're saying. You're probably not getting a lot of pushback. Folks, you know, municipalities like this program. It's money coming their way for projects that they need. But just in relation to the indexing of the program and where we're at right now with inflation, do you have any comments on that? Or have you received any feedback related to that?

**Mr. MacDonald:** — Thank you very much. Jeff MacDonald, executive director, municipal infrastructure and finance branch.

So the program itself is 10 years. And so part of our agreement with Canada is that there is some indexing that happens every couple years. And so that will happen in '22-23.

[17:45]

So our amounts are allocated each year, out for the 10 years. And so in '20-21 as an example, we roll it out on a per capita basis. It

was about \$60.05. In '21-22 that number will jump up to 61.80. And then in '23-24 as an example, that number will be increased to 64.20. So it was a part of the original agreement to have some recognition of increase.

And so the top-up payment itself though, was just a straight-up matching of our previous year's funding, and so they just topped it up, if you will.

**Mr. Love:** — Great. I appreciate that. That helps, you know, clarify the information that I received.

I suspect I might already know the answer to this because we're well into this program, right? It's not new. But do you have any municipalities who failed to qualify for the grant or who struggled to, you know, maybe it's a smaller RM [rural municipality], there's been a change of personnel. And for whatever reason, do you have anyone who fails to qualify for the grant? And have you identified any roadblocks for supports you give when maybe an administrator changes? How do you support a municipality to ensure that they get this, you know, money flowing from the federal government?

**Mr. MacDonald:** — Thanks for the question again. So our 10-year agreement with Canada was split into two five-year chunks. So '19-20 was a renewal period where everyone had the opportunity to participate again, if you will. And so the key piece, in order to participate there's some basic requirements. You need to submit infrastructure investment plans. You need to annually report on your progress for projects, is what municipalities are required to do. And we also require that they have valid financial statements submitted to us and that those are audited and verified.

For the 2019-20 renewal period, in our existing group we had 14 municipalities that chose not to participate in the program. And we've got approximately 73 communities currently that are non-compliant in one way or another. And we work very hard on a day-to-day basis to get them compliant, make sure that they're meeting the requirements in order to stay in the program.

We've got a compliance model that we've developed which allows a three-strike opportunity, if you will. So we do a notification. We give 30 days for folks to become compliant, second letter, third letter. And so overall that can be well over a year if you're into that non-compliant stream to get folks back on track. And we find for the most part we have some success. In our renewal period here now, we've only got one community that's been removed since the renewal period in '19-20.

**Mr. Love:** — Are you able to report to the committee, maybe with a tabled answer, on what those communities are that are either not participating or not complying? Or is that something that you're not able to report on? I'm just curious on the location or the types of communities, large, small. Is that something that you're able to answer?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'll maybe take that. We can certainly table those communities so that you can have a look at them. It's not our wish to have communities not receive these funds. And it's not only whether it's this, but revenue sharing or any of the other programs, it's revenue that we're trying to get to the municipality.

And so we, as Jeff said, we work very hard with these communities to bring them into compliance because we want that money to flow. It doesn't help us . . . You know, I don't even exactly know what happens, how it goes back in. But it's held there and as Jeff said, three strikes. But it's held there, and you know, we give them every opportunity not to swing at that third strike.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, I'm actually looking at the list of communities and the funding that they've received, and it's exhaustive. So I've no doubt that there's a lot of effort that goes in to get everyone into that group.

I'm wondering if you could just comment on like, what are some of the things that lead to non-compliance? Is it maybe not having a qualified administrator? Not submitting their audited financial statements? Like what are the things, without naming a community, what are some of the things that lead to either choosing to not participate or getting to that three-strike level?

**Mr. MacDonald:** — Yes, thanks for the question. The easy answer is some of it is the basic requirements of the program itself. So not submitting an infrastructure investment plan to us to allocate the funds becomes an issue. Financial statements, I had mentioned, making sure that we have submitted audited financial statements.

Projects need to align with the outcomes of the program. So it has to be an eligible project. And so while we can get an infrastructure investment plan, you'll check the box, if you will, of submission, but it also needs to then be eligible. We'll measure against that. And then of course the annual expenditure report to show us progress on how those funds have been spent. And so those are the primary kind of focal points of how you could become non-compliant.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — And I would just add to that that generally, and you know, I don't have the list in front of me, but it's smaller communities that really struggle with capacity at that administrator's level. And it's unfortunate because, you know, even the smallest community is eligible for this funding that could help them in whatever it would be, as long as the project is eligible. But it's the capacity within that local municipality in generally very small communities.

**Mr. Love:** — So I wasn't really prepared to ask about this, but since our discussion has kind of gone there tonight, there might be some gaps in my wording. But I know that there was a change recently to require every municipality, regardless of size, to have their own qualified administrator, which there's some geographical issues to that. There's capacity issues, all these types of things where I've heard from some, you know, resort villages that have a year-round census of, you know, in the teens, but they need to have an administrator, too.

And that can be challenging because a lot of folks don't live there year-round but they still have infrastructure for their peak seasons. And I think that you understand the problem I've identified here. Have you had any issues where there was the town struggling to recruit or retain a qualified administrator that led to them not being able to access these federal funds?

**Mr. Green:** — Sheldon Green, assistant deputy minister. Thank

you for the question. I don't have any specific examples of where there's been an administrator certification issue tied directly to a situation of non-compliance or unable to trigger Gas Tax funds.

The work of putting in these provisions was originally at the request of urban municipal administrators actually. The association had asked a number of times. And so we did look at it, and we did speak to the other municipal associations as well about whether this was an appropriate move to make, because the first time that there was a change to the population criteria to tighten up the legislative requirement to have a certified municipal administrator occurred in approximately 20 years ago.

And at that time we'd been under that regime where across the bulk of Saskatchewan, municipalities outside of cities that had a population of 100 or less could be exempted and not required to have a certified administrator. And typically that number of municipalities in that group would range, I think in the 2016 census when it first came out, under 100. There was about 137 communities that would fall into that just based on population. We do know anecdotally that some of those municipalities did have certified administrators. Some of them shared them with another community and had those arrangements, but many didn't.

With the change, as I said, that was requested through the municipal sector to look at . . . that we gave a grace period. We discussed it and consulted with the sector before the policy was brought and approved through government, and it had an implementation date for January 1st of 2021. So we're just a few months, or I guess a first year into this new arrangement. And we have heard some instances where communities are saying, particularly very small communities that don't offer full-time employment to their administrator, of expressing that they're trying to come up with a different model for themselves to be able to meet the criteria.

We're actively working with communities in conversations around things that they can do commonly. We're encouraging them to work with their neighbours if they want to continue. If they believe that, you know, any questions about them restructuring their governance is not where they want to go, then we encourage them to work with their neighbours to try and have a certified administrator in place.

The certification of administrators occurs outside of government. There's an Urban Board of Examiners and a Rural Board of Examiners on each of the urban and rural side. And those organizations are established under statute where, for example, the Urban Municipal Administrators' Association is established by SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], the urban municipalities group, and the Urban Municipal Administrators' Association of Saskatchewan, and they form that Urban Board of Examiners.

That board has the authority and it does the certification for all of the urban administrators in the province. Under their Act and their practices, they would have the authority to change up in terms of determining how they provide conditional certification.

And it's typically, what I'm seeing and hearing that communities are doing, is that in some cases where they have a person that's retiring, they're working through those issues. In others where

they're looking at a vacancy, there are conditional certificates being provided. If people are willing to enrol in, for example, the local government authority program at the University of Regina is one of the long-standing paths that people use to obtain certification. And so there's a variety of tools to help resolve that. And you know, we continue to try and provide advice.

We've been tracking . . . I guess the point I wanted to make was we've been tracking for a number of years how many municipalities share administration. And I don't have the exact statistic in front of me, but it would be well in excess of 100 different situations where an administrator is serving more than one municipality.

So we think that's a very viable alternative particularly in that public administration, not only for us at the provincial level but at the municipal level, doesn't get simpler with each year. The complexities of the work continue to grow along with the evolution of society's needs for public service. And so it makes a lot of sense for communities to work together and offer a full-time position. And that way they can be better served and better deliver the kinds of programs that the residents need and look after the assets and so forth that they have under management.

**Mr. Love:** — Have you received any advocacy from New North to assist northern municipalities to meet compliance for . . . I guess we should focus on these grants, but I'm curious with all, you know, with municipal revenue sharing too. But let's just focus on these, because that's what's before us tonight. Have you received any advocacy from them or any . . . yeah, any advocacy so that northern municipalities can get the money that you want them to have, that they want to have? Has there been any discussion with that group?

**Mr. Green:** — Yes, actually there has been. We've talked to . . . New North has had a proposal that they are interested in advancing, what they're referring to as a regional administrator support program. And it's one the ministry is interested in wanting to assist them with. We have, as officials, discussed some possible funding options for them, and we're very excited for that initiative to proceed when New North is ready to advance it. They're proposing a three-year pilot that would have certified administrators that would be able to work for New North, as I understood the proposal, and be available and going into communities on a pilot for a number of years and deliver training and support services in ways to help ensure that existing administrators can obtain certification. It's a model that I'm very interested in seeing how that would work.

[18:00]

In addition to that, we've also discussed, not only with New North but with the other municipal associations at an officials level, about having a circuit rider-type program where we could have a certified administrator that could complement the work that New North wants to do, and also visit communities on a rotational basis with the 24 northern municipalities as a long-standing model, perhaps, of support. Because as remote communities, not only in the south but particularly acute in northern locales, being able to access professionals, whether it's accountants or engineers or certainly administrators, is a challenge. So we have had discussions with all municipal associations about those kinds of challenges that can arise.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay, sounds good. Thanks for that. I really appreciate the answer there, and I hope we can continue this discussion in the spring as far as hearing more about supporting all municipalities to be compliant and eligible. I think that's everyone's wish, you know. I believe that to be true. So thanks for that answer.

I'll just wrap up our time here. Just a couple questions about the \$2 million that went to the FSIN. Maybe a two-part question. Like, that money has already gone out the door. It's being used, and I think resounding support in the province for the government to support this important work. I'll just go with one question. Is the government providing any funds for similar investigations at the sites of Timber Bay or Ile-a-la-Crosse residential schools that were not federally run but provincially supported?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So this of course all stemmed from, you know, the news that came out of Kamloops and how it kind of jolted the country I think. And so it was really all targeted to the federal residential school piece. And that's where our money has gone to the FSIN, is to look into the residential school piece that was federally run. None of the money that we have allotted, the \$2 million, I don't believe that that is going to those schools that you identified. It's more the federal issue through the residential schools that the federal government was responsible for.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay. And is there any . . . You know, seeing as how this has already gone out the door, I guess, what was in the agreement with the FSIN to deliver that \$2 million to them? Was there any strings or conditions attached, reporting or otherwise, to ensure that they had the funds to do this important work?

**Mr. Miller:** — Greg Miller, deputy minister of Government Relations. So with respect to the money that was flowed out through FSIN, the money went out to the FSIN. They established a secretariat, a secretariat to support communities to do this, and I would say to deeply contextualize the examinations at each residential school. The things that are on the table in terms of the work — and this is ongoing work and will continue to be so — would include, you know, in the best judgment of the communities there has to be different things occur.

This would cover such things as ceremonies associated with the examination of sites, potential sites; knowledge gathering, there's a body of knowledge within communities to contextualize the past. There's a lot discussed on the surface about the search, but it's, you know, sort of deeper than that search piece, certainly being there to perhaps memorialize the findings that occur.

And then finally of course, and broadly, to support the mental health of communities associated. This is deep work and requires support of both the community at large, also the people doing the investigation. But these are things that are being determined by FSIN in their good judgment and working in partnerships between FSIN, ourselves as provincial government, and certainly ongoing conversations with our federal colleagues.

**The Chair:** — Well, thank you for that. Having reached our agreed-upon time for the consideration of the supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Government Relations, we will now proceed to vote. Do you have any closing comments? Mr. Love and then the minister.

**Mr. Love:** — I'll just say thank you to all committee members and officials and the minister for the conversation tonight. I look forward to continuing the conversation in the spring as it relates to other estimates for Government Relations, but thank you for the answers and for working with our municipalities. Thanks to Hansard and to everyone for being here tonight.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'd also like to thank the officials for being here. Very well served by this group. They know their files so very well. So thanks for being here.

**The Chair:** — Awesome, thanks. Seeing no more questions, we'll proceed to vote.

2021 supplementary estimates no. 1, vote 30, Government Relations municipal relations, subvote (GR07), in the amount of \$60,000,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs, subvote (GR 12), in the amount of \$2,000,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Government Relations, vote 30, \$62,000,000. I'll now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2022, the following sums for Government Relations in the amount of \$62,000,000.

**Mr. Grewal:** — I so move.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Grewal. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. We will now have a brief recess to change officials. Thanks, everyone, for your time.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates — No. 1  
Corrections, Policing and Public Safety  
Vote 73**

**Subvote (CP06)**

**The Chair:** — Welcome back, everyone. Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. We will now consider the supplementary estimates for vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. I'd ask if officials who are not seated at the table wish to speak, they take a place at the table prior to doing so. Also officials, please don't touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn them on for you when you speak.

Minister, if you could please introduce your officials and make your opening comments. And then I've also got, just for a quick introduction, we've got Nicole Sarauer, who's substituting for

Betty Nippi-Albright. And you'll have a chance for opening comments after the minister. Minister, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And if it's all right with you, when the officials come and sit at the table they introduce themselves if that's okay. Is that fine?

**The Chair:** — Okay. Good.

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — Okay. All right, thank you. I'm pleased to attend committee here tonight to provide you with some information regarding the additional funding provided to the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety for the 2021-22 fiscal year.

The ministry requires additional funding of 7.614 million in 2021-2022 to support the operation of the province's correctional facilities. A significant portion of these costs are related to measures being taken to respond to the pandemic in our correctional facilities. The correction facilities are also facing salary and overtime pressures, as well as other operational pressures such as food service.

The provincial disaster assistance program requires additional funds of \$900,000. This is due to increased demand for compensation for uninsurable losses as a result of natural disasters, principally flooding.

As the province's lead agency for the pandemic response, the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency is faced with substantial, unanticipated expenditures of 72.125 million; 58.44 million of this amount is in response to fighting wildfires. The remaining portion is for pandemic-related measures, such as operating the provincial emergency coordination centre; 446,000 will be provided to the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] for the provision of biology casework management analysis work. Finally, 80,000 is to support the Correctional Facilities Industries Revolving Fund due to a reduction in the sales since the start of the pandemic.

I would now be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have on these additional costs for the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. Ms. Sarauer, the floor is yours. I'll give you an opportunity for closing comments as well. The floor is yours.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Minister Tell, for your opening comments. Let's start with the increase for Corrections. You mentioned, Minister Tell, that that was for salary and overtime and food service. Could you provide some further information please.

**Ms. Scriver:** — Heather Scriver, assistant deputy minister for custody, supervision, and rehabilitation services. The year-to-date COVID-19 costs in terms of salaries, that entails the correctional officers on our assessment and isolation units. Nurses, we have maximized all our part-time nurses, meaning giving them full-time hours. And we have had to bring in additional nurses to assist with the COVID duties. Cleaning staff, we have cleaning staff that are in the facilities to ensure that the high-touch, high-volume areas are cleaned.

We also have pandemic teams that were established, and this assisted with the communication and the logistics with the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] in terms of masking, what isolation means, self-monitoring, on-site training for the offenders, on-site training for our staff to understand the protocols that needed to be implemented.

We had to restart . . . So this again, now we've restarted the mandatory training that was paused due to COVID. Like our CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] and first aid and our induction training has restarted. Our vaccine and staffing issue, so for our staff to leave the facilities — and I'm talking about the correctional facilities — for three hours, we had to have backfill for them. So there were costs associated with that to get the vaccine.

[18:15]

White Birch has now reopened. So the staff that was taken out of White Birch when we closed it to help relieve the pressures on the facilities, once we opened up White Birch again of course those staff had to come back. And we had availability of staff, so when staff had to self-isolate or they had to stay home or were sick, we needed to have backfill for those folks as well. And we've actually already exceeded our budget for our contingency plans, because we do have the assessment units open and the isolation units still functional. So in terms of salaries, that is some detail to that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. The minister also mentioned food service.

**Ms. Scriver:** — Yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Could you provide some information about that too?

**Ms. Scriver:** — Sure. So in terms of food services, because of the isolation units and the assessment units, we had to use Styrofoam containers. So a lot of that cost are Styrofoam containers for those areas that were quarantined or isolation units and the assessment units.

We also had money that needed to go towards additional food provisions that Compass purchased at our request. So in terms of Gatorade for the offenders, or other snacks that were purchased during COVID, we would request that Compass would purchase them and we'd have to reimburse them for the money. And this also includes any other special meals that were prepared, you know, on our Indigenous Peoples Day. We still celebrated those days. And so that's over and above the costs that . . . it's outside the daily costs of our food contract.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Could you explain how much of this is still an ongoing budget issue? For example, are you still seeing pressures on overtime and salaries? And are you still using these containers, the Styrofoam containers for food services?

**Ms. Scriver:** — Yes. Yes, we are. We have not reduced our protocols in terms of COVID. So we are still using the same measures that we implemented during phase 1, phase 2, and phase 3.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So do you anticipate that these overtime pressures will continue on into the near future?

**Ms. Scriver:** — Yes. It's unpredictable at this point, you know, with this new variant entering now. It's unknown to us how it's going to impact us. But I'm confident that we'll mitigate any significant risk of contamination of our facilities based on the protocols that we've put in right now.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And just moving on to those protocols, I think you already answered this question but I just want to clarify. Are new inmates that enter the facility, are they still being required to self-isolate for 14 days regardless of their vaccination status?

**Ms. Scriver:** — That's correct.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I've heard from some stakeholders who are concerned about the mental health impacts that this self-isolation can have on inmates. What is being done by Corrections to address this issue?

**Ms. Scriver:** — We have our chaplains are available and active within our facilities as is our cultural coordinators, the elders that we have on contract. We've bought puzzles, books, games for the offenders. And in fact, you know, it's the communication with them just so they can understand what's going on, is quite effective. And we've bought Gatorade for them or snacks just to help appease the time that they're on self-isolation.

In regards to visiting, we do do our video visiting. And we also have Telmate pads that have applications for offenders. There's, you know, they can research law library and do some apps on the Telmate.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Can you speak a bit more about this video visiting, because it's relatively new.

**Ms. Scriver:** — Yes, you're correct. It is new. It allows a family member to actually link online and have a video visiting session with the client.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So does an inmate have to pay for this service? Is it free? How often can an inmate access this service?

**Ms. Scriver:** — It would be similar to what we do with our regular visiting program in terms of how often that they can visit. I'm not entirely sure if there is a cost for the video visiting. I can get back to you on that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — That would be great if you could look into that and let me know.

**Ms. Scriver:** — Yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Do you know how many tablets, iPads, whatever you use, are available in which correctional facilities?

**Ms. Scriver:** — I'm sorry. I don't have that information.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — That's okay. If you could endeavour to look into that and provide that information in the future, that would be appreciated.

**Ms. Sriver:** — Yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What about access to phoning for individuals? You mentioned that they have access to Telmate. Is there a reduced cost to Telmate for those who are having to self-isolate?

**Ms. Sriver:** — To my knowledge, no. There is not. It's the same cost.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What other COVID precautions are still in place in correctional facilities?

**Ms. Sriver:** — We had the biohazard cleanup. So we have cleaning protocols in all the facilities that have been enhanced and include measures such as cleaning the telephones after each and every use, and again like I mentioned earlier, the frequent high-traffic, high-touch areas. We have professional contracted cleaning services to come in to, you know, on a routine basis to clean the facilities to ensure that we have a high standard of cleanliness. All of our custody facilities have deployed the fogging machines.

In terms of protective personal equipment, on November 25th, 2020 we made masks mandatory for all our offenders in general population units who had already been cleared of the mandatory 14-day assessment period. And then as of September 15th, 2021, continuous masking remains mandatory for all staff, offenders, and civilians entering our facilities, regardless of purpose. And all staff have access to hand washing and sanitization supplies, and the offenders have access to hand washing and also have supervised access to hand sanitizer and those things.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Are there any rules around prisoner transports, moving inmates from facility to facility?

**Ms. Sriver:** — Yes, so I need to just grab my other papers. You know, my apologies, I don't have that information with me right now. We do not transport positive-COVID offenders within the province. We don't cross-contaminate, and we make sure that we know the status of the offenders when they leave. When they leave the facility, they're tested, and then when they're at the receiving end, they're tested again.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So just to confirm, any inmate who is transferred from facility to facility is tested prior to transport and tested at the conclusion of that transport?

**Ms. Sriver:** — That is my understanding, yes. So I found the information on Telmate.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Oh, awesome.

**Ms. Sriver:** — So it's the tablet. So offenders pay five cents per minute for all time spent accessing pay-for-use services. Family and friends pay \$50 per message because you can send messages back and forth, and 35 cents to upload a profile or photo or whatever on the tablets for the offenders. They can make the deposits and upload photos by the inmate telephone link that they have access to them, or they may deposit the funds in a Synergy kiosk in Canada.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sorry, could you repeat how much the cost was for a message?

**Ms. Sriver:** — Fifty cents per message.

**A Member:** — Yeah, she said \$50.

**Ms. Sriver:** — Did I say \$50?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I thought you said \$50. I was a bit concerned about that. Okay, 50 cents. Just to clarify, 50 cents per message.

**Ms. Sriver:** — Sorry about that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — That's okay. I'm curious about, I didn't know there was the ability to send photos. Could you expand on that?

**Ms. Sriver:** — Well the offenders do not have a direct connection to the internet, and the tablets are connected to the vendor's server, which limits the connections and restricts the list of allowed things on the devices.

Web pages are approved by the facility, and all links at the web page are removed to ensure that offenders can't navigate in and out of unapproved web pages. And their friends and families have to be added to their account, and they have to create an account to become active on the system.

In terms of the photo gallery, that I'm not well versed on, so I can get information for that as well.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And these are only available for those who are self-isolating, or is it . . .

**Ms. Sriver:** — No, no.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — For everybody?

**Ms. Sriver:** — Everybody, yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. And this is different than the video conferencing?

**Ms. Sriver:** — Yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. Thank you for the clarification. And I'm glad we clarified the cost of the message.

Do you know how many correctional staff have tested positive since the spring of 2020? March of 2020, to be clear.

**Ms. Sriver:** — Well I have staff recoveries, as of yesterday, were 279.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Do you have that separated by their job title?

**Ms. Sriver:** — No, I don't have that level of detail.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. Do you know how many of those are food service workers?

**Ms. Sriver:** — No, this would just be for the government workers, not contracted workers.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. Does the government have that information?

**Ms. Scriver:** — I don't know, but I could find that out.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. Do you have knowledge of how many staff have had to self-isolate because they were deemed close contacts?

**Ms. Scriver:** — I would not have that information. The SHA and Public Health would have those records.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Could you speak a bit about these established pandemic teams you spoke about earlier?

**Ms. Scriver:** — Sure. So it is a team at each correctional facility and at the youth facilities as well, that people put their hands up and voice an interest in becoming kind of the subject matter experts as a liaison with the Saskatchewan Health Authority. And just, they would, you know, troubleshoot. If there was an outbreak in the facility they would educate the staff and the offenders on, you know, what to expect and how to remain safe. They were really the communication link from staff to the offender population, and they've proved very, very valuable.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Are they still all active in all facilities?

**Ms. Scriver:** — They're not active, but they can be deployed and activated right away.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is there just one central one, or one for each facility?

**Ms. Scriver:** — Yes, one for each facility.

[18:30]

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I believe, based on what you've told me, that the majority of this additional funding is for salaries, like you've stated. Is there anything that needed to be done structurally that is a part of this budget item?

**Ms. Scriver:** — No.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I'm going to move on to PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program]. You mentioned that there was an increase in demand for uninsurable losses, in particular due to flooding. Could you expand on that, please?

**Mr. McAvena:** — Noel McAvena, the acting executive director of the provincial disaster assistance program. Yes, so PDAP continues to see requests for assistance as a result of disasters within the province. Specifically this year we've had some ice storms in the Melville area that caused quite a bit of a response and also some flooding in Regina, which created demand for the program.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Do you have a breakdown in the money by region, by disaster?

**Mr. McAvena:** — I do not have that with me here for each municipality, but I'd be happy to provide that information to you.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. How many applications for the provincial disaster assistance program has the Public Safety Agency approved since April 1st?

**Mr. McAvena:** — So it wouldn't be the Public Safety Agency approving those. It would be the provincial disaster assistance program. But in terms of claims for '20-21, we've had four municipal designations and accepted 33 private applications.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Just so I understand for my own knowledge, and forgive my ignorance, you've spoken about some specific disasters. Were any of the wildfires also included under this?

**Mr. McAvena:** — So we haven't received claims for wildfire damages or designation requests related to wildfires specifically with the PDAP program. There are other areas of the ministry obviously that have been involved in wildfires, but not our program.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Right, Public Safety Agency side. Does the ministry anticipate a continued increase in demand moving forward into future years for PDAP applications?

**Mr. McAvena:** — Yeah. I expect that we will continue to see disasters within the province of Saskatchewan, and there is a need for a program such as PDAP to respond to those types of disasters. As to the quantity or timing of it, I'm afraid we're at the mercy of the weather for that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Right, but there is of course a budgeting process and an estimation that has to occur moving forward, thinking to 2022. Is there any indication or thought that it may continue to increase in future years?

**Mr. McAvena:** — So the approach that the province has taken towards budgeting for the PDAP program is that the budget established is for a baseline level of operations. And any specific disasters within the year are requested through supplementary estimates, such as these, to fund the programming.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So the ministry then budgets for zero, and then any applications that come in then will have to come in through supplemental estimates is what you're telling me?

**Mr. McAvena:** — Any significant amount. There is a nominal amount for baseline activity.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Do you have that nominal amount available?

**Mr. McAvena:** — Yes. It was 550,000. Okay.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Going to move on to the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency. I'm curious to know how many FTEs [full-time equivalent] are involved in the SPSA's [Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency] pandemic response operations.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Marlo Pritchard, president of the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency. And I'm sorry, could you repeat the question please.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yes. Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Pritchard. How many FTEs are involved in the SPSA's pandemic response operations?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — That would be a very fluid number. We are involved in the 1-855 line with the business response team, and that ebbs and flows in regards to the demand. And you know,

probably at peak time, we probably had 30 FTEs working, whether it's full-time or part-time, answering phones. We had a number of our wildfire staff in the different regions assisting SHA with nurses. We assisted in La Loche, going door to door with SHA nurses doing a vaccine rollout. So any given day it could have been 10 or it could have been 25, 30.

We also assisted with logistics in regards to moving equipment; so again, having them in the field but moving equipment in. Earlier in the pandemic, we assisted communities in regards to setting up self-isolation. So again, when you've got the logistics staff, I know for a fact that sometimes when we were moving trailers, we'd have 10 or 12 staff just moving the trailers, the individuals that would be assigned to it. So again, that would depend on the situation.

We have had staff working with PPE, moving PPE to different communities. So again, to pick the exact number of staff that were involved at any given time, it would be hard to actually quantify. But again, if you look at the whole trail of it, we would have had staff at our base in Nisbet that were working with the logistics, putting the PPE together. We had a committee that was in Regina that worked across ministries in identifying the needs. And then of course we would have our staff at the location wherever the PPE was going to help with distribution.

So that's just some examples. We have the provincial emergency operations centre going. That again is based on need and activities. So at any given time we could have a low of five individuals working full-time and expanding up to 15, 20, and that's just from the SPSA. We would still have SHA, Ministry of Health individuals in regards to the PEOC [provincial emergency operations centre], and I'm sure I've missed . . . There was a lot of activities, but to pick a specific number of individuals would be very difficult.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Maybe we should take a step back. You can understand this is a new area for me, and I'd like to understand it better. Could you talk to me broadly speaking about how the SPSA operates?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — In regards to the COVID or in regards to everything?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Everything, and then we'll move to COVID unless that's too hard to separate right now.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — No, actually the SPSA is, I guess, a multi-faceted agency. We have the Sask911, I guess, umbrella that looks after the 911 calls for the fire services. We partner with two other PSAPs [public safety answering points], which is the Regina Police Service and Saskatoon Police Service, and of course assist with the RCMP. Part of that is the PPSTN [provincial public safety telecommunications network] network which is all the radio towers and equipment that keeps us connected.

We have our air operations, which has a number of air assets and staff that assist in regards to wildfires and wildfire suppression. And I did miss that. We did use our air assets to move vaccines to some of the northern . . . [inaudible] . . . So we have used our air assets for other aspects.

We have our ground operations, which is again multi-faceted. We have both our own staff that deal with wildfires and suppression efforts. We have a number of staff that assist with communities in regards to emergency planning and preparedness, so again encouraging both First Nations and non-First Nations communities to develop a plan, building capacity.

We also have the fire commissioner and a number of investigators that go out and work on both First Nations communities and non-First Nations communities in regards to fire investigations, assisting fire services. We do certification of fire services across the province in regards to training and assisting in that.

Again I'm sure I'm missing some, but as you can understand our purpose is around public safety. And it's both man-made or natural disasters, and it's both leading up to and through the prevention, response, and then of course the recovery and whatever that looks like. We have staff that are trained specialists in floods and fires and in investigations. And so that's kind of it at a very high level of what we're all about.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. That's very helpful. I appreciate that a lot. When did the SPSA get involved with COVID?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — It would have been right at the start, March 2020, maybe even a little earlier. We were involved in supporting both SHA, the Ministry of Health. One of our first focuses was bringing in or trying to acquire PPE because there was a vast shortage of that. So again working with partners across ministries, bringing in PPE for everybody — first responders, communities, First Nations, corrections — and bringing in as much as we could get to support and protect the people of Saskatchewan.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And can you speak a little bit about how now — correct me if I'm wrong — now this organization is sort of the main driver of the COVID response. I'm probably using a term . . . you'd prefer a different term. You're welcome to correct me. Can you kind of explain to me the fold-in and the change and now what this role looks like for you and your organization?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — I will try. Okay, the initial response from SPSA was again responding across ministries — across government, in all fairness — and supporting our first responders . . . [inaudible] . . . PPE. We had our staff, as you're quite aware of, doing some, you know, blockades and supporting communities in regards to safety of those communities. We moved a lot of logistics. We set up the isolation camps up in La Loche and some other communities, and as I mentioned earlier about the vaccines. We continue to do that as a support role, assisting with logistics, storing PPE.

And then moving into now, it's called an incident command system, ICS. Our staff are trained on that. And really what that is, is a way of managing an incident or a crisis or a disaster in a very systematic approach and managing the information flow. So when we were asked to — and it's not lead; it's coordinate is probably the best word by utilizing that system — coordinate with both the Ministry of Health and the SHA and ourselves, reporting up to our ministers from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Addictions, and Ministry of Corrections and Policing. So those, we report up to our oversight.



And we have a number of different, I guess, management units with the PEOC, which is the provincial emergency operations centre. And it is about managing information, identifying needs, both from the SHA, Ministry of Health, communities, whatever the issue is. And we are either, you know, doing or helping coordinate that information flow so that decisions and actions can take place.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. That was very helpful. When exactly was SPSA asked to take over this coordination role?

[18:45]

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Okay, it would have been early October, is when I was originally asked. And we would have initiated it. It would have been October the 7th when it went live. I might be out a day or so, but it was about approximately October 7th. There was a little bit of a lead-up to that, of course, with the conversations on what it would look like or what it could look like. We were asked to put a proposal together, more verbal than it was because it was rather, you know, to get it up and running as quick as possible.

But again it's not a new system. The system has been designed for floods and fires and any other disaster, in all fairness, and has been activated at different events, some smaller, some bigger. So all it is, is using in this case the pandemic, which is of course provincial-wide, and standing up an already proven system. And all we had to do was identify the key individuals to put into it and building that communication structure. You know, I won't say it was no work, but the system was already there.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Right, this is an organization that's used to handling disasters. What does that mean internally? I'm curious to know specifically how . . . Since October, how has this changed how things are operating internally with respect to COVID?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Well from my perspective and from information that I've received, it's allowed for a smoother information of information, both for the decision makers and for whoever is involved in it, because it's not just the Ministry of Health and SHA. There's a number of other individuals, whether it's education or economics, that it's allowing for that central form of all the information and it's coming out as a centre of truth for information.

It allows for streamlining of the activities, again not necessarily led by SPSA. It could be an SHA-led activity with supports from Ministry of Health, SPSA, but it has increased the speed of decision making, is what I've been told, and absolutely improved the communication.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — It sounds like a breaking down of silos, which is great to hear. The minister and I talk about this a lot in question period so that's great news. It sounds to me like it's, from your perspective, providing smoother communication internally. I'm curious to know how this has affected communicating externally to the public.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Well I would believe that it's probably increased it. We have our twice-a-week technical briefings which I'm sure you're aware of. We have, as I understand it . . . Again

you'll have to ask other people to confirm it, but I understood that the focal point of questions and concerns are coming to the SPSA and through our technical briefing, through the media. It's not scattered through a number of different ministries, so it has focused that and ensured that that clear and concise messaging and addressing concerns is going specifically on those technical briefings.

We have individuals again through the PEOC that have been assigned to deal with media inquiries and that external information flow. That doesn't mean that SHA is not, you know, doing their own public information aspects, or Dr. Shahab as you're quite aware, but they're also working with us, a part of that PEOC. So again it coordinates that messaging and we can align it, I guess, better. So whether it's better or worse, I don't think it's any worse, but I think it's very much more focused.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Who is all invited to those technical briefings?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — It's open to the media and we ask them to register. And so it ranges, I think, from a high of 15 different media outlets — and I can get who they are — down to, I think, the low we've had is eight. So it's typically open to any media that wants. We give the situational update, you know, whether it's working on vaccines or boosters or pediatric vaccines, whatever the focus that we are currently working on through the PEOC and SHA, Ministry of Health. We give that update and then we allow the media, each outlet, two questions. And sometimes that goes into four questions, but that's a good media person.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And are ministers ever at those technical briefings?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — They have been. But typically it's, I guess, the representations from all SHA, Ministry of Health. We have had Dr. Shahab of course is all part of it. But we have moved it around but for the most part it's very technical and not always the ministers.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Has this new coordination role resulted in an increase of staffing for your office?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — No, actually I won't say that. We did bring on one admin person to assist with the rollout of the rapid test kits, which is ongoing. The SPSA, to take some pressure off the SHA, took over about 90 per cent of the rollout of the rapid test kits throughout the province, and we did need a support person to bring in and to work on that, so that would be the one person.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Were there any public sector employees deployed to the ministry for pandemic response?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Sorry?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Were there any public sector employees that were from other . . . This is difficult to ask because it's very fluid from your . . . But I'm wondering specifically to Corrections, but maybe that is impossible. But you can just tell me it's impossible. Were there any ministry employees from other ministries, public sector employees, that weren't from this ministry who were deployed to this ministry for pandemic response?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Yes, there was. Early on there was a request for assistance through the PSC [Public Service Commission], through Corrections, again around the blockades or the barricades with communities. We had to bring in staff for that. So yes, there was. And I don't have those numbers in front of me, but we could find that out for you.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. If you could provide those in the future, that would be appreciated. Were there any for disaster relief as well outside of the pandemic?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — None that I can remember. We would have. If you're talking about wildfires and floods, that would have been mostly our staff or community activation groups.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. Did the ministry have to outsource at all, outside of the ministry, private contracting to supplement the pandemic response?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Are you talking individuals or equipment or . . .

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I'm talking either companies or individuals.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Just give me one second, I'll just have to ask questions.

In regards to disasters, we had no other external resources or companies for the COVID response. We did do service contracts for the CET [COVID enforcement team] members, which would be approximately . . . and the contact tracers. So probably about 25 individuals that were on service contracts.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So 25 individuals were on service contracts to do contact tracing?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Both. There would have been approximately 18 individuals that would do contact tracing in the spring, and there was between 9 and 10 individuals that were doing investigations through the COVID enforcement team.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And where did these individuals come from?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — A lot of them were retired police officers. There was a few that were not, but they were all retired professionals. But the vast majority of them were retired police.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And just to confirm, they were contracted individually? They're not through an organization.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Contracted individually, that's correct.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And that's it? I have some questions that my colleague, the critic for Health had asked in estimates yesterday to the Health minister. But yesterday the Health minister indicated that that money comes to . . . is covered by the PSA [Public Safety Agency], not Health. So I'm going to ask them to you. In particular they were around the ICU [intensive care unit] patients who've been sent to Ontario. Can you provide a breakdown of the costs associated with those patients, including any accompanying family members, and what those costs were for?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Yes, I can answer that, yes. Part of the COVID response or SPSA support to SHA was to support the logistics behind moving ICU patients and coordinating that and then supporting the support individuals or family members, whatever did go out with those patients. To date, we have spent \$142,532.32. That is based on a policy of supporting up to — not every patient had two support people — but up to two support people. We would cover accommodations. We also covered per diems for meals, taxis of course, and then the travel — whether it was flight or car — out to Ontario or whatever location that was in Ontario, whatever hospital near a city.

It also includes the cost for repatriating deceased patients in regards to getting loved ones and the family back. And currently we have four individuals that are still out in Ontario receiving care. And as of today we have one individual that is a support person that is in Ontario. So as I said, that number is to date. That will change somewhat. It won't be a huge number, but it will change somewhat.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. So the total cost you indicated was 142,000?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — 142,532.32.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Are you able to break that down into the categories that you had just listed?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — I can give you that right now. The accommodations are 37,918.16; per diems were \$27,032.02; Uber or taxi expenses was 3,716.59; and travel, which would be of course air or road, 35,753.41.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And do you have a total number of support people who had gone to Ontario?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — It appears here that total support persons travelled were 19, is what I've got here. And that's a total of 27 patients that were transferred out.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I want to ask a few more questions about the wildfire response. But thank you for this enlightening chat about how your organization has been working with COVID.

Could you elaborate a little bit on the portion of these estimates that relate to wildfires? I believe the minister said it was 58 million.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Yes, 58.44 million was response, so it was the response for fighting wildfires. As you're aware, this year was an extremely dry year. South was experiencing a drought. North was extremely dry. And there were a number of starts this year.

We had 620 wildfires, which is well over two times the average of 283. We supported four communities in regards to evacuations. We, you know, moved air scrubbers to 11 different communities because of some of the wildfires. We also set up radio comm trailers in communities to make sure the communications were there. A lot of the expense was around helicopters and air assets in regards to increased fuel costs because of the number of fire starts.

[19:00]

Our air fleet flew well over three times what they normally do, which of course increases the amount of fuel, increases the amount of maintenance, and of course the hours of the helicopters. So that is the biggest driver of the response. We had to also bring on . . . It was an extremely long season. In fact we had to keep staff on into November, which our labour services don't usually work that long.

We had to bring on a number of what we classify as type 3 firefighters, which are community-led, northern communities' supports that are trained. I believe at our peak was about 1,100. At the peak we had about 1,400 type 3 firefighters. We had to extend our type 2 firefighters, which are again community contracts. We had to extend that, and then we extended our own staff as well just because of the numbers.

So those were the drivers, just due to the vast number of starts.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Do you have the number of how much you had to increase your staff by?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — In regards to . . .

**Ms. Sarauer:** — You said you had to increase your staff.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — We didn't increase our staff. We increased the hours.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — But we did have overtime costs. But what we did do is that the type 3 community firefighters are brought on as needed. And so again if it's a slower season you may not have any type 3 firefighters, be just type 1 and type 2. This year, as I just indicated, we had 1,400 type 3's to assist us.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And can you speak a little bit about where, what communities those firefighters come from?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Just need to take one second.

Okay, back to the question. We have approximately 80 crews in the North, and I will go through a number of them here. And I will have to of course supply a detailed list, but we have crews out of Stanley Mission, Red Earth, Shoal Lake, La Loche, La Ronge, Southend, Fond-du-Lac, Timber river, Cumberland House — there's two crews out of there — Sturgeon Lake, Montreal Lake, Weyakwin, Buffalo Narrows, Dorintosh, Dillon, and Turnor Lake. That's just to name a few.

But we can get you that complete list on where every crew is. Like I said, there's a total of 80 type 2 crews. Some communities have more than one crew, of course.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I'm curious, how many of those crews had to be activated?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — We would have used all of them this year.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — All of them.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Yes, and in fact, I can tell you that we had to move crews from those communities into others. So they don't just respond to that area, that we would move them around as needed. We try to minimize that as much as we can, but we do have to move them to where the response needs to be.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — How much was budgeted for wildfires this year?

**Ms. Florizone:** — Teresa Florizone, the vice-president of corporate services at Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency. Currently, under our variable costs — and what our variable costs are costs over and above our base budget — our current base budget salaries are just for all current staff. As Marlo mentioned, that would have staff on board from April 1st to March 31st. Variable are the costs that we actually have during the year that are for costs for extraordinary events. And we have about \$14 million in our variable.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So would it be fair to say that \$14 million was how much was budgeted for wildfire disaster relief, or all disaster relief?

**Ms. Florizone:** — All disasters, currently. And as Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency, we're an all-hazards agency now. So in the past it was just wildfires. Now it is for all hazards. So it is a budget that is very sparse, I guess, for the emergency management response that SPSA does provide.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Do you know how much of that 14 million was used for which particular disaster? Could you provide that information to me please?

**Ms. Florizone:** — I'll just go on back to my . . .

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you.

**Ms. Florizone:** — So currently we have estimating forecast costs of \$73 million for wildfires, which is way beyond the \$14 million. And that's why we're here tonight, as well as other events that include the COVID response, which is another area that we've been working on for the last year as well. And in addition to that, we've actually just done some flooding which is minimal as well. And we've been out in the Yukon to help with the assistance there.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Does the minister recognize that climate change is a contributing factor to the increasingly severe forest fire seasons we have had in the past years?

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — I think it's fair to say that climate change is occurring. I guess the how and why is the question.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Does the minister have a plan to address the increasing level of forest fires, flooding, and other natural disasters linked to climate change?

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — We'll continue working with the SPSA, and following their advice and their guidance with respect to budgeting, and what they're anticipating in any given year.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is there a plan to increase the budget for these variable costs moving into the future?

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — I'm unable to speak to what we do in the future.

**The Chair:** — I'll ask the member to tie it in to the supplementary estimates, your questioning, please. Thank you.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Minister, you've mentioned some money was going to the RCMP for bio-casework. I might be getting that wrong. Is that the \$446,000 that's been allocated to them?

**Mr. Cameron:** — Good evening. Rob Cameron. I'm the ADM [assistant deputy minister] of policing. Nice to see you again. Sorry, can I get you to repeat the question one more time?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sure. I was asking for more details on the money that was provided to the RCMP. I believe it was \$446,000.

**Mr. Cameron:** — And so that's the result of an increase in the cost for the biological casework. And that relates to an adjustment of the extended benefits plan for RCMP as well as the case usage.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sorry, could you repeat that last word? As well as the what? Sorry.

**Mr. Cameron:** — Case usage. Our requests for services. So what happens is there is a number that's created out of the rolling average of two years, and then that percentage number becomes our number that we're billed. So I can give you that number if you'd like to know what it is.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Could you take a step back first and walk me through what you're talking about in terms of case usage, and just pretend I have no knowledge of what you're speaking, and talk to me like I'm a layperson just walking in off the street, so that I have a better grasp of where this money's going.

**Mr. Cameron:** — So the way it works is that when cases are brought to the lab, they tally an average for us over two years. And that number becomes our percentage rate which equates to what our cost is to the lab, or what we pay to the lab. So what's happened is, as you have an increase in cases, your number would change.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Do you have any indication as to why this case usage has increased?

**Mr. Cameron:** — No, I couldn't say why it's increased, other than I could speculate that there would be additional files coming through that require the services of the lab. But no, I couldn't say why it's increased.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And you're not sure why the additional files have . . . why the number has increased over time?

**Mr. Cameron:** — Yeah, I wouldn't be able to speak to that. I wouldn't know why that's gone up or gone down any particular year.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I actually have no further questions, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, we'll proceed to the vote, but first I will ask Ms.

Sarauer if you would like to have some closing comments, and then I'll ask the minister to also go over that. But the floor is yours.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sure. I'd like to thank everyone for being here this evening. First of all to Mr. Larsen and his team, all of the officials who are here tonight. I spoke about this a bit at Justice estimates just a few short minutes ago. It's a real pleasure to be able to see the larger official team at estimates again. I really missed you all being here last spring, and it's really nice to be able to see you all again, some new faces and some recurring ones. I always look forward to our conversations, and it's really nice to have everyone back here again. And I do really hope this is what estimates will look like again in the spring. I'm sure we all hope that.

So thank you so much for your thoughtful answers to my questions this evening. Thank you, Minister, for your answers as well and the opportunity to ask these questions. I do really appreciate it. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and all the rest of the members of the committee as well as, of course, Hansard and everyone that works at legislative services. Thank you so much.

**Hon. Ms. Tell:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course all of us, all of government wouldn't be what we are if not for all the amazing officials, very much experts in their own areas, you know, and my deputy minister of course. Committee members, thanks. You know, I know after a long day, it can . . . Yes, so he can hardly wait for me to say goodbye.

And of course you, Mr. Chair, and the Clerk who's assisting you. That's awesome. Anyway, Ms. Sarauer, thank you. And away we go. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Well thank you all. I don't think I've had a chance to thank Anne Drake, the Procedural Clerk, for just being excellent. Thank you for that. With that, I've thanked everyone, I believe. I'll continue on here.

So 2021-22 supplementary estimates no. 1, vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. Public safety, subvote (CP06) in the amount of \$73,025,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Custody, supervision and rehabilitation services, subvote (CP13) in the amount of \$7,694,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Policing and community safety services, subvote (CP15) in the amount of \$446,000, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, vote 73 — \$81,165,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2022, the following sums for Corrections, Policing and Public Safety in the amount of \$81,165,000.

Ms. Lambert. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Okay. We're now at the consideration of the report. Committee members, you have before you a draft of the second report of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. We require a member to move the following motion:

That the second report of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

Mr. McLeod. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. All right, so that completes our committee's business for tonight. I would like to thank the committee members for all of their excellent work. Again, I would like to thank Anne Drake for your excellent work and Ms. Sarauer for all of your awesome questions. And with that, I'd like to ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Ottenbreit 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 19:24.]