



STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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April 25, 2023

[The committee met at 15:30.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. My name is Terry Dennis, the Chair. With us today we have Mr. Travis Keisig, Ms. Lisa Lambert, Mr. Tim McLeod, Mr. Greg Ottenbreit, Mr. Terry Jenson filling in for Gary Grewel, and substituting is Nicole Sarauer for Erika Ritchie.

Today we will be considering the 2023-2024 estimates for vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; vote 92, Firearms Secretariat; vote 91, Integrated Justice Services; vote 3, Justice and Attorney General; and the 2022-23 supplementary estimates no. 2 for vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; vote 92, Firearms Secretariat; vote 3, Justice and Attorney General.

Following the consideration of estimates, we will consider Bill No. 99, *The Emergency 911 System Amendment Act, 2022* and Bill No. 118, *The Warrant Compliance Act*.

General Revenue Fund Justice and Attorney General Vote 3

Subvote (JU01)

The Chair: — Our first business today will be the consideration of estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, allowing for questions on integrated justice services. We will begin our consideration for vote 3, Justice and Attorney General, subvote (JU01), central management and services.

Minister Eyre is here with her officials. As a reminder, please state your name before speaking and do not touch the microphones. A Hansard operator will turn them on. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, committee members. Yes, in terms of officials, we have in the room Kylie Head, acting deputy minister, Justice and Attorney General; Max Bilson, acting assistant deputy attorney general, legal services; Tony Gerein, assistant deputy attorney general, public prosecutions; Mindy Gudmundson, acting assistant deputy minister, courts and community justice; Drew Wilby, assistant deputy minister, community engagement; Mitch McAdam, director, constitutional law; Lionel McNabb, director, family justice services; Greg Gudelot, executive director, Public Complaints Commission; Clive Weighill, Chief Coroner, the Saskatchewan Coroners Service; and my chief of staff, Ashley Boha, Mr. Chair.

So I'm pleased to provide the highlights of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's 2023-24 financial plan and to answer committee's questions.

Citizens in our province rely on the justice system to maintain public safety and provide access to important services. The justice system is complex. It spans criminal, civil, family, and regulatory matters. We strive to ensure that justice services are responsive to the needs of citizens and to the province as a whole.

There are over 1 million court appearances every year across 85 court points in Saskatchewan. The ministry coordinates and administers the services necessary to make this happen.

We protect vulnerable people in our society, including those who cannot manage financial matters independently, who suffer from interpersonal violence and abuse, and who need support during family breakdown. We ensure citizens have mechanisms they can use to resolve disputes such as those provided by the Office of Residential Tenancies and dispute resolution office. We also oversee organizations that citizens can engage with to resolve disputes with government agencies and police, such as the Highway Traffic Board and the Public Complaints Commission.

The ministry also provides a full range of legal services to government as its in-house law firm, advising it on all legal matters and representing it in the courts. We have a team of highly skilled, dedicated, and experienced people in the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General who work to stand up for our province's rights. This role has become critical as we have seen significant constitutional overreach by the federal government in recent years. In response to this overreach, we have passed *The Saskatchewan First Act* to assert our provincial jurisdiction under section 92A of the Constitution.

In terms of alignment to government's goals, this budget aligns with goals of growth that works for everyone, Mr. Chair, and a better quality of life for Saskatchewan citizens. We have increased funding for the justice system by \$3.8 million over last year. This is a 2.2 per cent increase.

When it comes to safer families, safer communities, we have two new pilot projects under way: family law screening and child support calculation. Both focus on providing better dispute resolution supports for families. We have also opened two permanent court locations in Saskatchewan to provide more access to justice for our citizens and communities.

We are providing more supports for the most vulnerable people in our province by investing new funding into second-stage housing for women and children leaving interpersonal violence and abuse.

In terms of a bit more detail about some of these new initiatives, Mr. Chair, on February 1, 2023, the Lloydminster Provincial Court opened as a permanent court location. With new funding of 389,000 to hire five new court staff, the location has been re-established after running as a circuit point for the last two years. This strengthens the court's capacity to serve communities across the area and provides more options for citizens accessing court services. We've already seen over 4,500 court appearances in Lloydminster in the first two months of operation.

On April 3, 2023, the Weyburn Court of King's Bench judicial centre and registry office opened as a permanent location. We've invested 302,000 to hire three new court staff for that location. The reopening of the Weyburn judicial centre will improve access to justice services in the city and reduce pressure on the Estevan judicial centre, which was seeing a high volume of work coming from Weyburn. This is an important step to improving efficiency, access to justice, and speed of justice. It will ... [inaudible] ... strengthen the court's ability to serve the

Weyburn area, reduce travel time, and ensure local, criminal, and civil matters are handled efficiently.

We are also hiring two new deputy registrars in the Saskatoon registry office to address workload challenges.

The serious incident response team. Mr. Chair, the Public Complaints Commission will receive 178,000 in additional funding to finalize the implementation of the serious incident response team, or SIRT. SIRT became operational on January 1, 2023. With the addition of this new funding, SIRT's annual budget is now 825,000. SIRT investigates all deaths, serious injuries, sexual assaults, and incidents of spousal violence related to the actions of on- and off-duty police officers. This ensures that the most serious incidents involving police are examined through high-quality independent investigations conducted by a civilian-led body.

Since SIRT's new legislation came into force on January 1, it's been involved in seven files. SIRT handled 17 files under its old legislation between April 1 and December 31, 2022.

In terms of pilot projects, Mr. Chair, I would like to highlight the child support calculation project. We're creating a service for the administrative calculation of child support, with a federal contribution of \$345,654 over the next three years. Parents have an obligation to financially support their children. Child support is the right of the child. This new service will align with our existing child support recalculation service to ensure that children receive the support they need after divorce or separation.

The new child support calculation service will remove barriers to establishing child support. Parents may now apply at no cost to them. They will no longer need to apply to the court and will save on court and legal fees.

Under the new service, a calculation officer will obtain current income information from the paying parent and calculate the appropriate child support amount based on federal guidelines. The officer will issue a calculation decision, which will be recognized as a legal and enforceable document. This will ensure that children benefit from the income of both parents and free up court resources to deal with more serious or complex matters.

The ministry is currently working on regulations, policies, procedures, and hiring staff, and we expect to implement the service in the fall of 2023 when the necessary legislation has passed.

In terms of the family law screening officer project, we have launched this project with a federal contribution of 1.1 million over four years. In the past, specific screening for family violence was not undertaken for a family law court file. This new project will ensure new family law files are screened to determine whether interpersonal violence could be a factor. If that is the case, supports and processes will be determined to best support those litigants. One family law screening officer is located in Regina and one in Saskatoon. This project will strengthen the justice system response to family violence and promote awareness of family violence factors in the courts.

Second-stage housing and interpersonal violence funding. Mr. Chair, we have committed 876,000 in operational funding over

three years to support second-stage housing. This funding will support intervention and counselling services for women and their children leaving interpersonal violence and abuse. Second-stage housing provides safe, affordable, longer term support for women and their children to break the cycle of violence and help them rebuild their lives.

This is part of an overall commitment of 27.5 million that we are investing this year to address interpersonal violence and abuse. This includes 134,000 to fund new victim/witness services in the Melfort area, including a new victim/witness specialist position. This position will provide court orientation and support for children and other vulnerable witnesses to help reduce fear, anxiety, and further trauma.

We are also continuing our investment in a wide variety of ongoing initiatives to address interpersonal violence and abuse, including the victim advocate case review program, which allows community experts to review closed sexual assault files, 94,000; the Face the Issue campaign, which raises awareness about interpersonal violence and available supports, 200,000; the family intervention rapid support teams, which work to proactively provide support to families in crisis, \$662,000; transportation initiatives for women and children leaving abusive situations, 170,000; and children-exposed-to-violence programming, 1.2 million.

In terms of prosecutions agents, to ensure that we are using our most experienced prosecutors to address the most serious crimes, we will continue to expand the use of prosecutions agents in the coming year. The 2023-24 budget includes 2.243 million to support this direction.

Since this initiative began in 2021, public prosecutions has increased its roster of prosecutions agents from 6 to 13. These agents include federal prosecutors, retired provincial prosecutors, and private bar lawyers. Prosecutions has also hired a director of professional development and director of agents to develop an education program to train these new agents and increase the number of agents on the roster.

The major case assistance unit. Public prosecutions has also established a major case assistance unit as announced in the 2021 Throne Speech. The total investment in the unit for 2023-24 remains unchanged from last year at 1.9 million.

The major case assistance unit includes senior Crown prosecutors assigned to handle major cases such as homicides, attempted homicides, aggravated assaults, and home invasions. These senior counsel also provide more junior counsel with mentorship and assistance on other cases throughout the province. The unit is currently carrying 50 cases involving major crimes. It has already proven itself to be an important resource in terms of the mentorship and support it provides to regional prosecutors.

With this budget, Mr. Chair, we have now also fully implemented the family dispute resolution program with an annual investment of \$640,000. It is now mandatory throughout Saskatchewan to engage in early dispute resolution processes in any contested family law dispute before taking any further steps through the court. This process empowers families to resolve issues outside of court and reduces the financial and emotional impacts of

separation and divorce.

[15:45]

We now have 143 providers recognized to deliver this service in the province. We also offer a sliding fee scale and can reduce or waive fees for low-income parties who access the service through the dispute resolution office. This program is already seeing significant results. In its first year of operation, contested family law and divorce applications have decreased by 22 per cent in Regina, Mr. Chair.

Increase to CBO [community-based organization] funding. We have also increased funding to all community-based organizations that we fund by 3 per cent this year. This means an additional \$918,000 to organizations funded through integrated justice services, such as those that respond to interpersonal violence and abuse.

In closing, Mr. Chair, the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General is taking significant steps this year to improve the administration of justice in our province. We are proud of our accomplishments over the past year, and will continue to collaborate with the courts, our stakeholders, and community partners to achieve greater success in the future.

The funding for the '23-24 fiscal year will ensure that the ministry can continue to provide a fair and accessible justice system for the people of Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you for your opening comments, Minister Eyre. I will now open it up for questions. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks. I just want to start by thanking the officials for being here this afternoon, for the work that it takes for them to be prepared for estimates. I know it's a lot of work behind the scenes for a long time, not just for yourselves but for those who you work with. So just a hearty thank you from me for all of that work leading to this afternoon.

I want to start by walking through the votes and the line changes in terms of dollars from vote to vote, just to make sure that there isn't anything that I'm missing that falls outside of the remarks that you've provided, Minister.

So I'm starting by looking at vote 3, courts and civil justice (JU03). There's a small decrease, very small decrease, in funding for court services and also a decrease in funding for dispute resolution. Can you explain those changes?

Ms. Gudmundson: — Mindy Gudmundson, assistant deputy minister for courts and community justice division. So for court services, yes, you're seeing a decrease of \$11,000. First, there's plus and minuses, so this is a net number obviously. There's an extra \$389,000 for reopening the Lloydminster Provincial Court House and adding those staff there. There's another \$302,000 being added for the Weyburn judicial centre and adding the court staff and operations for that. As the minister remarked in her opening comments, we added two deputy registrars in Saskatoon's deputy ... in the registry office there, so that's \$150,000 for those two staff.

The reductions that happened. There is \$114,000 decrease. That has to do with authentication services. So we are waiting for the federal government to still put the Apostille Convention and receive assent for that. They are indicating potentially not until 2024. So the extra funding that was provided for '22-23, we don't need it for '23-24 so that is coming away.

There's also a reduction of \$228,000, and that is related to Aboriginal court worker program. So there was an expansion that was potentially planned there starting in the '22-23 fiscal year. Once that was looked at, it was decided to hold back and see what the program actually needed. So the strategy that was being put forward for that was not likely to address the issues that we were facing there.

And then finally you're seeing is a \$611,000 decrease. That is to defer the operational funding for the provincial offences project. It's not to be implemented during the '23-24 year. We had laid in permanent resources already for that, just the funding. We haven't hired anyone behind there yet. But that project is not expected to be up and running for the '23-24 fiscal year.

Did you want the numbers for dispute resolution at the same time?

Ms. Sarauer: — Please, yeah. Thank you.

Ms. Gudmundson: — So small decrease there of \$31,000. That is all related to — make sure I get the name of it right — the family law early dispute resolution program. So that is the end of the four or five years that it's taken to put that in across the province. Again the minister alluded to that in her opening comments about that being mandatory everywhere now.

When we came to the end of the program as to how much did it need in order to run, it was less than anticipated. So instead of it needing the extra money in '23-24, we basically rebased the program, and it was a \$31,000 decrease to the program in order to have it operational.

Ms. Sarauer: — The Aboriginal court worker program, we've talked about in estimates annually now. It was one that had been reduced significantly several years back and then there was, from what I understand, an understanding by the ministry that this was a program that was met with positive reviews by the public, in particular by the judiciary. And as a result of that, the plan was to move it back up to its full complement. Why has that plan changed?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. So clearly the Aboriginal court worker program, you know, a very valuable service that, as the member knows, helps reduce court delays, reduce adjournments, helps people navigate the criminal and family justice systems, and supports restorative work in the courts.

In '22-23 we added seven court workers with dedicated funding from that year's budget. Unfortunately we lost eight court workers over the course of the year. And on average the ACWP, Aboriginal court worker program, is experiencing annual turnover of around 20 per cent.

And so based on this, we did make the decision to put the planned

expansion of the ACWP on hold while we look at these issues and some of the causes that may be impacting the overall program, you know, to make sure that there's a long-term health and consistency for the program. And so the levels really are consistent with that increase that we saw post the reduction that was referenced in '17.

This is really only about the expansion, so decided not to proceed with the incremental expansion for '23-24, hold at the current amount for '23-24. Given increased funding from the federal government is another component, and some of the current pressures that I've referenced, we're going to revisit this as we move forward.

As the member will know, the federal government provides 50 per cent for this program and as has been stated, obviously it serves an important purpose in terms of navigation through the system, and enables community supports, which are very valuable. But we also saw an increase last year from the federal government of total allocation. And it's a bit of a balance in terms of all these factors because we spend a certain amount every year; we then recoup up to 50 per cent, or the federal government's maxed capped amount, so back from them. And there was also during COVID a factor that provision of services actually fell. So again a number of competing factors.

We want to, though, retain the consistency of the program. We want to obviously ensure the continuation of the program in its strongest form, taking all of those balancing factors into account. And, Kylie, I don't know if you want to add anything.

Ms. Head: — Sure. Kylie Head, acting deputy minister. So I would just say that we are in the process of negotiating a new five-year funding agreement with the federal government. So that's one factor that's still sort of a bit up in the air for us that we are in the process of negotiating. So we want to take a little bit of time to look at how best to use that resource if there is going to be increased resources, potentially from the federal government, in addition to the resources that we would need to be putting into the program as a 50/50 cost-share.

So while continuing with the implementation of the program in year one and then moving into year two, which this would have been year two of the expansion, we determined that more analysis needed to be done to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the program. There is a number of program improvements being considered for analysis. We want to have court work services being available to everyone who needs those services. We want them offered at more court locations, including circuits. We would like to look at something like that.

Court work service is being offered in different types of areas. So adult and youth for criminal; looking at family; looking at how the court workers could best make a difference in the justice system; looking at using enhanced technology for client contact; making sure the court workers are appropriately trained and compensated, which is something that varies a little bit from service agreement to service agreement currently; looking at paralegal training and supervision that could be offered to expand the scope of court work services, and court workers supported by a team offering legal training, financial, communications, and technological support.

[16:00]

So there's a whole bunch of different factors that we could look at there to see what changes might be made to the program going forward.

So currently court workers are being asked to take on an increasing number of responsibilities such as weekend court, in-custody requests, a complicated family legal system, recent immigrants, and specialized courts. They've got a lot on their plates.

A more fulsome plan needs to be developed to address issues related to recruitment and retention of court workers. Community-based organizations express difficulty providing the necessary services due to the inability to locate the appropriate skilled resources in their local market. Of course a lot of the court workers are scattered throughout the province in rural Saskatchewan.

So deferring the expansion for '23-24 is not expected to have a significant detrimental impact on the program as it currently operates, but it will allow court services to conduct a fulsome review of the program and present options for future considerations which we would bring back at a future year.

Ms. Sarauer: — How many court workers are there currently?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — There are 27.

Ms. Sarauer: — Just moving on to the dispute resolution office and the mandatory early dispute resolution requirement now for all petitioners in family law matters. You mentioned that there is an option for the fee to be waived at the DRO [dispute resolution office] office for those matters. How often has that fee been waived?

Mr. McNabb: — Lionel McNabb, executive director, family justice services. They waive fees and they're very flexible on that. But they've waived fees 60 times.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. McNabb. As we know, for the mandatory mediation required in civil litigation files, that is covered at no cost through the DRO office. Why was there not a similar provision provided for family law clients?

Mr. McNabb: — The reason, (a) it's a pilot. Much as we've gone province-wide, we're still evaluating it. The numbers are looking good between that and we have a different program that the minister had talked about with JCCs [junior Crown counsel], but the numbers seem to be dropping quite dramatically for family law applications. But it's a pilot.

But there's also, when you do civil there's a \$300 fee to start your court application, of course, and then \$150 fee for filing your appeal on that. Well with most of the family matters what we're finding is, early dispute resolution, they don't have to do that. They're going before that. So they're starting off with really a bit . . . \$450 a head. But the numbers so far are looking very good. The resolution rate seems to be in about the 50 or 60 per cent of where they don't actually end up going to court with it.

But it's early. We're struggling with numbers so far because

we're also comparing to COVID of course. But so far it's looking positive. But that's part of the reason that we continue to evaluate the program. And to some extent if you end up not going to court, even if you have a lawyer, whether you do or not, going to a mediator is much cheaper than actually paying for your lawyer in court as well.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. A few things, feedback that I've heard so far, and understanding that this is relatively early stages. The first is concerns about the drop in numbers of petitions filed and the fact that this additional requirement, the mandated early dispute resolution, is actually deterring people from making applications, not necessarily meaning that they're resolving their matters out of court. And that will be very difficult for the ministry to be able to pick up those folks who are falling through the cracks in terms of folks who are entitled to receive, you know, child support for example. But going through the system is making it more difficult because of the mandated piece.

And then the other one I've been hearing from family practitioners about the extra financial burden of having to go through early dispute resolution at a rate, a financial rate that is completely different than their, you know, civil litigation clients who are multinational corporations that can go through dispute resolution and do so at a very different type of cost than a family law file for example.

Saying this is a pilot project, what's the plan for soliciting feedback and the review and the result? Understanding that this has been change in legislation, so I didn't realize that this was still considered a pilot. So what's the plan for reviewing it continuing down the line?

Mr. McNabb: — It is a new program, and we of course recognize there are some challenges with any new program so that's why we're evaluating it. We are also out meeting with family bar and family lawyers getting their feedback, just what you're saying as well. The dispute resolution office is very good — we talked about that earlier — getting people in and finding ways to get around charging them. Which I'm sure you are aware, Legal Aid also has their own mediation group so they handle a bunch of those. Family justice services runs walk-in Wednesdays regularly across the province so we're helping people sometimes on the front end prepare for that.

And then there's at least one or two pro bono groups that are willing to help people. But certainly, like I've said, we will continue to evaluate this and see if this is the correct way to go.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. I'm just cognizant of the time, so I'm going to move on but I very much appreciate those responses.

I'm looking at vote (JU04), legal and policy services. There was an increase for justice services and tribunal division and public prosecutions.

Ms. Gudmundson: — I'm Mindy Gudmundson. So for justice services and tribunal division, you are seeing a \$289,000 increase there. \$221,000 of that is an increase due to the transfer of some legal policy resources out of integrated justice services — so our vote 91 — and into vote 3. So that's just almost an internal transfer, inter, yeah.

There is a small portion of the justice services and tribunal division increase that's associated with the Crown counsel compensation package that came through. And then for public prosecutions, seeing a \$1.635 million increase. The majority of that is due to the Crown counsel compensation package increase. There is also \$180,000 increase. That is a transfer of a specialized prosecutor from the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. For that one we were paying for a specialized prosecutor and they were paying for a specialized prosecutor, so this is just creating a consistent model and bringing the prosecutors back to public prosecutions.

For public prosecutions there is also a \$236,000 decrease, and this is the same for what you saw in court services. This has to do with the provincial offences project not being completed this year. So that is pulling back the operational funding that is meant to support it in the long term.

There is also a \$1.2 million decrease in public prosecutions and that is to reflect the high vacancy and turnover rate that is temporarily providing savings in that area. So this is something that we have seen year over year for a number of years, and the hope is that the Crown counsel compensation package will help resolve it.

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — And, Mr. Chair, I'll just add, on the Crown compensation package we have, as stated, developed a new compensation structure for Crown counsel. We hope that this will help to recruit, retain skilled, experienced Crown counsel obviously to ensure public safety, maintain confidence in the justice system, and stand up for Saskatchewan's interests.

Saskatchewan prosecutors on both, you know, prosecutions and on the civil branch, obviously working very hard. When we look at the prosecutions side, there's a high caseload compared to other provinces — 119 cases per prosecutor here compared to 70 in Alberta. We wanted to make sure that with announcements that we've seen in recent months from Alberta, from BC [British Columbia] around compensation and the public safety angle that we are competitive and that we address not only the issue in terms of comparison with other provinces, but to make sure that prosecutions remains, and the ministry remains, an employer of choice for talented law graduates, people who are interested in coming to the ministry, and so on.

[16:15]

So we want to really bolster the amazing work that is being done, and that's why we undertook the compensation structure that you see.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Minister. I appreciate your explanation as to why the Crown counsel compensation package was created for this year. You mentioned high caseloads, some turnover rate, ensuring confidence in the justice system, as well as public safety.

In line with those reasons, can counsel who work for Legal Aid expect a similar increase in their salaries?

Ms. Head: — Kylie Head, assistant deputy minister. So Legal Aid is actually in bargaining right now, and actually in bargaining today. And so we can't really speculate in terms of

what specifically will happen. But obviously there are discussions under way currently regarding their contract.

Ms. Sarauer: — Do you have numbers available today for their file loads, average caseloads, as well as their vacancy rate?

Ms. Head: — I'll have to consult.

So the current vacancy rate for lawyers in the province is 12 per cent. And the criminal file load, each lawyer is expected to carry 225 to 275 full-service files per year. Once that starts to be exceeded, then we look at bringing in the private bar services to pick up the additional file load.

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — I'll also add . . . Sorry, Mr. Chair. Just on legal aid, and as the member will likely be aware, in the federal agreement for legal aid has been in place for decades, the province has continued to press for the federal government to bring things back and have there be a correction back to the original intended 50/50 cost-share. There has been progress in that regard.

And so to the issue of funding, the increased portion has increased along the way to close to 65 per cent. But with the federal recent increase in funding, that's come down now to closer to 60 from 65. So the 35/65 split is based on actuals of '20-21, and at that point we were spending 20 million; they were spending 7. Now they're spending 8; our 20 remains more or less the same. So same amount — 19.6 million — that we're appropriating, but they are paying a bigger share.

So that does remain a pretty hot topic in terms of, you know, at the federal-provincial table certainly in terms of that increase. And there have been some twists and turns along the way with formulas and so on and then sort of a more graduated, not sudden, change to the formula based on use. And so we continue to advocate for that, certainly with the federal government. And they have addressed that and are certainly aware of provinces concerns.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. I imagine this has come up in bargaining today. And understanding that you're in bargaining and being cognizant of the time, I'm going to move on.

You mentioned a few times the provincial offences project. Is that the project that was previously called e-justice? And if so, can you provide some information as to why it's not being operationalized this year?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. So on e-justice there were some expense concerns, some project delays, certainly, and the ministry made the decision to suspend e-justice and the provincial offences project, as noted.

And the e-justice program is certainly of broad intention to modernize services, prevent and resolve disputes in a manner that is accessible, of course, and timely and fair for the people of the province. There are two projects though in the program: one to improve administration of provincial offences, and the other to improve resolving consumer disputes, in partnership with the Financial and Consumer Affairs Authority.

And in '22-23, the provincial offences project was forecasting to

be nearly double the original timeline and getting up to double the original budget. And so we felt that it was wise to pause implementation to enable a thorough review. The consumer, though, disputes project with the FCAA, the Financial Consumer Affairs Authority, was not suspended. And that was implemented in March 2023.

So the broad focus, the broad aims, the broad goals all remain the same. But I think it's important to undertake with stakeholders, including SaskBuilds and the Public Service Commission, what this will look like going forward in terms of managing potential delays and expense, you know, issues. And just really analyze the project's potential benefits, examine changes to the project's governance model to reflect lessons learned from the current governance structure and really incorporate best industry and government practice. I think that that will be important as we move forward and look at the design, the organizational design within the proposed new project and the proposed governance model and analyze the costs of finishing the project. And look at the pathway for other platforms and overall just next steps including what would be required for submission in the 2024-25 budget process.

So that is really what is happening now, and I think an important reassessment in terms of where we were at and how this looks now, moving forward to the next budget cycle.

Ms. Sarauer: — There's already been a significant amount of time and dollars expended in this project, just from our discussion in estimates last year. The minister at the time stated that in the 2020-21 budget, there was \$155,000 spent. In the '21-22 budget there was 3.408 million spent; and in the '22-23 the forecast at that time was for \$4.074 million for the budget for the entire e-justice program.

How close was this project to be operationalized before there was the decision to suspend the program?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — One thing I will say in terms of the expected timelines, I think there was a certain degree of ambiguity on that front, but I'll certainly let Mindy or Kylie speak to what any expectation was.

I think that it's important to emphasize that everything that's been built and established so far will be used. I think though that the concern was around precisely that. Some ambiguity around timelines, some ambiguity about costs of IT [information technology] interfacing and platforms and the rest of it which proved perhaps a bit more complex than expected.

And you know, before there was a going down the path of, you know, more FTEs [full-time equivalent], for example, being required or more admin costs or more office space or more hardware, it was felt that it was important to bring back a five-year plan with options next budget.

As I say, that which has been spent and committed will be used, but how does this work best for the people of the province? If this is about an accessibility to justice issue and the themes are laudable and make sense, does the path to get there make as much sense as it possibly can in terms of some of the IT and other administrative challenges that these things can face?

So we just want to make sure for example that, you know, a project manager is independent, answerable to the governance steering committee, that there be a real look at the governance model in place and all the elements that I went through in my previous answer in terms of that five-year plan and how we best put to use in the most efficient timeline possible what's already been invested. Oh yeah, right, and on the timelines.

Ms. Head: — So I know you had asked about sort of where things were left off when it was paused and how much had been developed and where we were at. So prior to the suspension a lot of the core solution, which includes the legal guided pathway and the online dispute resolution tool, were built. However in order for the system to have functionality, that system needs to be able to talk to another system which we have which is called CJIMS [criminal justice information management system]. So I don't know if you've heard CJIMS before but the acronym, criminal justice information management system. The problem that we have is the two systems won't talk to each other and we need to have the bridge to be able to get them communicating with each other.

And we also have another issue which is batch files, which is not terribly exciting, but I'll tell you about it just so you're understanding what's going on here. So CJIMS right now runs a batch system, which means it doesn't do a live update continuously. It will run a batch every so often. So once a week it'll upload a whole bunch of new files and, you know, then the system is up to date, or once a day depending on what the particular issue is that you're looking at.

For us to operate this provincial offences system, we want it to be live. We don't want it to be batch. Because when you get pulled over at the side of the road and you get your ticket, maybe you want to pay your ticket right there. You go in. Your ticket is not in the system. You get mad, you know whatever, and you don't want to end up paying it. You know, you're frustrated. So we want to make sure that the system is fully automated.

We also don't want to pay staff . . . to create new positions so that somebody can take the information from the provincial offences project and then load it to CJIMS, right. That's supposed to be an integrated, automatic, automated system.

[16:30]

And so we need to have some time to figure out how to do that batch. And there are — I'm not an IT expert — but there's different alternatives and different, you know, price points and different ways you could approach it.

So I think in this situation here, the prudent choice was to take a bit of a pause just to make sure we are really on an efficient path, that we're following a good path, that it's going to stand us the test of time, you know, from a number of different options that we're facing. And so, as the minister has indicated, we're trying to take an in-depth review, take a little bit of a pause, make sure that we are doing the right things, that we're on the efficient path, you know, and then we'll be bringing it forward for reconsideration at that time.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. I've heard some frustrations from some stakeholders with respect to the cancelling of this project,

particularly those in the world of policing who were quite excited about how this project could allow them to free up officer time from court and administrative duties in particular. So I'm passing that on to the ministry.

You mentioned a few times some challenges with the project's governance model. Can you explain what the challenges were with this project's governance model?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, again I would just reiterate. I mean this is not a cancellation, of course; it's a pause. And I think, I mean certainly my understanding in terms of even consultation that was done around the pause and, you know, including with police groups across the province, there is a great deal of understanding that you want to make sure that there isn't cost creep and there isn't over-administration and there isn't, you know, there aren't inefficiencies.

I think there's a real understanding that the goals are about access to justice, that it's about seamlessness for the public, and the aims are very, as I say, are strong. I think the issue around, you know, the issue becomes how do we make it as absolutely strong and seamless as possible. And I think there's a great deal of understanding around that in terms of consultation further to and leading up to the pause. And again I would just emphasize that everything that has been invested will be used.

The concept is strong, you know, of e-justice, and that's, you know . . . Really this is about making it as really, you know, synergized in terms of IT and every other way. And also including, for example you know, the various stakeholders and how that sort of IT-wise and otherwise will harmonize into the system. I think that's just in everyone's interest, and I think there's a broad deal of agreement about that, that you can't rush into things if it's not going to create, you know, an efficient, a seamless program.

And on the governance, I'll just, Kylie if you wouldn't mind just adding into on that.

Ms. Head: — Sure. So the governance of IT projects in government, as you can imagine, is complicated because we're not just an island at the Ministry of Justice. We have to fit into the larger government IT systems. We have to fit in with SaskBuilds, we have to fit in with ITD [information technology division]. We have a lot of infrastructure that we need to work with, and so the consideration is that we would want to take some time. Since we're doing this pause and taking, you know, the time to get everything right, we'd also like to look at this time at the governance and make sure that we have the right players at the table, that we're getting the right expert advice.

We really want to make sure that SaskBuilds is providing us with appropriate advice around costing of the project: what would be an appropriate budget going forward, you know, looking at the technological solutions with ITD, right, if there's different options in terms of what we could be doing. Getting some advice there. So there are some other players beyond us that, you know, really could bring some expertise to the table. And we want to make sure that we have a structure that enables us to take advantage of all of that expertise.

Ms. Sarauer: — Just so I fully understand, the infrastructure

that's already been created but isn't quite complete, is that going to be used moving forward, or is there a need because of these challenges, to start from the beginning?

Ms. Head: — We would be using that product, and as you probably heard and I had indicated just a few minutes ago, a lot of it is really substantially complete. It's just it won't connect with CJIMS. So there's no reason to scrap that product. It's something that's been developed. It's got value. You could technically probably use it now, if you wanted to hire staff to do . . . Instead of having the computer do the live updating, you know, you'd have to hire a staff person who would be moving tickets over constantly, but that would not be an efficient use of staff, or you know, it was not what was intended in the system.

So that piece, that module that exists, is definitely not wasted. It is something that would be continuing to move, you know, forward if government chooses to restart this project after the pause, right, which . . . But the issue is building that bridge. How does that look? What does that look like? What are the options? What are the different models? But it would always be involving that particular module that's already been built.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Cognizant of the time, I'm going to move on to the gender-based violence file and the announcement about operational funding for second-stage shelters. How will this new funding be given out to the various CBOs, and which organizations will be receiving this funding, and how much?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Okay thank you, Mr. Chair. So funding allocation: SOFIA House, Regina at 39 units, 156,000; Adelle House, Saskatoon, 12 units, 48,000; at YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] Turning Points, Saskatoon, 14 units, 56,000; Sapohtewin House, La Ronge, four units, 16,000; and North East Outreach and Support Services in Melfort, four units, 16,000, for a total of 292,000. And that's again, over then three years for 876,000 for the initial pilot.

And, Drew, if you want to add in terms of how that's actually disseminated, just the mechanics of it?

Mr. Wilby: — Absolutely. Thank you, Minister. Drew Wilby, assistant deputy minister, community engagement. That allows us to provide operational support across the province to those that are already providing second-stage housing in the province of Saskatchewan.

For us it was important to look at where is the Ministry of Justice involved or integrated justice services involved? The capital side is looked after usually by CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] or the housing corporation. There are other funding sources that are available.

What we really feel is important is to provide that service direct to those clients that are in those shelters, that are in those second-stage units, whether it be on the counselling, the career training, or that side of the equation, those valuable services that our second-stage providers are providing to women and kids largely, that are in those shelters and helping them get back up on their feet so that they can live independently as they come out of the second-stage living.

Ms. Sarauer: — So I'm curious about this because when it was

originally announced, it said that money was for counselling, and then the minister just mentioned counselling and intervention. You've mentioned a few more things, Mr. Wilby. Are there parameters around that funding and if so, what exactly are they?

Mr. Wilby: — Thanks for the question. Predominantly it will be that counselling and intervention support service. As you know, with a service provider in La Ronge, it can be very different than what's available in Regina, than what's available in Melfort or Saskatoon or somewhere else, depending on the level of service that's in that community.

As we work through the contracts with each agency, as we'll have to do as it's a new program, we'll explore that with the agency in terms of what they have available, what they're doing currently, and what we know is there in the community. It's possible they may be able to partner up with some of the agencies that are delivering the first model currently or something else that's there as well. So there will be parameters around where that funding can go, but it will be subject to each of those contracts and jurisdictionally according to sort of what's in those areas and what's being provided currently.

Ms. Sarauer: — So just to clarify further, there is always an administrative element to these organizations, an executive director, a manager, etc., who's running these operations, especially ones that have more than one staff. Can this funding provide for that as well or is it more strict?

Mr. Wilby: — It could provide for that, in particular if we use an example of SOFIA House in Regina. They have counsellors that are on staff. They also have cultural service providers that are on staff as well. So it could be used for those purposes, which of course are very, very valuable and important to helping those women and kids get back up on their feet and to deal with that trauma that's come from that very difficult circumstance from which they've left.

And so as we work through with each of them, we want to make sure we fully understand their needs, where they are, and meet those agencies where they're at so that we have that in place.

Ms. Sarauer: — Speaking about SOFIA House specifically, they also have an executive director. Would it be able to fund that individual salary if that's what was deemed needed?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just say again and to Drew's point too, that, you know, every facility is different, and then some of the demands in terms of what constitutes operational funding of course is different in each case.

I know with SOFIA House for example, there was talk by Ms. Marchment about how where previously — and this has been, you know, oft pointed out — that where there had maybe been a necessity to fundraise or self-fund for counselling, specialized counselling in some cases, this funding then covers that off and provides for that. And so really that relief mechanism in terms of the need of the individual facility to fundraise for that or fund some of those positions.

So I think just in terms of the fluidity, if you like, of a more established SOFIA House versus a smaller facility, the specialization in terms of counselling, for example, would be

perhaps different. And so would it, could it go to a salary? I suppose, if it's a smaller operation, and that salary would then be covering most of the services, the counselling and interventions that are provided. Whereas if you have a slightly more substantial facility such as SOFIA House where they can offer a range of counselling and specialized counselling, then I think certainly the impression that we're getting is that for SOFIA House, for example, it would go more to that side of it rather than salaries for existing, you know, people who are involved in that facility. Am I missing anything, Drew?

Mr. Wilby: — No. I think, Minister, you've hit it on the head. I think part of that too, is looking at the definition of second-stage housing, and how it's not just providing the physical housing location. It is providing those intensive supports for women and kids, you know, in terms of connecting them to education, employment, and supports for the children and receiving the counselling as well.

And so that's important for us as an agency looking to provide that, but I know also for the second-stage community that is incredibly important. So it's not just the housing provision that's there; it's the ability to provide the other as well to make sure that there is that clear connection to those supports.

[16:45]

Ms. Sarauer: — Of course, which is why we've been pushing for this funding and very happy to see its announcement. It doesn't sound like it will completely cover the entirety of the needs of the organizations that already exist. So hopefully there will be some work within the ministry to increase that funding in the future. But I'll look forward to continuing this conversation in the future.

Since I have you here, Mr. Wilby, last year you mentioned around the second domestic violence death review panel that was supposed to occur, I believe you had mentioned last year that there were plans to have it happen in winter of '22 and '23. And although it keeps snowing every once in a while, I like to think that we're out of winter. I'm wondering if you can provide an update on how that's going, when that's going to happen. And then always the request that it become a permanent thing.

Mr. Wilby: — Thanks for the question. Drew Wilby again, assistant deputy minister, community engagement.

Absolutely, you know, committed to the second domestic violence death review. It's in progress right now as we had talked about last year. We have established processes and protocols. That occurred as of fall of 2022. A lot of that is establishing privacy protocols and those different pieces to make sure that across agencies we can share that information. I know we have the Chief Coroner over here. He's a key part of that as well. We are currently conducting those reviews, which means looking at those files of, unfortunately, those who have passed due to the circumstances.

As well, we are connecting with victims' families to have those conversations with them as well, which we feel is an important addition to the piece this year. From there obviously we'll develop some recommendations, or the domestic violence death review panel will develop those recommendations and release

their final report to government shortly thereafter.

In terms of will this become a permanent fixture, this is the second one we've done. We're, you know, considering that of course as part of that, anticipate it very well may be a recommendation as part of the domestic violence death review as it comes out. I think it's safe to say that, you know, we are committed to the process and moving it forward as it moves along.

Ms. Sarauer: — Will that report be publicly available, and if so, what is the projected timeline for when that report will be released?

Mr. Wilby: — As per the last report, you know, cabinet was very clear to the ministry that they wanted that to be public and they wanted, you know, the public accountability around that. So I anticipate the same. But of course we do take our direction from cabinet so we will move forward on that, but I anticipate that will be the case.

In terms of the timeline, obviously the final report, we're anticipating release of winter '23-24, as part of that. It should be shortly thereafter so I would say next . . . depends on when winter decides to go, but at some point in the next winter. Define as you wish.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Wilby. It's already been mentioned, that 3 per cent increase for CBOs and shelters in particular. While that's welcome, the feedback that's been received by me is that that 3 per cent doesn't make up for inflation experienced over this past year, but also a decade of not necessarily keeping up with inflation.

In addition to that, there is the challenges that shelters are now facing because they had received some significant COVID funding from the federal government during the pandemic. That money is no longer being renewed, and now many of the gains that shelters have experienced in terms of new programs, additional staff, more funding for utilities and groceries are going to have to be cut back.

Is the government advocating with the federal government to renew that funding, or at least establish some sort of ongoing budget transfer directly to shelters as part of the conversations that are happening around the national action plan?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. It's a very new announcement with the federal government, and I take the member's point that sounds rather dramatic in terms of this discontinuation.

I think, very clearly we will advocate on behalf of shelters with the federal government. And there are a number of opportunities in the next few months to do that and certainly get a sense of the context of that announcement and its significance because it is dramatic and this is being read as such by those in the community who are, you know, directly impacted and involved in this.

I would say that our commitment is very, very clear and is backed, in terms of support for interpersonal violence and addressing it and sexual assault initiatives, you know, with the commitments that we've made: 27.5 million in funding to

support and reduce interpersonal violence, sexual violence. So 8.9 million for 12 provincially funded transition houses, three enhanced residential programs that support immediate shelter needs for victims fleeing domestic violence. 876,000 for a three-year commitment to second-stage housing — as mentioned, that will provide the new funding for the counselling and intervention supports that we've discussed. 1.97 million to 14 agencies to offer 16 family violence intervention programs across the province. And so it goes.

I think in terms of the CBO amount, it's a significant increase, and really the most significant increase we've seen in, you know, a decade or so.

So while all these things are always efforts to find and strike the right balance when it comes to funding, I think certainly in terms of, you know, the context of the recent announcement by the federal government, our support and commitment is very clear. And that's really backed up with the 27.5 million in funding that we've been talking about and the recent announcement around second-stage — the first time in Saskatchewan's history — the human trafficking efforts that we've engaged in with Hope Restored, you know, at the end of last year, and so on.

And so I guess the response would be that we're very firm in our support; we're very firm in the commitment. And where the federal government is at, it's a puzzling announcement to be sure. And we have to understand, as I say, a little bit more around the context and the significance of it. But certainly our commitment is very clear, and the numbers really bear that out.

And there are others. I mean 1.7 million to sexual assault service providers across the province. That's part of the 27.5 million. 662,000 for the family intervention rapid support team; 200,000 for public awareness campaigns, and we've talked about that to bring awareness to the issue of interpersonal violence; 170,000 to support two transportation initiatives in the province for individuals and their families who are leaving interpersonal violence and abuse. And so it goes.

So that would be the response I think certainly at this point that we're going, if anything, you know, in an increased direction. And the federal government, it's, as I say, a puzzling development, but it's certainly going the other way it seems.

Ms. Sarauer: — What stage is the province at in signing on to the federal national action plan?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Well I believe that the Minister of the Status of Women has been very clear — this has come up I know in question period — that we have signed on, that the flow of money now . . . And I know that's also been asked and answered in the sense that that is now very much up to federal government in terms of the purse strings, if you like, of the program.

But certainly the intention of the Minister of the Status of Women was to participate, which she did, very closely with the process to signal absolute support, and now I'm assuming to advocate — as she has indicated she has — for where that money goes and what that signing on means.

Ms. Sarauer: — CBOs are waiting for more information as to what this is going to mean in terms of dollars flowing to

Saskatchewan. So does the ministry have any indication of when those details will become publicly available?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — It would be best probably to direct those questions in great detail to the Minister of the Status of Women. But my understanding is that there isn't an enormous amount of detail yet as to what specific funding is flowing, simply that the intention is there and the agreement was signed on to, including by the minister, and so therefore the province of Saskatchewan. Where that goes from here and where that money goes is up to the federal government.

Ms. Sarauer: — Moving on to survivors of sexual assaults and the work that CBOs do in that field, I've heard some concerns about the lack of amount of counselling services in the North. I'm thinking about . . . When I say North, I mean Prince Albert north. From what I understand, there is only one counselling position right now for the entirety of that portion of the province. Has the ministry considered any sort of targeted funding intervention to alleviate the pressures for that, well, one individual that's doing that right now?

Mr. Wilby: — Thanks for the question. Drew Wilby again. So we do provide \$1.7 million to service providers across the province. And of course that includes eight agencies to provide services to Grandmother's Bay, La Ronge, Pinehouse, Stanley Mission, Sucker River, Prince Albert, and Meadow Lake which are in the North. And then the other ones, of course, are in the South.

You've highlighted a key point, and that is service delivery in the North generally. And we hear this from our partners as well as others in terms of how do we best provide that service, how do we contract for that and work with the respective agencies that are there.

[17:00]

We're always looking at innovative ways of doing that, whether that be remote technology, although that doesn't work for everyone. We did a recent trip to the North a while ago and had good conversations about how remote technology will work for some but not for others' availability, that face-to-face piece that's very important as well, as well as some of the important pieces around dealing with youth, especially as it pertains to victims and such.

We do also have a victim witness specialist in the La Ronge area providing services to those that are going to court. The minister highlighted, you know, the victim witness specialist program earlier, so that's an important piece in La Ronge as well. And so we are attuned to the challenges in the North. We do have service delivery there, and we'll continue to work with our partners to make sure that we have services in place that can provide for the survivors that are there in those areas.

Ms. Sarauer: — Are you keeping track right now of the wait time, the length of wait time for a survivor to be able to access those counselling services?

Mr. Wilby: — It of course varies in location. We do work with our providers to determine what those are. You may recall a few years ago there was a significant wait time in the Regina area.

We worked with the Regina sexual assault services, of course, and the work that they provide to try to address that. We were able to direct some funding there to do just that and bring that wait time down.

I don't have the specific statistics here today. We can look to see what those are and work with our providers. They are at times difficult to obtain just because of the remoteness of some of them, but we will look to provide that if we can.

Ms. Sarauer: — Just to be clear, I'm asking specifically about wait times in the North region, so thank you for that in the future.

Minister, just being cognizant of the time, I'm going to switch subjects. I've noticed that the government has announced that there is going to be a change in how clinical legal education is funded in the province. Can you speak about why that decision was made?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Absolutely. So this has been coming on for a little while in the sense that, based on conversations with the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] College of Law dean, for example, it became apparent that there is an appetite to expand clinical legal education through the college. And as the member certainly knows . . . Sorry, I just wonder if they could perhaps stop. It's a bit distracting. Sorry, Lisa, just it's just a bit distracting.

So the U of S College of Law dean has indicated that, as I say, there's an appetite in expanding some of the clinical legal placement opportunities for students. And there are a range of possibilities. It could include placements with the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital, which of course is very nearby; in-house opportunities with companies; other private firm opportunities; the ministry; prosecutions. We're certainly interested in recruiting, you know, keen grads into, as I say, the ministry.

So I think based on conversations that we've had, the tenor or the feeling is that CLASSIC [Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc.] is CLASSIC, and it's of course, as we know, poverty law — very important area — but that students and the dean would like to look to perhaps enhance some possibilities. And we're very interested in what that might look like.

So as the member is aware, we announced that there would be 100,000 this past fiscal, 100,000 going forward to the next fiscal for just stability and maintaining funding for CLASSIC in regard to what they are currently receiving from the provincial government. There's another MOU, memorandum of understanding, that the college has with CLASSIC itself, and that's its own MOU and own arrangement.

But this 100,000 this past fiscal, 100,000 this fiscal is, as I say, simply to maintain funding for CLASSIC from the provincial government as we look to what CLASSIC might become — or really not so much what CLASSIC might become; what the program of clinical legal placement might become.

And I think there are some really exciting opportunities. So the steering committee is beginning in a few weeks, is my understanding. It will include potentially CLASSIC. It will include, as I say, Jim Pattison Children's Hospital and obviously

include the dean. We want to include the University of Saskatchewan more directly. There are a number of clinical placement programs, I mean, across the university that are offered, and one thinks of course of med or dentistry and others, and so I think the university has a role to play.

And as we know, the university has recently announced a big fundraising initiative. And so, you know, there might be some look by the college to do that with clinical legal placement, you know, in its sights or in mind. But this is not a cut of anything really, and so it's more a look to expand possibilities for students and really then what the ministry's role is in regard to that.

So I think there are some exciting opportunities ahead. And I think with the steering committee that we're striking, we can really explore those with the direct stakeholders — the ones who are the closest on the ground, namely the College of Law and students — and really get a feeling for what they want in terms of legal placements beyond merely placements with CLASSIC, and really then what funding will look like going forward.

Will that be, you know, a continuation of the MOU between the law college and CLASSIC? That's of course up to them. What will the funding look like on the part of the province? What will the funding look like potentially on the part of the university? Will, as I say, companies be interested in offering placements for students, law firms, and other possibilities? So I think it's actually a very exciting, positive development.

Ms. Sarauer: — You mentioned CLASSIC specifically. My understanding is that as a result of this announcement — and I think you've said this — it's not that CLASSIC will maintain the \$100,000 annually going forward into the future, plus there will be additional money coming from the government for additional clinic experiences for students; that there is the potential that CLASSIC will no longer be receiving this money at all or in a reduced form. Can you comment on that?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Sorry, could you repeat the question? I just didn't hear the rest of the question.

Ms. Sarauer: — My understanding is that as a result of this announcement, CLASSIC may or may not receive the amount that they've been receiving up until this point from the province moving forward. So not that the government is announcing that they will continue with their \$100,000 annual commitment to CLASSIC, plus expanding into additional areas of clinical experiences for students. Can you comment on that? That was my question.

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Well I'm not quite sure what the question is. Sorry, but I think if the . . .

Ms. Sarauer: — I guess my question is, what does this mean for the future of CLASSIC in the next four years?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Right. Well we felt it was very important to maintain the 100,000 over the two fiscals to provide precisely the stability that's necessary in order to see what clinical legal placement will look like at the University of Saskatchewan and the College of Law.

I think that what it will look like in terms of government funding

going forward will be something for the next budget cycle. But we felt that it was important that that funding be in place, as I say, for the stability of process through this steering committee.

And again, I mean, obviously we have supported CLASSIC, you know, both through CLASSIC and through legal aid. But CLASSIC in terms of funding, you know . . . Based on recent audited financial statements, I mean, the ministry's \$100,000 grant represents only 10 per cent of the overall funding that CLASSIC receives, which was . . . 922,731 was the most up-to-date number that I've seen. So funding is not solely dependent for CLASSIC on the Government of Saskatchewan.

And I think the idea is that, you know, even if you look at the donors, there are four donors over 2,500. And certainly we commend law firms and the College of Law itself, the Law Foundation, any fundraising that's been done in terms of support that they've provided CLASSIC.

But clinical legal placements can't perhaps only be, nor should they be, only with CLASSIC. I think there are other possibilities. That's not to say that CLASSIC won't be a part of the process, and certainly we think that CLASSIC can play a very important role in the steering committee process that is moving forward with really the College of Law and the dean as the key on-the-ground partners. But I think there has to be some look by the College of Law and by the University of Saskatchewan itself about what does a clinical legal education placement mean and how is that best offered to the students of the College of Law.

And that isn't only a Government of Saskatchewan responsibility. It also involves, of course, the university and the college and other potential participants in what this could look like for students. And I think that's the main purpose here, is really how to enhance the experience for students. And what role the government plays is all to be seen as we go into the next budget cycle based on the steering committee's work. But I think, as I referenced, recruitment to the ministry, placements and opportunities with the ministry, with prosecutions would be welcome and, I think, very, very positive. And I think that's one of the things we can look at as we look at what clinical legal placements mean in the province.

Ms. Sarauer: — Again being cognizant of the time, I'm going to move on to some questions about the coroner's office. I'm wondering if you could provide some updated stats with respect to the office, in particular how many overdoses the coroner's office has dealt with. And if there is a breakdown as to types of substances used, that would be appreciated as well.

Mr. Weighill: — Clive Weighill, the Chief Coroner for the province of Saskatchewan. Thank you for the question, and I'm certainly pleased to give you some update on the statistics that we're seeing across the board.

Unfortunately I have to report that our business is increasing again in the next fiscal year. And just to look at some comparators, when we look back from just nine years ago, our cases have come up from 1,890 a year to over 3,078 a year — 63 per cent increase — so it's going on an upward trend.

We continue to see really two big things that are impacting that. Number one is the older citizens of Saskatchewan, over 65 years

of age primarily, that unfortunately are passing in their homes. You know, they could be found deceased in their bed. They could be found by a family member. You know, I can't exactly say why we're seeing so many more in their home except that we're seeing more seniors unfortunately, and that cohort is growing every year.

So if someone passes away unexpectedly or suddenly in their home, the police are called, EMS [emergency medical services] is called, and the coroners service is called, and we have to do an investigation into that.

Another big issue that we're facing, and of course facing right across Canada, is the drug toxicity, drug overdose problem that we're seeing. We were hoping that we were starting to see a plateau last year. We had 393 confirmed and suspected deaths last year, and that was compared to 408 the year before that. So that was the first year we've actually seen a little bit of a decrease. Unfortunately I have to report so far this year we were up to 153 deaths just before March 30th, so that's not slowing down. We were hoping to see a plateau that was going to drive some of our business ideas for this year, but unfortunately that's not coming to fruition.

That cascades onto everything that we do now. So for instance we end up having to do more autopsies. So we've seen an increase in the number of autopsies we have to do from 596 every year to 938. We just had to increase two more forensic pathologists to keep up with the demand on that.

Transportation for us, increase of about 68 per cent from 2018-19 till last year, from 1,309 transports in for autopsies and back or for holds that we do while we're investigating, up to 2,169. The cost of transportation has risen from about 717,000 to \$1.25 million annually.

Increase in the coroners' investigations themselves, we have fee-for-service coroners that we have . . . they work on a fee-for-service. That's increased by about \$150,000 every year.

And then last but not least is the increase that we're seeing in inquests. During COVID we had to do intermittent postponements of inquests because of COVID, which put us behind. We have about 45 inquests now waiting to be held. We've increased from about six to eight per year that we used to do historically. This year we hope to do 14 to 16 inquests. So we're trying to, you know, bite that off in small chunks as we can to catch up with those loved ones that are waiting to hear the results from, you know, why their family person perished.

So we're a busy organization, and like I say, I hate to say it but we're just increasing again.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Weighill. The other portion of the question I was wondering . . . I'm not sure if you have this, but if you track with respect to overdoses in particular, substances, which substances you're seeing more of and which ones are causing the most challenges.

[17:15]

Mr. Weighill: — Most of the drug overdose deaths that we see are related to opioids, mainly fentanyl, derivatives of fentanyl,

carfentanyl. We see other drugs involved too, etizolam, things along that line. We very seldom see a death that's attributable to one drug. It's usually a mixture of methamphetamine, fentanyl, cocaine; a mixture of alcohol, methamphetamine, fentanyl. There's usually, you know, very poly-substance abuses that are happening for that.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Last estimates, you had mentioned that you were planning to report to government on the child death review committee prior to this budget. Could you provide an update on the work on that? And are you still of the view that this would be best practice for this to be instituted?

Mr. Weighill: — Clive Weighill, Chief Coroner. I chaired an ad hoc stakeholder group for the last three or four years, and that group is Health, Social Services, child advocate, police, mental health, SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance], University of Saskatchewan, FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations], Prevention Institute, practising pediatricians. And we formulated a preliminary plan.

I've brought that preliminary plan and I have a strategic policy and research working within the ministry right now, working with me in assisting with developing a proposal for the minister. We want to look at different models across Canada because there are child death reviews in other provinces, but they're operating all a bit differently. So we want to get the best practice for that.

So essentially the proposal to the minister will include some internal research and utilization, research capabilities within our own ministry and across the ministries and with the Saskatchewan universities. The coroners service will lead a two-year internal review utilizing internal service data from across the other ministries.

We're looking at data sharing. This requires the co-operation of and collaboration with Social Services, Health, Education, Corrections, Policing, prosecutions, and non-government stakeholders, and then assigning partnerships to review circumstances leading to the deaths. So we've done the stakeholder part. We're going to bring a proposal to the minister's office essentially outlining those areas of a plan to try to move this ahead on the agenda.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Do you have a timeline for when you plan on bringing that proposal forward?

Mr. Weighill: — It'll take probably about two years across all ministries to make sure. The data sharing is one of the biggest issues that we have, as you can well achieve, especially when we start reaching outside of the province for some of the stakeholders and the amount of data sharing that will have to take place for a review of these cases.

Ms. Sarauer: — Considering you're also the author of the report making recommendations, which included this one, are you still of the view that this would be beneficial for moving forward in terms of addressing these issues within Saskatchewan?

Mr. Weighill: — I believe it's an important step to look into a child death. It looks at many aspects from this. It looks at pediatric deaths, which could look into family issues, family histories that families should know about, that pediatricians can't

because we're not doing a review on it. It could be from crime. It could be from all kinds of issues that cause any child death under the age of 19. So it's health, it's criminal, all kinds of issues that fit into this.

Ms. Sarauer: — Am I right that this is the only recommendation that hasn't been fully operationalized yet?

Mr. Weighill: — There's about four recommendations that have not been from the study, the review that I did in 2018. But they're mainly just administrative ones. All the major building blocks have been done. All the staff has been employed. All the operational changes have taken place. Really it's just a few administrative, you know, some job descriptions and things along that line that haven't been done.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you so much. I would like to ask you a couple questions about the courthouse reopenings that have already been mentioned. We'll start with Weyburn King's Bench. That one was closed originally by your government several years ago. You spoke already about why the decision has been reversed. It sounds very similar to the concerns that had been raised at the time of its closure. Why has the government changed its position on the closure of the Weyburn King's Bench courthouse?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I found I was very . . . I mean I was very personally vested in this process over the last year in terms of addressing the needs that community members in these two communities were expressing about, the need for reopening. And I think the Minister of Education put it very graciously in his response to the budget, which was . . . well he said, and he was talking about Weyburn of course specifically but he said that sometimes decisions are made. You know, in that case, as the member has referenced, it was a very difficult financial reality for us in that budget when that decision was made.

And sometimes things happen, and then things are corrected based on a number of factors. And it's not so much about dwelling on the negative or the realities at play at the time — and there were key realities at play at the time, namely financial — but really about sometimes making different decisions.

And I think in this case the reality was, with both Weyburn and with Lloyd — and the member has referenced specifically Weyburn — I think there was simply a realization that there was a great deal of pressure being put on Estevan in particular, as a point, that there was an excessive increase in travel time for court parties, for witnesses, for law enforcement, and you know, just across the board. And I think of them in tandem because the issues are so similar. Similarly with Lloyd and Battleford, I mean it became apparent.

And again COVID, which is where the Lloyd situation came up, it was in the midst of that. And again I'm not going to speak to what the, you know, realities were perhaps at the time, but I mean obviously numbers were different because in-person appearances were very different. And so when, you know, emerging out of COVID I think it became apparent that for the community of Lloydminster itself but also for surrounding communities, this was very, very top of mind in terms of the importance of a registry office and interpersonal interaction at the registry office

with a real person.

And so to really assert the importance of access to justice, I think that became a key consideration. I mean speaking for both, in both locations, but in Lloyd coming out of COVID, I think there came to be a realization very quickly that — and I referenced in my opening remarks the numbers that we've seen since the reopening, you know; they're substantial — the need was absolutely there. And we appointed . . . There was a judge appointed to that community.

So far things seem very, very positive in terms of reception by the community and into the community of him, which is wonderful. And I think that it sent a really important signal to law enforcement who were dealing with issues in the surrounding areas around Lloydminster and were then having to travel to address them at the registry offices. Of obvious importance in both cases where, you know, there came to be too much need on the ground.

And so again with Weyburn and Estevan, similar issues: travel times, registry office needs for, you know, that perception — I mean, beautiful courthouse, very functional, very well maintained — that this was an obvious thing to address in light of pressures we were seeing in and around Weyburn.

And again, interesting with both those communities, you know — both energy centres, with some of the pitfalls of that in terms of, you know, where you see great activity there are issues, and where you see a decrease in activity there are issues. And there just came to be a recognition that, based on case volumes and otherwise, both those decisions were necessary and I think have been very, very well received by law enforcement, by the people on the ground in both of those communities.

And it really was about responsiveness to what we were hearing. And in the case of Lloyd more recently than in the case of Weyburn, but over time with Weyburn, that it was something that continued to be raised, and so we wanted to be responsive. And I believe we were, and I'm very, very proud of the work we did to . . . you know, in both those communities, in addressing really the realities we were seeing.

And often where you start to look at where cases are actually being heard, even when they start to go beyond — you know, in the case of Weyburn/Estevan or, you know, particularly with Estevan — you know, even into a Regina spillover situation, that just becomes . . . it just doesn't become as responsive as it could be where you see that case volume increase.

So that's really . . . The why, I think, is quite apparent, and to not do something because an earlier decision was made I think is also equally . . . it would be not responsive enough to the communities and the concerns that they raised around the increasing realities we were seeing about pressures in both those court centres.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Minister. Could you provide the total cost associated with reopening each court location separately — the Weyburn King's Bench as well as the Lloydminster Provincial Court?

Ms. Gudmundson: — So Lloydminster for court services is an additional \$389,000, and for Weyburn, that's \$302,000. I would

like to note too that the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety has an aspect of this with the deputy sheriffs. So to provide court security in Lloydminster is \$386,000 and Weyburn \$226,000.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Now you're giving me one more?

The Chair: — Yes. I'll give you one.

Ms. Sarauer: — I just shoehorned my two questions into one question because you said I just had one left, so I'm . . .

The Chair: — You're good?

Ms. Sarauer: — Well I could ask . . . I will happily ask another question. Okay.

You mentioned the file load you were seeing already in terms of court appearances at Provincial Court. Do you also have a similar number for Weyburn King's Bench?

Ms. Gudmundson: — So in Estevan we have some trial . . . time-to-trial numbers for you. In 2016 we had 89 days time-to-trial for Estevan, and in Weyburn the time-to-trial in 2016 was 115 days. As we move into 2022 and the reopenings, Estevan's time-to-trial moved up to 189 days, and Weyburn's time-to-trial had moved up to 234 days.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. The committee Chair is very strict, and he's giving me the hook. So I just want to conclude my questions by thanking first of all you, Minister, for answering my questions this afternoon, as well as all of your officials. I started off by thanking all of you. I very much look forward to the opportunity I get once a year to have this dialogue, and am very excited about having this conversation about what's going on within the ministry. I'm always very fascinated and impressed by all the work that all of you do, so thank you so much.

[17:30]

Apologies if I did not get to you to ask questions. I had some more pages that I wasn't unfortunately able to get to this afternoon. But just, please, a heartfelt thank you so much for all the work that you do every single day. And thank you to you, committee Chair, as well as the committee members and Hansard and all those who work within this building who helped make this committee possible.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Sarauer. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Ms. Eyre: — Thank you. I'd like to obviously thank the member for her questions and also thank officials. It is somewhat noted that we have quite a strong contingent which comes to committee every year, and they're not even all in the room. And so when the member says that she didn't get to anyone, there are people who weren't even in the room with us who might well have, had we had more time to answer questions.

But as I say, certainly appreciate the questions. Certainly appreciate the effort that the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General go to every day to help the people of this province. And so thank you very much to them, all their incredibly assiduous,

conscientious work, and to committee and to you, Mr. Chair, and to Hansard.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. I too would like to thank the minister, the officials for all their work today, committee members, and also to Hansard and the staff too as well. As it is now time for a recess, we'll adjourn consideration of these estimates. This committee stands recessed until 5:45.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

[17:45]

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

Subvote (CP01)

The Chair: — Good evening. I'd like to welcome everybody back to the chambers, committee members. And I also would like to welcome committee member Gary Grewal back here. I would ask committee members to please not . . . anybody in the desk to not open the desk too as well.

We'll move on to consider estimates and supplementary estimates on no. 2 for the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety and Firearms Secretariat. We will begin consideration of vote 31, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, subvote (CP01), central management and services.

Minister Tell is here with her officials. As a reminder, officials, please state your name and do not touch the microphones. Minister Tell, please introduce your officials and make your opening statement.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening. Pleased to be here tonight to discuss the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety's '23-24 financial plan and to answer questions.

I'm joined at the table by Deputy Minister Dale Larsen. Also present behind me is Robert Freberg, the Chief Firearms Officer; and beside Dale is Marlo Pritchard, the president of the Public Safety Agency. We also have a number of officials from the ministry, the Firearms Secretariat, and the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency in the gallery.

Our goals of providing safe communities, safe facilities, safe and engaged employees takes a team far greater than what can be represented in this room here tonight. I want to recognize and thank all of our staff for the tremendous work that they have done throughout the year and continue to do. They have served Saskatchewan citizens through their expertise, integrity, dedication each and every day, and we are grateful for their service. Thank you.

This budget aligns with government's goal of growth that works for everyone. This year, the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety's budget is 615 million, an increase of 13 million or approximately 2.2 per cent. Custody, supervision and rehabilitation services' budget has decreased by approximately 1.1 million to 197 million. This decrease reflects the removal of

a temporary trailer at Saskatoon Correctional Centre and associated operating dollars we needed to ensure staff and inmate safety during the pandemic.

Policing and community safety services' budget has increased by nearly 20 million to 324 million. Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency's budget has decreased by 6 million to 92 million. This is largely the result of the completion of a capital project that involved the purchase of the aircraft.

I will now highlight some areas of importance in this year's budget. Seven million in new funding will be devoted to the development and implementation of the Saskatchewan marshals service. The new service will consist of 70 officers and approximately 30 administrative staff once fully implemented. It will provide an additional law enforcement presence across Saskatchewan and conduct proactive investigations while supporting the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] and municipal police operations. The service will respond to areas with high crime rates, apprehend offenders with outstanding warrants, and investigate farm-related offences like theft and trespassing.

We will also expand the crime reduction teams and warrant enforcement and suppression teams with a new investment of 3.2 million. The crime reduction team mandate is to target street gangs, prolific offenders, and respond to urban and rural crime surges. The crime reduction team is currently made up of nine teams: the RCMP staff teams in North Battleford, Prince Albert, Lloydminster, Moose Jaw, La Ronge, and Meadow Lake, and municipal police service teams in the cities of Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. The new funding will add a crime reduction team in the Battlefords region, making a total of 10 teams.

Suppressing crime is heavily reliant on the collection and timely distribution of criminal intelligence. Criminal analysts are attached to each crime reduction team and share intelligence with other policing agencies throughout the province. We are also expanding warrant enforcement and suppression teams this year. The team is currently based in Saskatoon and Meadow Lake. While it is primarily made up of RCMP officers, it works jointly with RCMP and municipal police services. The new funding will expand the team to Prince Albert.

The team is designed to target high-profile offenders and gang members with outstanding Criminal Code warrants. These teams are mobile and can be deployed across the province.

This budget also sees a \$200,000 investment in the creation of the warrant intelligence team. The warrant intelligence team will work with other government agencies and police to collect information on violent offenders with active warrants. It will also work with other government agencies such as Social Services to suspend government assistance where appropriate. This will ensure taxpayers' dollars are not used to fund criminal lifestyles and activities.

We're also providing an additional 355,000 to add five civilian employees to the RCMP's "F" Division operational communications centre. This will allow the communications centre to answer calls for service in a more timely manner and ensure staff can remain on the line with the caller to collect all the necessary data to keep the caller safe.

The internet child exploitation policing unit will receive an increase of 147,000 to fund a new administrative non-commissioned officer position.

New deputy sheriffs have been hired to support the recently-opened Lloydminster Provincial Court and Weyburn Court of King's Bench judicial centre. We are also increasing our investment in other areas dedicated to policing, including more funding for the Saskatchewan Police College, legislative district security unit, and the provincial protective services branch.

An additional 6.9 million in funding is dedicated to our obligations to the provincial police service agreement, and the First Nations policing program.

An additional 75.4 million is being allocated to the construction of the remand centre expansion at Saskatoon Correctional Centre. The increase in gang-affiliated and high-needs offenders has put a strain on our existing infrastructure and requires us to invest in a new, modern build that will allow us to house this population safely and securely. This new facility is expected to be open in 2025.

We are also happy to begin our partnership with Saskatoon Tribal Council on the . . . there is a name, but it's basically Back to Basics, transitioning offenders. Drew Wilby can say this like nobody's business, but he probably says it a couple times a day. But anyway. Collectively, the government is providing 1.2 million this year to Saskatoon Tribal Council for this program, which will help women leaving custody at Pine Grove Correctional Centre reintegrate into their home communities, and reunify with their families. These women will be provided with mental health and addictions supports, and safe, stable housing at STC's [Saskatoon Tribal Council] dedicated reintegration facility in Saskatoon.

The Firearms Secretariat budget will be over 8.9 million. A major part of the secretariat's work going forward will be the increased awareness around firearm safety. This includes responsible firearm storage, ensuring the safety of licensed ranges, gun ranges, firearms ranges, and reacting effectively and promptly to public safety concerns involving firearms.

The Firearms Secretariat will use 927,000 to support the new Saskatchewan firearms ballistic laboratory. The laboratory will conduct analysis on and catalogue firearms by characteristics and serial number to expediate Saskatchewan law enforcement investigations. The laboratory will also determine the legal classification of firearms and firearms accessories.

A further 1.3 million will support the new client services function of the Firearms Secretariat. This includes the firearms compensation committee, which will administer the process for the seizure, destruction, or deactivation of firearms either restricted or prohibited by Canadian law. This committee will ensure citizens receive fair market value for expropriated firearms or firearms accessories. We are also developing a prosecution unit in Firearms Secretariat which will prosecute non-criminal firearms offences.

Finally, we have created a central management and services area within the Firearms Secretariat to support administration and management. This includes nearly 2 million to support capital

costs associated with the new IT system for the firearms compensation committee and to undertake some tenant improvements.

The '23-24 budget contains a significant investment in the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency to fulfill our commitment to build a stronger and safer province. The agency continues to improve its emergency management programs and services to better assist communities in need and help those communities identify safety risks and mitigation strategies.

We have also transferred the provincial disaster assistance program, or PDAP, to the SPSA [Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency] to better coordinate emergency management and recovery efforts. Flooding will be a concern again this spring, depending on the runoff. And we expect to see drought and grassfires due to dry conditions again in the southwest part of the province. If you recall, the 2022 response season was very active with 447 wildfires, which is greater than the five-year average of 379.

The agency also deployed staff and resources to out-of-province incidents eight times last year as part of the support agreement with other provinces, and of course the United States. One of those deployments was to Prince Edward Island to assist in the recovery from Hurricane Fiona last September. Beyond wildfires, the agency responded to two major train derailments, 22 emergency events, and 18 search and rescue events in Saskatchewan. The agency continues to work with our communities to inform them of their risks and assist them in mitigating the impact of these events for the upcoming response season.

In 2022 the agency's provincial emergency operations centre was activated to lead unified command with the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training and the Ministry of Trade and Export Development, which successfully coordinated the arrival of five flights of displaced Ukrainians to Saskatchewan. The most recent flight arrived on March the 27th.

Before I move on to the numbers, I also want to quickly highlight the investment and work the agency did with the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training to reopen the Provincial Firefighting Training Centre at Parkland College.

This work will address the growing demand for all types of firefighters across the province. Many of those same firefighters will benefit from the launch of the transportation extrication program, which was created in partnership with SGI. This program, administered by the agency, will provide more Saskatchewan firefighters with the specialized tools and training they need to respond to collisions and save lives in their communities.

Now on to the numbers. The SPSA's '23-24 expense budget is 131.24 million compared to 101.89 million in '22-23, an increase of 29.35 million. This increase includes non-cash expenditures and the transfer of the administration of the Sask911 account from SaskTel to the agency with no impact to the agency's GRF [General Revenue Fund] funding.

[18:00]

The SPSA GRF operating grant is 84.162 million, an increase of 7.370 million due to the following changes: 3.73 million increase for the transfer of the provincial disaster assistance program from the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety into SPSA; 5 million one-time increase for Ukraine support; 100,000 increase for the improvement of detection tower roadways; 136,000 increase for 703 air carrier pilot; 96,000 decrease for the accommodation services; and 1.5 million decrease allocated to emergency response operations.

The SPSA's '23-24 GRF capital grant is 7.611 million, a decrease of 19.5 million from the year prior, reflecting the conclusion of a four-year payment plan for a CL-215T plane. I think I got that right; I don't have my glasses on either.

This concludes my overview of the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency's '22-23 budget, which contains numerous investments in protecting people and property of our province.

The Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety and its associated agencies play a vital role in our province. We have accomplished so much this year in the last year, and we continue to work with our partners and wider community to create positive outcomes for the people of Saskatchewan. Now I would be pleased to answer questions about the '23-24 plan and budget for the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety and its associated entities. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister Tell, for those opening comments. I will now open it up for questions. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. I just want to start by thanking the officials for being here this evening for the next three hours. I very much appreciate the time it takes to get prepared for an evening like this, and the work that you and all of your staff do are very much appreciated by all of us, and this is always a conversation I very much look forward to.

I'd like to start by going through the line items of the votes. Hopefully I have enough time to get through them all and ask some questions about specific changes in the dollar figures just to make sure that I haven't missed anything.

So I'm looking particularly at vote 73 around (CP06), Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency. There was a decrease in funding from last year of about \$6 million. Could you explain what that is?

Mr. Pritchard: — Marlo Pritchard, president of the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency. The biggest decrease in our budget would be around the last payment of the CL-215T, which was a reduction of about \$7 million. We did have a reduction of 1.5 million in regards to reducing our budget about 2 per cent, so we did reduce our operating budget by that much. We did do some realignments in regards to accommodations, so that would attribute to approximately of what you stated.

Ms. Sarauer: — What does the decrease in the operating budget mean for your organization?

Mr. Pritchard: — At this point in time we have a, you know, because of the amalgamation of a number of entities we have,

you know, a reasonable surplus. So for this coming year the decrease will not be felt, depending on, of course, wildfire season, disasters, those ones that we are not budgeting for, because again, we don't know what the season's going to do. But at this point in time, we are not identifying significant pressures.

Ms. Sarauer: — And I know we've spoken about this airplane before, but can you remind me what it's being utilized for?

Mr. Pritchard: — It will be a water bomber. It'll be a CL-215. It's one of the last planes in regards to a renewal of our air fleet. And on May the 2nd it'll be in Regina for a presentation as we get ready for the new season. So we're just taking, I guess, the keys and we'll be bringing it into the province here very shortly. But it is a water bomber that will be part of our fleet.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you so much. Moving on, vote (CP12) Saskatchewan Police Commission, there is a bit of an increase to the Saskatchewan Police College, which I believe you've already mentioned, Minister, but I'm wondering if you can provide some detail as to what the enhancements will be at the college.

Mr. Larsen: — Dale Larsen, deputy minister. Ms. Sarauer, that increase of 337,000 is essentially a bit of a rebase to the police college through the Saskatchewan Police Commission's budget. There'll be some extra dollars spent, or additional dollars spent on contracting people to do some continued training. There's no increase to FTEs currently at the police college, but there would be additional dollars spent on some of those contractors to deliver some of the training that's put a bit of demand on the core group of FTEs at the college.

I'm sure you've seen some of the media releases this year that agencies, particularly Regina and Saskatoon police services, had to go outside for a period of time to the RCMP to get their training, and it's just a pressure on the college.

Ms. Sarauer: — Yeah, that's where I was going, is that I've been hearing some challenges around wait times to get into the college to access the training that's needed. And capacity issues . . . Is there the feeling that having these contractors come in will be able to alleviate those pressures sufficiently?

Mr. Larsen: — We're hoping it will. To a certain degree, as you know, the college has had pressures with the current regime's system that they have established over the past few years. And we will still experience some pressures this year, depending on demands from the municipal agencies. And we try to offset that by having, you know, benefit in-kind from police agencies to provide officers to do the training. And this is purely for those contracted — usually working officers — so that we just refund the police agency for their time to continue with some of the training.

Ms. Sarauer: — Last budget your ministry had hired Buckingham Security to review how things were going in the police college. What was the outcome of that work?

Mr. Larsen: — Thank you for that question, Ms. Sarauer. We've received the report. We've had conversation with the Buckingham team that put the report together. I think there's a total of 67 recommendations that we're — yeah, 67 — that we're working through. And you know at the end of that time period,

hopefully we'll get a solid direction in relation to more of a public safety training facility for public safety people in the province, whether it be a combination of highway traffic, conservation officers, corrections officers — any public safety need is what we're hoping to establish eventually. But right now, going through, like I said, the report and having had one meeting with their team to go through some of the items, we're still sorting things out.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Are you able to provide the committee with a copy of that report?

[18:15]

Hon. Ms. Tell: — We've had the report for a couple weeks. There's still a number of steps that we need to go. And we're not exactly sure what direction we're going to be going. If cabinet . . . and I do believe that that's where it'll end up. It's advice to cabinet, so at this juncture, as it stands today, no. It's advice to cabinet.

Ms. Sarauer: — Moving on to vote (CP13), custody, supervision and rehabilitation services, there is a slight decrease in the budget for custody services. Could you provide some information as to what has changed there?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Yeah, the trailer that was at SCC, Saskatoon Correctional Centre, obviously was brought in to ensure that we had the right type of space during the pandemic. With the new remand centre construction beginning we didn't have room to continue leaving that on that particular property, so the trailer has been returned. It was being leased by the Government of Saskatchewan. It's been returned to the owners.

Ms. Sarauer: — How many beds were in that trailer?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — There was 44 bed spaces in that trailer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Moving on to (CP15), policing and community safety services, an increase of about 11 million in the budget for RCMP. Could you provide some detail about that?

Mr. Cameron: — Rob Cameron, ADM [assistant deputy minister] of policing. So to answer your question, increases for the PPSA [provincial police service agreement] includes 5.372 million for the increase to the PPSA itself; 3.195 million for CRT and WEST expansion. So that's crime reduction team and the warrant enforcement suppression team. 1.529 million increase for the First Nations policing program; \$475,000 increase to establish the First Nations policing community consultant groups; 355,000 to increase and to expand the "F" Division operational communications centre; and 300 . . . Are you speaking just about RCMP or about the whole PCSS [policing and community safety services] budget?

Ms. Sarauer: — I was just speaking about RCMP, but it's okay.

Mr. Cameron: — Okay, so I've got to go back a couple steps.

Ms. Sarauer: — That's okay.

Mr. Cameron: — So for RCMP only, it's 5.372 million as I said before; 3.195 million for the increase to the CRT and the WEST

expansion; 1.529 for the First Nations policing program; and \$355,000 for the "F" Division operational communications centre; and then 147,000 to increase the ICE [internet child exploitation] child exploitation unit, that was part of phase 3. So that covers all of that.

Ms. Sarauer: — I also notice this is where the \$7 million is allocated for the Saskatchewan marshals service. Can you explain what the \$7 million will be used for in this year's budget?

Mr. Cameron: — Rob Cameron, ADM of policing again. So the 7 million this fiscal year will be broken into several different chunks I guess. And the first chunk will be the hiring of some key support services positions as well as the chief marshal. So what we'd be looking at there would be the chief marshal, procurement folks, communication folks, some positions with regard to the HR [human resources], communication, and a variety of different support services around those areas. In addition to that, we may be in a position where we can hire some, what I would call an NCO [non-commissioned officer]-level position or some middle management for the organization as well.

In addition to that, we'll be looking at accommodation to establish a headquarters facility for the marshals themselves. Beyond that there will be some procurement of equipment. So equipment for the marshals could comprise of vehicles, which will be in this . . . or try to get it in this fiscal year, as well as other police-related equipment — firearms and uniforms and that kind of thing. It'll be also some IT and looking at radio informatics-type support services to that. So that's the large, sort of high level of what that dollar or that amount of dollars will be used for in this particular fiscal year.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. So when we talked about the marshals service during the bill debate, it sounded like it was still very much in its planning stages with the plan of it being operationalized in a couple of years. But if you're already purchasing equipment and office space, you must have a fairly strong idea of what this is going to look like now. So in light of that, have you . . . The actual boots-on-the-ground folks, the officers that you will be hiring, what will the qualifications be for those who will be hired?

Mr. Cameron: — So just before I answer the question, I just wanted to clarify something because, Ms. Sarauer, you'd indicated that there was or you felt that there may be a really hammered-out plan at this point, and I would say that there isn't. We're still in a developmental stage, and there's still a lot of work to be done with that. And we are still expecting that it'll be several years before we have a fully operational entity known as the Saskatchewan marshals service.

That said, your question was about the qualifications and what . . . I'll maybe break it into a couple parts just for clarity is that, one, we are looking at experienced police officers coming into the marshals service. Those qualifications for the marshals will be the same as it would require for any other police officer inside the province of Saskatchewan.

What we haven't come to ground on and there's still things in development and we're still looking at, is what kind of service range we'll be looking for in that. Different entities in different

law enforcement have a requirement for certain service levels. We're still working through what would be the appropriate service level for what we want the marshals to be able to accomplish and what kind of experience we'd like to see them come in with.

Certainly the type of criminality they'll be looking at, gangs, guns, drug trafficking, higher level human trafficking, that kind of thing, as well as very specific offences related to agricultural offences, I would call them, cattle rustling, metal thefts, chemical thefts, trespassing violations, things like that, will require a certain level of knowledge in that area as well. So all that to say is that we're still developing that criteria and what that's going to look like, but we've still got a way to go on that and to figure out where it's going to be.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you for the clarification. And you went into another question I had which is what type of work they would be doing. So just to clarify — I think this is what you've just said — but just to clarify that that hasn't been fully ironed out yet either, but those are the types of things that you had just mentioned that they're likely to do? Is that correct?

Mr. Cameron: — So some of the examples I gave you in my answer, certainly we're looking at focusing on that sort of higher level criminality: gangs, guns, illegal firearms, drugs, human trafficking. Also in there there're a variety of different things like provincial offences, provincial statutes, the apprehension of people that are on warrants, for example, which would . . . It works as a suite. You know, the concept is that we have other entities that do that kind of work, too, but it's enhancing the support to those other policing agencies. And I think that's one of the important parts here is to realize that it's a support service to other police agencies in the province.

Ms. Sarauer: — I think — correct me if I'm wrong — I think you just also mentioned office space as well. Where will that space be?

Mr. Cameron: — So the initial headquarters of the, if I can put it that way, for the marshals service is going to be located in Prince Albert. We're still looking at suitable areas and where we can house them. And then after that there will be, as we progress with the marshal program, we'll be looking at field offices in different locations but those have yet to be determined.

[18:30]

Ms. Sarauer: — So you're . . . Oh, so you're thinking there'll be a headquarters in Prince Albert, but then there'll be other offices in other locations. Is that what you just said? And where will those be? You said it was not yet determined, but do you have an idea so far of where you think they might be located?

Mr. Cameron: — No, at this point we don't have any hard, fast decisions on that. Yeah, so it's still a part of the development that we're doing now.

Ms. Sarauer: — So that would require office space in those locations once you've decided where those will be as well in future years.

Mr. Cameron: — So there will be with the field offices some

requirement for space for the members to work out of, but one of the things we are exploring is the ability to co-locate with our PPS [provincial protective services] resources as well. We have offices that are located inside of PPS that are in different areas of the province, so we may be able to co-locate there. If there's an area that we can't co-locate, then we would have to look at some other kind of accommodation.

Ms. Sarauer: — And remind me — I know this was mentioned in the minister's opening remarks, but I'm not sure if I caught the numbers correctly — how many officers and how many support staff are you planning on having with the marshals service?

Mr. Cameron: — So the officer cadre, or amount of officers we would have is 70, thereabouts. And from a support staff point that's a little bit more . . . take a little bit more development there because we're not sure exactly, but around 30. Could be more or less.

Ms. Sarauer: — Do you have any concerns that when you're doing this hiring, when you are at the stage where you are doing this hiring, that you'll be essentially taking from RCMP detachments, municipal policing, rather than . . . perhaps out of province? Instead of adding to the complement of policing services in Saskatchewan, you're essentially reshuffling the ones that already exist. This is a concern that I've heard from other policing organizations, so I'm wondering what the ministry has given thought to with respect to that and if there are any comments.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Throughout the policing communities in our province, including the RCMP, police services take other police from other police services on a continuous basis. This is forever thus. And people leaving the RCMP or people leaving from the municipal policing services to go to the RCMP, this is something that has happened forever. And we're not about to — we were just talking about this — we're not about to . . . let's take a very small police service in the province, and somebody that may fit the criteria that will be laid out, if they have, maybe two, three members. We're very aware of what the impact could be on much smaller policing services. But I'm telling you they all move all over the place at any given time for a variety of reasons.

The interesting thing about the marshals service, and it did surprise me, is that the . . . even though we haven't called for applications or résumés, we got them. And they are basically from out-of-province, experienced police officers that want to come home.

Ms. Sarauer: — Now I heard you mention this actually, in your remarks at SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], and I was interested to know who these individuals are. Obviously you're not giving names. I'm just wondering general years of service, that sort of thing, these types. Can you provide some information about that?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Well I mean it's not monolithic, obviously. There is a number of applications that come from very, very senior police officers to, you know, ones that have 8 to 10 years old . . . or 8 to 10 years of service. They're not 8, 10 years old. But you know, and quite frankly, we were a little bit surprised by all of that. So and those members, if they fit the criteria, will receive as much consideration as somebody within the province

that may . . . I mean, with the criteria not being set at this point in time, what we're looking for in an individual, years very specific or general years of service, what their years of service actually consisted of or consists of . . . I mean you can have 20 years of service as a police officer and not be off, you know, doing other than general duty patrol. We're looking for something a little bit more specific than that.

And even though it hasn't been defined, I think we have in our heads with the type of incidents that we are expecting the marshals service to be able to engage with, there's going to have to be a level of skill and experience that these members are going to have to have. So what that looks like specifically, I can't say, but it's very obvious that we're not looking for recruits coming out of recruit training.

Ms. Sarauer: — You've mentioned this as well before, the desire to have fairly skilled officers come into the marshals service. How much are these marshals going to be paid? What will their annual salary be?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Their rates of pay will be competitive with other policing agencies throughout the country.

Ms. Sarauer: — You've also mentioned the possibility that there be retired officers that would be involved in this or some group of folks . . . You're shaking your head; maybe that's not the case. I'm just asking generally about training for the officers, specifically will the training for these officers, should there be specific training for them, ongoing training as is always needed for all officers, will that be through the police college as well?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Ongoing training for police officers . . . I mean, the word "ongoing" tells it all. With you know, whether it's firearms, whatever the case may be, ongoing training is required. And I mean as things change the members need to be trained.

And this is no different than what happens in the municipal police services, that when someone comes with the desired qualifications and the skill level, that they will, if they're coming especially from out of province, ensuring that, you know, all the standards are met, just upgrading, updating, making sure that provincial statutes are understood, because provincial statutes are obviously different in each province, and you know, just to, you know, create that comfort level, especially if they're coming from out of province.

Ms. Sarauer: — Now as you well know, the RCMP made a very specific funding request to your ministry this year and spoke about the challenges that their organization is facing. In the document that they had provided to your ministry, they said that if resource increases are not provided, they will be forced to amalgamate detachments and move resources from what they define as the south district to the north district to distribute their resources. They said in the past changes to service delivery models have been viewed negatively by the public. Most common concerns are a lack of police visibility, increased response times, and the overall fear of increased crime in their communities.

Their ask for this budget cycle was for just under \$20 million, which would've allowed them to hire 60 public service positions.

Now that's positions that's a bit easier to hire and recruit right now, and it would add to economies in the local places where these detachments are located. And it would've allowed the RCMP to put boots on the ground in terms of redirecting RCMP officers to be doing the front-line, on-the-ground work that they want to be doing, while their administrative support would be bolstered. Then they wouldn't be in the detachment, you know, sitting on their computers as much as they have to right now.

From what I've heard from the ministry, the Sask marshals plan is to alleviate some of the concerns that have been addressed in this proposal: a lack of police visibility, increased response times, and the overall fear of increased crime in communities. However Sask marshals wouldn't put new officers on the ground for a few more years, whereas this proposal would've put more officer time on the ground immediately. Why did the ministry decide not to grant the request of the RCMP?

[18:45]

Hon. Ms. Tell: — So in answer to your question, the Government of Saskatchewan has increased funding to the RCMP for provincial policing services by 52.5 per cent or 76.7 million since 2011 and '12. This has allowed the RCMP to add additional 387 and a quarter officers responsible for provincial policing, an increase of 58.8 per cent since 2011 and '12.

With our investment our government has made in the protection and response teams, there are over 300 more uniformed officers able to address public safety concerns along our highways. Since '07-08, we've invested over 230 million to fund 143 municipal front-line policing positions, and talk about PACT [police and crisis team] and internet exploitation.

However our government has also introduced a number of initiatives: 1.8 annually to fund police and crisis teams; 11.2 million annually to fund traffic services of Saskatchewan; 11.3 million annually, and this is over and above the PPSA, to fund 10 crime reduction teams; 3.2 million annually to fund the warrant enforcement and suppression teams based out of Saskatoon and Meadow Lake; and \$6.4 million annually to fund the Saskatchewan trafficking response team in Saskatchewan.

And in this year's budget we also agreed to increase the number of clerical positions. I'm not sure what they asked for, but I believe we ended up with five . . . The communications centre, and we topped them up for another five.

That isn't all the province of Saskatchewan does with respect to First Nations policing. We provide almost \$20 million to support 33 community tripartite agreements of First Nations community safety officer positions.

I think, you know, just saying, and all that to say is that the Government of Saskatchewan, the people of Saskatchewan have increased funding to the RCMP significantly since 2011-12, even more significantly from 2007 and '08. All of the combined traffic services, crime reduction teams, warrant enforcement, trafficking and response are primarily all RCMP officers, so that's over and above it.

So what we have seen, and what we have observed is the very

targeted, very specific function teams have been extremely effective in the province of Saskatchewan. And I'm sure they've been effective in other provinces, but I can only speak for Saskatchewan. So the amount of funding over and above the front line of the RCMP is significant. And even though these teams consist primarily of RCMP officers, if I do say so myself we have invested heavily in our provincial police service.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you for that answer. However I don't believe you answered the very specific question that I had with respect to the funding request that the RCMP made for this year. They didn't ask for more officers in WEST or CRT, for example. They asked for \$19.8 million which would have been 60 public service positions. That's 38 detachment service assistants, 10 DOCC [division operational communication centre] operators — I think you just mentioned that you provided them with 5 of the 10 that they had requested — and 12 front-line support.

Again I ask, why did the ministry not provide this funding that the RCMP have asked for in this budget cycle, which would have allowed them to put more front-line officer time directly into communities immediately?

Mr. Cameron: — Rob Cameron, ADM of policing. So it's a complex answer, I think, to your question. First of all the discussions we had with the RCMP with regards to positions that they would desire or resources they would like, it's not just a one-time occurrence. It's a constant conversation we have. We're continually linked to the RCMP in this province to discuss their requirements, their challenges that they have, and what they think they require.

What we do know is that we've provided the RCMP with quite a few positions — including 22, I believe, this fiscal — as well as the folks for the comm centre. But there's other ways to also look at how you can improve policing in a particular region, or province in this case. And we've seen great results with our CRT teams, our WEST team, our STRT [Saskatchewan trafficking response team] teams, which are primarily RCMP resources that we've provided.

The other part of that is when you look at, for example, the marshals service and how it'll function is, is trying to relieve that pressure on the front-line RCMP because we recognize what the RCMP tells us with regards to pressure at the front-line detachments. But one of the issues is they've got to do it all. And units like CRT, WEST, STRT, marshals, they will improve what the RCMP calls proactive time, and that's the time that they can spend on the detachment without a call for service. And they try to do about 30 per cent of that at each detachment, and that's a challenge.

But we've also looked at, when you look at the PRT [protection and response team] and as well as the PPS, particularly one of the things we're looking at is the removal of the pressure with regards to prisoner transport and court security. So currently the RCMP provides members into the courthouses to provide that security as well as they also transport prisoners, which frankly the RCMP has been asking to get away from that. And with our PPS and the enhancement with that program, we're able to provide more. We haven't completely removed the RCMP from that, but we've actually been able to decrease the amount of pressure on the RCMP and improve our ability to transport

prisoners and of course do court security. So those kinds of steps allow the RCMP to better utilize their resources.

Now going into the future, and like I said it's a constant conversation, we're going to engage with the RCMP. We'll look at other asks that they have, and then as the environment changes, we'll continue to have those conversations with Assistant Commissioner Blackmore and her staff with regards to what the next fiscal year could bring.

One challenge — and I think it's kind of universally known, so I'm not speaking out of school on this — is the RCMP has some challenges filling positions. We've seen that with some of the positions we've provided them and their inability to get bodies into those chairs. It's not to say we don't have confidence that they will. They will. Eventually they'll be able to get the people they need. But at this point in time, they do have some challenges with that.

So this is more of a blended solution to kind of do the best we can with the scenarios that we're facing there and to make sure that the RCMP is supported and they can spend more time doing that front-line detachment policing. So I know it's more a complex answer than just this is why, but that is the bigger picture of it all.

Ms. Sarauer: — I think we can all agree that the RCMP are facing a lot of pressures right now. It sounds like the ministry fully understands that. And one of the challenges that they also face is around recruitment of new officers.

[19:00]

That's why the budget proposal that they had put forward for this year was for the hiring of public service positions because they were positions that they felt . . . and had experience historically being able to fill much easier than they could with officer positions. Again they put this proposal forward in an effort to alleviate the pressures that they're seeing. Instead of that, as you have just mentioned, Mr. Cameron, there were decisions to fund other supporting bodies.

Again why was the decision made not to grant this funding? Why did the ministry decide they were better equipped to decide what would be able to best alleviate the pressures within the RCMP?

Mr. Cameron: — So to answer your question, so in the totality of all the situation and all the evaluations that was done by the ministry with regards to the RCMP's ask for resources and what the ministry felt was a good balance there, what you see in the budget and the things we spoke about it was the end result. So that decision was made based on an assessment of all the factors that we had in front of us.

It doesn't mean that we won't continue having those conversations with the RCMP. We certainly will be. We'll certainly be looking at what next year might bring and what kind of things they may want to see when they deliver their next plan. But it's always a live conversation; we're constantly having that discussion. And so I know I've met with Assistant Commissioner Blackmore to discuss these things.

But at the end of the day, all I can really say is that was the

decision made based on the facts and the information we had in front of us, and was deemed as the best solution.

Ms. Sarauer: — The RCMP also made a specific request for \$2 million to study policing models for future RCMP policing in Saskatchewan. Why was this request not granted?

Mr. Cameron: — So just a point of clarity, I don't believe the RCMP "F" Division did make a request for \$2 million to study policing.

Ms. Sarauer: — Just give me one minute. Let's see if I can find where I got that from. You know what, that request came from the National Police Federation. It was their 2023 pre-budget submission to the Government of Saskatchewan, and included in that there was a recommendation for . . . I'll just read it specifically:

Investing \$2 million to undertake a study with the Sask RCMP to explore alternative service delivery models, make recommendations, and implement enhanced policing models within the province, for example, fly-in and hub models.

Mr. Cameron: — So thank you for the clarification. That actually makes more sense now. As you're aware that the NPF [National Police Federation] is the union for the RCMP. We've never had discussions, received or entertained information from the union with regards to different expenses or different requests. It's actually unprecedented until, I guess, this particular ask. So we wouldn't normally do that.

Our contract is with Public Safety Canada and we would have negotiations or discussions with Public Safety Canada or perhaps Public Safety Canada and the RCMP, in our case "F" Division. But we wouldn't have that discussion with the NPF.

Ms. Sarauer: — Just being cognizant of the time, I'm going to move on to ask a few questions about the budget for the Firearms Secretariat. I think we've talked about a few of them already but just to make sure I haven't missed anything.

There is a quite substantial . . . I'll just say generally, I'm just looking at the full budget of the Firearms Secretariat. There's a substantial increase in the budget this year. You've spoken a bit about that already, but I'm wondering if you could just provide a bit more detail about the planned expansion for the Firearms Secretariat this year.

Mr. Freberg: — Good evening. So I'm Robert Freberg, the Chief Firearms Officer with the province of Saskatchewan.

So we're undergoing a major growth this year with regards . . . Our first year in operation, we looked at what the need was and did a lot of evaluation on what was taking place within public safety, what the needs were of the stakeholders in the province. We had consultations with some police agencies. We're also a member of the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police, so we go to some of the meetings there and listen to some of the concerns. As well as we've been touring around the province and also talking to some of the stakeholders as well.

So really what we've identified in here is that, you know, there's

the core service that we've had in the past when we started a Chief Firearms Officer, which is basically handling the regulatory side of the federal firearms program. So across Canada, each one of the provinces has a Chief Firearms office and they typically deal with business licences, firearms businesses, revocations and review of licences of PAL [possession and acquisition licence] and RPAL [restricted possession and acquisition licence] licence holders. And also, of course, are involved with some public safety campaigns and also investigating what's called FIPs [firearms interest police], or firearms incidents reports, that comes when somebody has had an interaction with the police or some public safety concern has been raised.

When we took over the program, there was a huge backlog, up to almost 800 days, of some files that hadn't even been looked at. And so we jumped into it, I guess being fed with the firehose. Firearms officers that we initially were advised by the federal government were needed to operate the program was woefully under what we needed to actually be able to operate the program properly because we found that there was just too much workload and of course the faster we went through them, the more files that came at them.

So since we've had that experience and we've also looked at what else we can do within the program, we've developed a Saskatchewan firearms office rather than just focusing on the CFO [Chief Firearms Officer] responsibilities, which is one component of the Saskatchewan firearms office now.

We've also looked at the ballistics lab. So again, the province at one time had a ballistics lab here that was operated out at the RCMP headquarters. The decision was made by the federal government to pull several of those labs, including the one in Saskatchewan, back into their headquarters in Ottawa. So what happened of course is the provinces weren't getting the services that they required and so they started building out their own lab services.

And for example in Alberta, they set up a lab in Calgary and also in Edmonton. So they started of course taking some of the employees out of the lab federally, because it's a very narrow band of expertise, and setting up their own lab. So of course the service levels then started to go down within the national lab and the response times became worse and worse, which had then caused more provinces to get on board with a similar program, which Manitoba did as well.

So Saskatchewan was fully reliant on the services being provided by Ottawa and of course, as I've indicated earlier, those services started to diminish. So we looked at it within . . . By talking with SACP [Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police] we established a committee of folks from SACP to advise as to what the best process was. Should the province look at this provincially and set up a provincial firearms lab, or should we look at, you know, locating it inside a police service? And the recommendation came forward that we should set it up as a provincial lab so we could service all of the agencies in the province, both municipal, RCMP, some of our partners with Environment, and others who might have incidents where firearms or firearms casings would have to be analyzed.

So we set up a separate division in this new budget that you're

seeing now for the ballistics lab, which will have its own director, manager, technicians, and equipment, and facility. Given the amount of time that's required to build out a lab like that and get it properly equipped and established, in the interim we wanted to make sure we were providing those services to provide the public safety. So we have now signed a contract, or an MOU I guess would be more properly the way to phrase, with Saskatoon Police Service, to co-locate the lab on an interim basis for two years into the Saskatoon police station, which will allow us to get our staff, our technicians, and our managers up and running, get them trained and get in front of this, and then be able to actually start turning out some results while we build our more permanent home over on Cardinal Crescent where we do have some property that we're developing.

[19:15]

So that was sort of a first step, I guess, with respect to the firearms lab. And then we have the Chief Firearms office, which again right now I've been wearing several hats. I've been wearing the hat of the Chief Firearms Officer. I'm helping to establish the lab. And then we're setting up this other division with client services.

With the client services it's going to have a number of responsibilities, one being of course, working with the new Saskatchewan firearms Act to bring forth some Saskatchewan firearms legislation. What we found in looking at the challenge around secure storage, education, licensing was, the firearms Acts are very complicated. And I think probably any of the lawyers you talk to, as soon as they see a firearms file come across their desk, they run for the hills. And as you know from your own experience that it . . . You have to go back and forth between the firearms Act and the Criminal Code and then other statutes. And then you've of course got, you know, other things that come into play. So it becomes very complex.

So the challenge for some owners is they can easily become offside with the legislation, like forgetting to renew a licence, not totally understanding their responsibilities around safe storage, or having some, you know, memory lapse where maybe they forget to lock a door or something like that and a firearm gets stolen.

So we wanted to really establish these provincial offences so that we could deal with them more on an education process and not end up having the stakeholders in the province that are involved resulting in a Criminal Code charge that could result in them losing the firearm, losing, you know, the privilege of using a firearm permanently, potentially affecting their ability to travel outside of the country, and so forth.

So within our budget expansion, you know, we've also put in place in our client service unit to provide two additional lawyers to provide some prosecutorial services for those Saskatchewan offences. So we're not going to be leaning on the Crown prosecutors who are typically dealing more with the, you know, Criminal Code offences or where there's violence, or you know, other egregious acts that, you know, are certainly outside of administrative-type offences that we're talking about here.

With that as well, we've also put a group together that's going to be setting up some mandatory compensation review — I wouldn't say mandatory — I guess the option for people to

request a review of their compensation. As you know, the federal government has become quite aggressive in banning a variety of type of firearms, about 1,900 models so far and apparently more to come. I was just reading a headline today in the paper that there's more to follow in C-21. Apparently they just announced early this afternoon that there's more changes coming.

So with that in mind, if these firearms are going to be taken away from stakeholders in the province or expropriated — they call it a buyback, but it's expropriation; it's confiscation; you can call it what you want with a buyback, but that's what it is — we want to make sure that these stakeholders are properly compensated and that they have a mechanism to be able to have a third party review their situation, much like you'd have with your vehicle.

You know, you have an accident and you get an evaluation of it and you feel it's not adequate because you just put new tires on it, just put a new engine in it, a new starter, battery but now, you know, the value of your vehicle has gone up and so you go back and get another opinion. And that's exactly what we're going to be doing with this evaluation committee or compensation committee, is taking the information from the stakeholder through an online portal that we're developing.

So people can go in, send in photographs, backup data, information, condition, and so forth, so that we can go to an expert panel to have that review done, make recommendations to the commissioner and have them make a determination of what the fair value of that is, present that to whoever the seizure agent is that's been licensed to actually take that firearm.

So again the licensing of the seizure agents is another main issue. And it kind of ties back into the overall growth for the program because we believe in looking at the seizure of firearms that several things have to happen. I mean the individuals involved in the seizure need to be licensed, trained, and understand their responsibility both to the client but also to look at the firearms and their history.

So what we don't want to see happen is people picking up firearms, grinding them up at the door or taking them somewhere and destroying them right away, only to find out that the person that they took the firearm from may have potentially at some point in time been involved in some type of criminal matter, potentially with that firearm being involved in that situation, in which case now we've just gone ahead and destroyed the firearm. So we want to make sure that that firearm goes through some form of ballistic analysis, so we take some sort of a fingerprint of it which, I might add, isn't unusual.

In many of the states in the United States — where frankly, you know, their licensing requirements are not as stringent as they are in Canada and therefore, in my opinion, why they have some of the issues that they have — they do in some states require that the firearms being purchased have to have the cartridge casing, the fired cartridge casing, which actually is included in some cases with a new firearm submitted at the time they register the gun, so that they actually have the DNA of that firearm for the purposes of tracing it should that firearm show up in a crime.

We're basically doing the same thing when we take these seized firearms in. We're going to be getting that fingerprint so that we have that record before we destroy the firearm, combining that

with the compensation, and then combining it with the fact that once we've determined the value and submitted it to the individuals responsible for paying the client, that in fact the client is getting paid. And that, you know, it's . . . All three steps have taken place before the firearm is then destroyed.

So to that end you can see where the ballistic lab fits into that. It's not only helping the police with what they're doing, but it's also helping us to catalogue these firearms that, you know, are going to be destroyed, you know, never to be used again. But it requires us to have technicians. It requires us to have a lab. It requires us to have storage facilities. All of these things are highlighted in our budget.

In addition we've of course put in more firearms officers to allow us to have more investigations because of the amount of public safety complaints which we think are pivotal in reducing gun crime that we're seeing, and working with police on investigations related to smuggling 3-D [three-dimensional] guns you're hearing a lot about. The list goes on and on.

And then I guess the third pillar of this is to provide specialized legal support both to our own Crown prosecutors but also to the police to give them more knowledge and the ability to potentially charge for less egregious crimes under the provincial Act.

So it's a big project that we're undertaking here, and there's a lot of parts and pieces, and to that, you know, we've established now a commissioner. There are some other FTE positions and there are actually several that support many of the things that I've, you know, I've described here I guess in length as usual.

So I hope I covered most of your questions or maybe I created more questions than answers.

Ms. Sarauer: — You did. Thank you so much for that answer. I appreciate it. I promise I'm getting to the corrections side of the ministry soon. I just have one more question, a set of questions I really want to ask before we move on to the custody folks.

The legislative district security unit, last time we were speaking about that new unit there wasn't an idea yet about what the costs were going to be. So I'm wondering if you could provide some numbers in terms of what the initial set-up costs were and what the ongoing cost is?

Mr. Cameron: — Rob Cameron, ADM of policing. So break it down into two kind of parts first, and then we'll kind of get into what that's all for.

So in the '22-23 fiscal year, we spent just under a million dollars for LDSU [legislative district security unit]. In '23-24, our budget is 1.747 million in the LDSU. And primarily that was also to . . . What had happened when the classifications were done for our officers, the classifications came actually in higher than they were originally thought they were going to be — good for the members — and so that cost went up.

Some of the things that . . . And I'm glad you brought up the LDSU because we've been able to do quite a few things. And as you know, we've only had LDSU in place since October really, operational here in the legislature. And I'm pretty proud of the work that they've done and how they've adapted to, you know, a

fluid situation and really looking at the amount of training that they've been doing, not only training internally and focusing on the training that they do with their day-to-day tactical work and whatnot, but there's also ethics training in there. There's also non-biased policing training, things like that, that are also being included into their regime of in-service training.

The other thing that we've really been working on is the development of a solid policy and policy manuals that are quite exceptional actually. One of the things that we realized is that there wasn't a lot of written policy as to how things operated inside the legislature here. And so LDSU has been spending a lot of time working on that, those kind of policies, covering things like how to address protests or how to address the turnout for work, the kind of things you would expect that any law enforcement entity or, in this case, security entity would have to ensure that it's professional and above board.

The other thing we're really seeing is a real cross-pollination with our policing partners. In fact Dani Herman, our director of security, has been working hard at making sure there's the interoperability, including with the Sergeant-at-Arms here in the building. In fact, Dani just — and if I can brag for just a bit — has just been accepted into the Sergeant-at-Arms association, which is a pretty big accomplishment, I would suggest.

Really overall I think we're providing a really good service. We've increased the amount of hours that we have actual security patrol in place, including our weekends — which was something that wasn't in existence before — and certainly extending hours into the evening. And I'd like to think that our officers in the LDSU are also getting to know folks here in the building and working and are a professional and courteous group and providing the service that we expect them to provide.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Last time we had spoken about this, I had asked about how much the budget was for the original Sergeant-at-Arms team, and at that time the ministry did not have access to that number. Could the ministry provide that number now?

Mr. Cameron: — So unfortunately I can't. We were never provided with that information, so I can't speak to what the Sergeant-at-Arms budget would have been or whatnot.

[19:30]

Ms. Sarauer: — You also mentioned that the LDSU is working on creating written policies. Who is working on those policies?

Mr. Cameron: — So that is actually the director of security. So Dani is working with her team as well as our policy experts inside the PPS. We have a policy group inside there and they're working, using a very established format for policy that is very typical of police agencies throughout not only Canada but North America, and accepted it. In fact I believe it's CALEA [Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies] has actually approved this policy mechanism.

We're using a databasing program that helps us develop that and keeps the policy. So every member can . . . they have to read the policy and then they have to sign off on the policy. So there's an accountability network or framework that's built into that as well.

And what it does is bring it in line with what a professional policing or law enforcement security organization should have in place.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. There was a minor controversy that happened last session in the galleries with respect to the wearing of a shirt that was deemed a political statement, and some concerns around that. After that happened, one of the government ministers expressed in the media that there was going to be some work across the aisle on creating an understanding, a policy perhaps as to how that would be treated in the future. The opposition received no further communication after that was announced. Has that policy been created?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Mr. Chair, if I could. The question asked by Ms. Sarauer isn't dealing with the budget that is before us, and so if I can ask you to have a look at that.

The Chair: — We'll move on please, Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Oh, let's move on to the corrections side of the ministry then, if I'm not going to get an answer to that question. Let's talk about the remand centre. Last year, Minister, you mentioned you weren't sure at the time what the facility was going to look like in terms of bed space. You just indicated because of budgetary pressures it was going to be less than what was originally announced. Do you have an indication of what it's going to be now?

Ms. Aldridge: — Joelle Aldridge, director of major projects. Yes, so I'm happy to finally have a firm answer to your question here. The remand centre expansion will be 312 beds in total.

Ms. Sarauer: — And when is the projected time for completion and opening?

Ms. Aldridge: — So our timeline for now is still to have the building ready for operations by June of 2025.

Ms. Sarauer: — Are you feeling confident that you'll meet that timeline?

Ms. Aldridge: — Yes.

Ms. Sarauer: — And the remand centre will only be housing male offenders. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — So with the new remand build, there will be just male remanded offenders in that new build. However as part of making these changes — you know, knowing what we're dealing with in the province of Saskatchewan with our offenders — we are working on the old part of the building, not the new building, but the old Saskatoon Correctional Centre to create that flexible space. So that can be used for male and/or female offenders. It is very early in the stages of doing this, trying to determine how many spaces will be there. It is not nailed down at this point in time. But with the new remand centre, it is strictly dealing with male remanded offenders.

Ms. Sarauer: — So are you thinking something similar to White Birch, where they're to house short-term remanded females? Or what are you thinking that might look like?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — The intent of the flex space is to take pressure off of the Saskatoon Police Service. They're holding offenders for us, you know, after hours and on weekends. And if we're able to alleviate some of the pressure that is being experienced through SPS [Saskatoon Police Service], then it is part of the criteria.

However we are very focused on completing the remand centre. The flex space is a factor. And as we move through the process, we will be able to better determine and articulate what that space can be used for, over and above what is needed through the Saskatoon Police Service.

Ms. Sarauer: — As you know, Pine Grove is under significant pressure in terms of their capacity. And last I checked — and then hopefully I'll have enough time to ask for an update — but last I checked, 75 per cent, at that time, of the population there were remand inmates. What work is being done to address the pressure at Pine Grove specifically?

Ms. Scriver: — Heather Scriver, assistant deputy minister, custody, supervision and rehabilitative services. As you know, with remanded offenders, we have very little ability to get them out any quicker than we can, so we're focusing at this point in time on our sentenced offenders.

We do maximize our reintegration leaves. We have case managers that work with our women to develop discharge planning right when they get into the facility so that we can have them geared up when they're eligible to go on a reintegration leave back into their community or back to work or back to their family.

We also have our reintegration unit in Saskatoon that is at capacity all the time, and we have a wait-list for that as well. We do use our Elizabeth Fry Society contract. We've had some fantastic work done with the EFry [Elizabeth Fry Society] ladies coming in to the facility and working with our women. And we also have — and Drew Wilby will be able to speak more to it — is what was formerly known as Back to Basics. And Drew can come up and speak to that.

Ms. Sarauer: — Before I get Mr. Wilby down here, I'm assuming you have the point-in-time counts for the facilities.

Ms. Scriver: — Do you want them now?

Ms. Sarauer: — Could you provide them now since you're here?

Ms. Scriver: — Yes, I can.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you.

Ms. Scriver: — So I can go back to April 1st of last year. Our point-in-time count summary for all our adult facilities was 1,973. As of March 15th, 2023 we've risen up to 2,063 offenders in our adult facilities. I can give you a breakdown.

Ms. Sarauer: — Could you by facility and percentage of over, of capacity?

Ms. Scriver: — Yes. So right now, as of April 25th, if we look at the Regina Correctional Centre, our facility count is 718.

Prince Albert Correctional Centre is 537. Saskatoon Correctional Centre is 529. Pine Grove is 208. SHNB [Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford], we have 28 clients there. Whitespruce Training Centre, 23. White Birch, our remand facility in Regina for females is at 12, and our Besnard Lake is at 12 offenders as well.

Of the breakdown of those, 57 per cent or 1,183 are on remand, and we have 43 per cent or 904 are provincially sentenced offenders.

[19:45]

Would you like our utilization?

Ms. Sarauer: — Yeah.

Ms. Scriver: — Okay. So Regina Correctional Centre, our operational utilization rate as of April 21st is 90 per cent; Saskatchewan Hospital, North Battleford is 56 per cent operational utilization; Besnard Lake Correctional Camp, 52 per cent; White Birch, 56.3 per cent; Whitespruce, 82.1 per cent. Saskatoon Correctional Centre is over their operational utilization at 106 per cent; Prince Albert, 107.5 per cent; and Pine Grove Correctional Centre, which is 124 per cent.

So if we look at the big four, Regina Correctional Centre, 51 per cent of that is remanded offenders; Saskatoon correctional is 61 per cent remand; Prince Albert Correctional Centre is 62 remand; and Pine Grove, 60 per cent remanded offenders.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Thanks, we appreciate that.

Ms. Scriver: — You're welcome.

Ms. Sarauer: — Perhaps I can now ask about the project with Saskatoon Tribal Council and what stage that's at in terms of its operating schedule.

Mr. Wilby: — Good evening. Drew Wilby, assistant deputy minister of community engagement. I appreciate the question about *ikwēskīcik iskwēwak*, a Cree name meaning "women turning their lives around." In terms of the program, this was new for us where we really targeted an outcome-based initiative. We knew we had a challenge. We knew our female population was going up significantly, as ADM Scriver has just highlighted that remand number coming in.

Around 2014-15 we saw the number in, especially the Pine Grove facility, the number of females coming into corrections more than doubled. It actually went up about 400 per cent. And so we knew we had to do something. And taking a look at that, we thought, well, what if we could partner with an agency to look at the back end of the system, the reintegration side, where we know we have these individuals for a period of time. But what we saw is they were churning in and out of the system, sometimes 4 or 5, 6 times.

So partnering with Saskatoon Tribal Council, we provided about \$3.6 million over the next three years. So a million of that is coming from the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. A further 200,000 is coming from the Ministry of Health to provide mental health and addiction services.

The real innovation here, and what's pretty amazing that Saskatoon Tribal Council has done, is they took advantage of the rapid housing initiative money the city of Saskatoon was given by the federal government and CMHC to build a house in Saskatoon to house some of these females. They have staff that are employed as reintegration coordinators at Pine Grove, working between Pine Grove and Saskatoon, as well as a team on the ground.

And at that house we were going to open it last week, and I can tell you a little tidbit of a story. There's room for 18 in the house. And it was the Friday, I believe, before the Monday that it was set to open, and we posed the question and said, you know, is there demand? Is there desire amongst the individuals leaving Pine Grove? And the answer was yes.

And the program manager from Saskatoon Tribal Council said, did you pass the shelter in the alley as you approached in? And I said, well I did. And she says, that's one of our women. And so I was able to talk to her on the way out, and her excitement to move into the house and to begin to get the services from Saskatoon Tribal Council to help her reintegrate back to her home community, it really speaks to that, you know, that advantage of doing that, and obviously stopping that churn from coming back into the facility.

Further partnerships that we've had, we've had the quilter group from Humboldt that have partnered with Saskatoon Tribal Council to provide a quilt for every female that will come through the doors, they can take with them. Just showing again that wraparound service and support that's there in the community for the program.

Ms. Sarauer: — How does the housing piece of this work in terms of length of time they're able to stay in the house?

Mr. Wilby: — For sure. That is largely determined by Saskatoon Tribal Council under the conditions of the contract they have with us. What Chief Arcand had said last week and their program managers are suggesting is about that year to 18 months at the top end. I mean, obviously it could be shorter than that.

But as we know, and we've had the conversation earlier about second-stage housing, to be able to get that wraparound support, connect to those services, make sure that that individual is being made whole again to go back out into the community usually takes that year to 18 months. We also know from our data collection that if we can keep an individual out of the system for a year to 18 months, their likelihood of coming back plummets down into the ground. So hopefully they're able to get back up and going.

And of course the most important thing here is you're connecting families. These are women, a lot of them have kids, so having that space where their kids can come, that feel welcome. There's a park out the back. It's very connected to the Pleasant Hill Community Association. The excitement is there in the community as well of course with the program agency and the delivery partners.

Ms. Sarauer: — Could you provide some more specifics as to the wraparound supports that will be provided to these women?

Mr. Wilby: — Certainly. So they are providing obviously transportation from Pine Grove as well as the connection point at Pine Grove itself. And I think the important thing to remember here too is that this can also be for remanded offenders. If someone is being released on a remand warrant, it doesn't preclude them from coming into the program. They are still eligible for it, although this largely does fall to the sentence side.

There's the Ministry of Health programming, as I talked about, that's being directed towards mental health and addictions supports. And STC wanted to see that done through a culturally specific way, as opposed to, you know, necessarily what else is being done in the community, because they do have a clear vision of cultural support on that as well.

There's partnerships with Social Services, of course. We were able to engage them fully to not only collaborate with the house but also direct family reunification support to ikwēskīcik iskwēwak clients so they are able to work with the women coming out, identify if they have children where they are, and try to reunify them together.

There's agreements in place with Saskatchewan Polytech and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies to support the clients if they're interested in completing grades 10 through 12, or potentially workplace training, because we know of course that's an important part.

As well it's simple things like connecting to a driver's licence and connecting through SGI and making sure that's in place and looking at other, you know, other connection points that may be there as well. So that's sort of a broad spectrum of where those services are.

Ms. Sarauer: — One of the challenges that has been discussed before with respect to connecting women, and all inmates actually as they leave facilities, is connecting them to ministry supports like social assistance. Is that also a piece of the work that they'll be doing, and is that something . . . More broadly speaking, I'm wondering about long-term goals. I'm already thinking, how can these services be provided to as many who leave the system as possible? So broadly speaking, you know, thoughts about how the lessons learned through this project, assuming it will be fairly successful, can be applied to supporting more released inmates?

Mr. Wilby: — Absolutely that. I mean, the connection to whether it be income assistance or potentially social housing, once they do leave the . . . if they are in the facility. If they aren't in the facility, they may have some of those community supports or a place to live, but they still need the wraparound support and services from ikwēskīcik iskwēwak and the STC as they provide that.

And I think you've hit it on the head. I mean, this is a bit of an experiment. It was something different. The minister took a risk on us, cabinet took a risk, and Corrections took a risk to say, let's try something different. Let's partner, and let's partner across the system. And that's really what I think makes this special.

And we will fully evaluate it. We've got a partnership with the university to run the evaluation. Of course all those data-sharing agreements are in place to be able to do just that. We're very

hopeful that it will be successful. And I mean, if we're able to reunite families and put them back together and have these individuals stay out of the system and go back on to healthy, long lives, that would be a true measure of success.

We know we won't be successful with everyone, and STC's of course aware of that as well. But we will evaluate it, and if successful, of course we would look to, you know, either expand or look at other potential places for this. Maybe male offenders or others. But that will all be prefaced by that evaluative work to see, you know, how successful are we, what are the measures of success, and are we keeping people from churning back into the system, which we anticipate we will.

Ms. Sarauer: — When will the first person move into the house?

Mr. Wilby: — That's already been done. They moved in last Monday. We had six individuals, including that lady I spoke of who was in the alley behind the facility, move in on Monday. We anticipate over the course of this next month that the house will likely be full.

Ms. Sarauer: — I'm sure, as you had mentioned, the evaluation of this project will be ongoing. This time next year will there be the ability to provide a bit more information as to how the project is going so far, understanding that it is a three-year project, correct?

Mr. Wilby: — Yes, it's a three-year project. Someone will be able to update you next year. Of course that won't be myself, but I look forward to the updates as well and where those will go.

The formal evaluation, of course, won't take place until as we move through that 18-month, two-year, three-year time horizon. But there will be continual updates. So if the questions are asked next year, someone for sure will be able to provide you with at least some output measures, if not some outcomes at that time.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you so much for this information. What are the plans for upgrades to the custody facilities for this budget year?

Ms. Aldridge: — Overall plans for . . . Oh sorry, Joelle Aldridge. I guess the question was just capital improvements overall for custody facilities. So the big one of course is the remand centre, which we've already discussed.

We have locking mechanisms projects that are still ongoing. That work will be completed at Paul Dojack as well as Prince Albert youth residence this year. And we have work continuing at Kilburn Hall and at Regina Correctional that may extend beyond this fiscal year, but it's in progress now.

The Urban Camp is now complete and operating. We have some seasonal type of work remaining coming up in the summer, but that's complete and everyone is moved in and quite happy with the facility. So that's a good-news story for our capital program overall.

We also have camera infrastructure renewal. There's a larger asset management plan in place where we're operating obsolete or critically needed security infrastructure throughout the centres. Prince Albert unit 4 retrofit is continuing on to the next

side. The side that was impacted by the disturbance is now complete and they've moved into that half again. And we'll be looking at completing the second half beginning this fiscal year, and then some smaller program area upgrades within base capital — operating equipment purchases, those types of smaller items that fall within the small capital allocation.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. I have some questions about Sask Hospital. I believe we were just given a capacity number for that facility. How many total beds are available right now for corrections side?

Ms. Scriver: — Heather Scriver. So as I mentioned earlier, the count at SHNB: we have 17 male, we have 11 females, for a total of 28. Of that, 13 are sentenced and 15 are remanded. The operational capacity of those two units is 48. Right now there's 20 beds available for utilization.

[20:00]

So in terms of wait times — because I know you're going to ask that — is the average wait time is 30 days, and that's for females. For males, it's 32 days. And at present there are 11 scheduled to arrive between April 25th and June 14th — six female and five male. Then there's another list of accepted clients. Seventeen of those are male and they're still waiting for their admission date. Their admission date is predicated on the assessment and acceptance by the psychiatrist.

Ms. Sarauer: — Understanding that it sounds like — and correct me if I'm wrong — there are some available beds that aren't currently being utilized, what is the delay in getting individuals who've been . . . Well first of all, there's the individuals who are waiting to be approved but then individuals who are approved and then waiting to get into the facility. Where are the challenges in terms of the holdups there?

Ms. Scriver: — Heather Scriver. As I indicated earlier, the admissions to the Sask Hospital is conducted by a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist only reviews the cases of our clients once every two weeks . . . Once a week? . . . He will assess two inmates once a week.

Ms. Sarauer: — So the holdup is there's not enough psychiatrists available to do this work. Is there any plan to recruit more psychiatrists? I understand that's a challenge throughout the province but still.

Ms. Scriver: — Absolutely it is and it's something that we've been struggling with for a while. But of course, that is with the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] and the Ministry of Health. We don't retain and hire our own psychiatrists in the Ministry of CPPS [Corrections, Policing and Public Safety]. That is done through the SHA. And it is a critical pressure that we're dealing with.

Ms. Sarauer: — What is the criteria for those to be admitted to SHNB rather than placed in a . . . rather than kept at the correctional centre?

Ms. Scriver: — Clients are assessed and reviewed at the correctional facility by our medical team, and if they have, or it's determined they have a significant mental health issue then they

will be referred to the assessment health team at Sask Hospital North Battleford. That health team consists of the psychiatrist, and at that point in time the determination will be made whether or not they are accepted into the program.

Ms. Sarauer: — Are violent offenders allowed admittance?

Ms. Scriver: — Our offender population is predominantly complex needs and violent offenders. Yes, they would be accepted into the program.

Ms. Sarauer: — So just to clarify, it's not a criteria that will result in an offender being refused treatment at Sask Hospital?

Ms. Scriver: — The assessment on our offenders for Sask Hospital is based on a mental health and a medical view. It's not . . . It's based on their acuity and what they need to address their behaviours or criminogenic needs that brought them into the criminal justice system. So if violence is part of that and they do meet the criteria to be accepted into SHNB, the medical plan, the treatment plan by the health care team will address the violence.

Ms. Sarauer: — Are all of the beds that could be open for the corrections side of the hospital now open?

Ms. Scriver: — We have four units that are correction beds. Only two units are open at this time.

Ms. Sarauer: — What is the pressure for opening those other two units?

Ms. Scriver: — The pressure is the lack of psychiatrists to assess our clients for acceptance.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. So before there was challenges with finding psych nurses, for example.

Ms. Scriver: — Yeah.

Ms. Sarauer: — I believe — correct me if I'm wrong — in previous years we've talked about that. Are those issues resolved?

Ms. Scriver: — No. Health care, retaining, recruiting health care within the province — regardless if it's with us in corrections or if it's with the SHA hospitals, long-term care facilities, everybody's struggling to find nurses to work within their areas. So yes, it's psych nurses. It's RPNs [registered psychiatric nurse]. It's addictions workers. Psychiatrists is the first and foremost challenge that we deal with.

Ms. Sarauer: — Right, because they're the initial barrier for being able to fill the beds that you currently have open. But there are still other pressure points — correct me if I'm wrong — there are still other pressure points for being able to staff additional beds. Like, more beds would be open if not for the staffing pressures around psych nurses and all the other supports?

Ms. Scriver: — If those pressures weren't there, we would have a fully functional, four-unit complex at Sask Hospital North Battleford.

Ms. Sarauer: — How many beds is the four units again? I know

we've talked about this before.

Ms. Scriver: — It's 48.

Ms. Sarauer: — 48.

Ms. Scriver: — Mm-hmm.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. Do you have a . . . Sorry, it's getting late so my brain is starting to shut down. I think you just gave me this number, but could you tell me what the . . . You've told me wait times, but you gave a number for wait lists, correct? How many inmates are waiting to be assessed?

Ms. Scriver: — Yes, I did.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. Okay, thank you. I won't ask for it again then.

Ms. Scriver: — If I could just clarify, there's 96 beds total in the SHNB. The two units that are operational have 48 beds in them, so it's a 96-bed complex. What's being utilized right now is two units, would have 48 beds in totality.

Ms. Sarauer: — And the 96 beds are the corrections side? Because I know there's a non-corrections side and a corrections side. The 96 is corrections?

Ms. Scriver: — Correct.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay, thank you.

Ms. Scriver: — You're welcome.

Ms. Sarauer: — The question around staff within custody and adult custody facilities, and particularly the number of FTEs and whether or not that's changed from last year.

Ms. Scriver: — So a point-in-time in terms of our FTE count. In 2022-23 our total — and this is just the adult facilities; that's what you were asking for, adult? — our total number of employees working, which are permanent part-time and permanent full-time, are 1,517. For '23-24 our current total number of employees working permanent part-time and permanent full-time are 1,478.

Ms. Sarauer: — Are you keeping track of sick-time utilization and overtime utilization? And do you have some average numbers for that as well? And year-over-year comparison, if possible?

Ms. Scriver: — So overtime last year, '21-22, total for '21-22 was 26,328,587. For '22-23, the total is 28,994,697.

Ms. Sarauer: — Sorry, was that overtime or sick time?

Ms. Scriver: — That's overtime.

Ms. Sarauer: — Do you have sick time as well?

Ms. Scriver: — So just in terms of sick time, if I can give a little bit of background in terms of, you know . . . I would be remiss if I didn't stress that we do have a robust approach to managing our

sick-time usage with our staff. We rely very heavily on the government attendance support program, and this is a policy framework set out in the context of all absences being treated as non-culpable unless there is clear evidence to the contrary.

The ministry, we do monitor sick-leave usage and we identify those staff whose sick-leave usage exceeds that of their peer group. These staff are contacted in the context of our attendance support program. So I'm sure you can appreciate that working in a correctional environment or any correctional institution is a high-stress environment, and we recognize that the environment does impact staff's mental health and well-being.

[21:15]

Correctional work sick-leave usage is in line with usage in professions that have similar hours of work or stressors. Both police and nursing have been compared, and the results are similar to those professions. We also have comparisons with our federal correctional workers, and they show the similar results. And we do continue and we intend to continue with this approach, which deals with individuals with high sick leave and which demonstrates that management is taking the interests and the health and well-being of its staff. This also aligns with the ministry's strategic objective of having a safe and engaged workforce and staff.

So in terms of our correctional officers, it's broken down into hours but I've also broken it down into days. So the total hours for 2022-23 is 156,079. The average person, that breaks it down to roughly 118 hours per person. So you recognize that we have 8-hour and 12-hour shifts within our facilities. So those who work 8-hour shifts, it's 15 days. Those who work 12-hour shifts is 10 days.

For our youth workers, it's 29,000 roughly and those are 8-hour days — again, 10 days. And our nurses, they work 12-hour shifts so it's roughly six days per nurse, and the hours of that is just shy of 10,000 hours.

Ms. Sarauer: — Do you also keep track of the number of OH & S [occupational health and safety] complaints within the facilities? And can you provide that data?

Ms. Scriver: — So OH & S, we do collect the data. However that is with our integrated justice services and in a different shop. Can I provide you with that response, a written response, after?

Ms. Sarauer: — Sure.

Ms. Scriver: — Okay, thank you.

Ms. Sarauer: — As recently as this past December, the auditor had noted that there are still challenges within corrections around solitary confinement. What is being done to address the auditor's concerns?

Ms. Scriver: — So just as a matter of context, administrative segregation is a status within the correctional centre subject to the legislated criteria to be used as a temporary preventative and non-punitive measure to assist in maintaining the security of the correctional centre. Before placing an inmate on administrative segregation, the correctional facility manager must be satisfied

that there are no reasonable alternatives.

Saskatchewan has reviewed its administrative segregation and it has implemented changes in a number of areas to improve our segregation practices. The use of administrative segregation in Canada has been subject to a great deal of scrutiny by human rights organizations, federal commissions, the courts, and the media. Legal challenges have resulted in rulings that the federal legislation regarding the use of administrative segregation violates several sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

According to the Provincial Auditor and their audit of our administrative segregation, we have developed a work plan. And our current status to mitigate the issues with administrative segregation and our strategies is we have a 15-day limit on the length of stay on administrative segregation status. That has been implemented.

There also must be a minimum of five calendar days between placements on administrative segregation, which may only be shortened if authorized by senior correctional facility managers due to the immediate safety and/or security concerns. We have an administrative segregation assessment tool, and it continues to be used to ensure all reasonable alternatives are considered prior to placement and during each review.

Reviews are conducted within two business days of the initial placement, and at 7 and 14 calendar days. Staff are also responsible for completing daily reviews to allow for constant monitoring of inmates on administrative segregation.

In-person health care assessments continue to be completed for all initial placements and during the seven-day review. All administrative segregation placements are actively monitored by the director of standards and communication, and we do have quality assurance tracking which has been updated to include all key policy requirements.

In April 2020 the four adult correctional centres each added 40 hours of elder services that are dedicated to inmates on administrative segregation, disciplinary segregation, and on the medical units. And as of January 24th, 2023 the data indicates that administrative segregation placements have decreased by 82 per cent since 2019.

So the recommendations that have been brought forward by the auditor, there are four. We have two that are ongoing and three that are complete. So the ongoing ones are “develop an ongoing training plan for correctional centre staff involved in administrative segregations.” We are developing learn modules. The plan is to have the modules reviewed on an annual basis which will include the correctional officer, nurse, and correctional facilities manager’s responsibilities. It’ll be part of their responsibility to ensure that those learn modules are completed.

We are also having additional sessions for any assistant deputy director of operations or an assistant deputy director of programs that miss the initial refresher training, that they need to do the module training as well.

And the second one is properly complete reviews — initial daily

placements, seven-day reviews, and the 14-day reviews — and the health care assessments as required by administrative segregation policy. So placement forms have already been updated to include the name of the nurse who completed the health care assessment and the recommendations. And reviews are being captured on a tracking sheet, with a quarterly review of all paper documentation, for example, to ensure that the forms are signed. They’ll be added to our quality assurance program.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you for that. I’m curious to know how this compares with disciplinary segregation, the work being done with that.

Ms. Scriver: — I can give you our disciplinary segregation snapshot as of March 6th. We conducted the snapshot in order to compare data with the previous year’s segregation snapshot. The methodology used was to collect data regarding inmates on disciplinary segregation status as of 7:30 a.m. on this select day. As disciplinary segregation occurs only in the adult correctional centres, data from the following facilities was collected — so that would have been our big four — Regina, White Birch, Prince Albert Pine Grove, and Saskatoon.

So I can break it down by facility or I can just do a total.

Ms. Sarauer: — Could you do it by facility please?

Ms. Scriver: — Sure. So in 2021 the total count in the facility at that time was 672. There were 16 offenders on disciplinary segregation. So that was 2.4 per cent segregated. So that was in RCC [Regina Correctional Centre]. So if we skip one year and go to this year, the total count at RCC on that day was 732. The number of inmates on disciplinary segregation was six, so the percentage of that is 0.8 per cent of the total population.

Ms. Sarauer: — Do you have a high-water mark and low-water mark for length of stay . . . high-water mark and low-water mark for length of time? Or if you don’t have that, I’ll take an average if that’s what you’ve got.

Ms. Scriver: — I can get that information for you.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you.

Ms. Scriver: — Would you like me to continue on with the facilities or just RCC?

Ms. Sarauer: — Please, yes.

Ms. Scriver: — So, Prince Albert Correctional Centre, in 2021 we had 424 offenders in the facility. We had eight offenders on disciplinary segregation at that time which is 1.8 per cent. 2023, the count is 491. We had 21 offenders on disciplinary segregation, which is 4 per cent of the total population.

Pine Grove, 193 offenders. One was on administrative segregation which is 0.5 per cent. In 2023, there were 202; six offenders on disciplinary segregation which is 3 per cent of the total population.

Saskatoon in 2021, it was 485. At the time there was six offenders, which is 1.2 per cent of the population. 2023, the count is 521. Four offenders on disciplinary segregation which is 0.8

per cent.

So in totality, the total count in 2021 with all the facilities was 1,774. The number of offenders provincially on disciplinary segregation was 1.7 per cent. That was in 2021. If we look at 2023, the total offenders in the province for the adults is at 1,957. Number of segregated offenders on discipline are 37 which is 1.9 per cent totality.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. In 2019 the Ombudsman recommended that the ministry ensure discipline panel chairpersons at each correctional facility are not employed to perform any other duties at the correctional facility and do not report to the director or any other operational manager of the correctional facility. So, in other words, that they be independent of the facility.

That recommendation was accepted by the ministry but hasn't yet been implemented. Could the minister provide an update as to whether or not there is an intention to implement this recommendation, and if so, when?

Ms. Scriver: — We recognize that's an outstanding recommendation from the Provincial Auditor and that we did accept that recommendation. That recommendation isn't something that we could just pivot on in a moment's notice. Of course you recognize there is legislation changes that have to be made, and so we are having discussions in regards to other areas of the legislation that we may want to change or alter or modify or add. And so that is all part and parcel of the discussions that are going on at this time.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you for that. Is there a general timeline for when the new legislation may come forward?

[20:30]

Ms. Scriver: — I don't have a timeline for that. I know that we are starting discussions on it but, I mean, we don't have a firm timeline on legislation being proclaimed and in effect.

Ms. Sarauer: — I would be remiss if I didn't get at least one or two questions in about the DSATU [dedicated substance abuse treatment unit] units. You know I love to talk about those.

Could you provide some information into how the program is going, the success of it, of the expansion? And I understand, while you're looking for your notes, I understand that . . . I believe they are federally funded. And so conversations with the federal government in terms of the sustainability of that funding into the future, any information you could provide would be great. Thank you.

Ms. Scriver: — Thank you for asking the question on the dedicated substance abuse treatment unit. That is something that we are very proud, to be able to facilitate this program in partnership with the SHA, and appreciate the funding that we are receiving with the federal guns, gangs, violence, the funding that's come forward.

So we view any treatment programs that we have in our facility, it contributes to community safety, and especially through the DSATU unit. Community safety is enhanced through our

substance abuse treatment, and it's accessible to those who need it. We have partnered with the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Ministry of Health to provide substance abuse treatment unit services in DSATU at Regina Correctional Centre. We've been doing that since 2008. And now through the federal funding with the gang-violence reduction strategy, the DSATU program has been implemented in Pine Grove, November 2020; Prince Albert Correctional Centre, May 2021; and just, well a year ago at SCC, May 2022.

So in terms of the DSATU number breakdowns as of December 31st, 2022 — because I knew you'd ask that — at Regina Correctional Centre, the capacity is 20 participants per program cohort. The current wait-list for the dedicated substance abuse treatment unit at Regina right now, or as of December 31st, is 127 inmates. We have had . . . In 2020 we had 82 participants complete the program; 2021, we had 78 participants complete the program; and in 2022, 90 participants completed the program.

At Pine Grove, the capacity is 11 participants per program cohort. We currently have zero offenders on the wait-list at Pine Grove. In 2020 we had 11 participants complete the program; 2021, 54 participants completed the program; and in 2022, 60 participants completed the program.

P.A. [Prince Albert] Correctional Centre, the capacity is 13 participants per program cohort. The current wait-list at Prince Albert Correctional Centre is 40. In 2021 we had 48 participants complete the program; in 2022 we had 71 participants complete the program.

And in Saskatoon, their capacity is 25 participants per program. The current wait-list for the DSATU is 17 inmates, and in 2022 we had 106 participants complete the program.

Ms. Sarauer: — Any idea in conversations with the federal government as to the long-term sustainability of this funding?

Ms. Scriver: — Yes, but it hasn't been announced publicly at this moment so I would be remiss if I actually let the cat out of the bag.

Ms. Sarauer: — You can't say?

Ms. Scriver: — I can't say.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. Could you provide some detail about the Saskatoon Correctional Centre relapse prevention group program?

Mr. Carey: — Good evening. Dean Carey, and I'm the executive director of offender services. So the relapse prevention group program was originally piloted at a couple of different facilities. It was recognizing that we were, at times, having a difficult time getting individuals to understand what that process was through just interacting with corrections officer case managers through that process.

So it was developing a program that we could use as a teachable opportunity to actually teach individuals . . . [inaudible] . . . individuals within our centres what that process was, and so that they could create relapse prevention plans based around their offending, so that they will be more successful in the community

once they leave.

So it was basically recognizing that at times we were struggling to get them done individually. But once we do them in a group format, people clearly understand what it is and what the process is. It's much easier for them to complete and to have a plan when they leave, similar to what they would get in other types of group programs.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you so much. I'd ask more questions but I'm short for time. So I do appreciate you coming down and giving that answer. I did want to ask quickly about Drumming Hill's closure and the reasons for that closure.

Ms. Scriver: — So just going back a little bit, in April of 2003, the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* completely replaced the *Young Offenders Act*. The YCJA [*Youth Criminal Justice Act*] introduced significant reforms to address concerns about youth justice system, which had evolved under the *Young Offenders Act*, and it also provided a legislative framework for a fair and more effective youth justice system.

With the new legislative framework in place under the YCJA, we started to see a trend in reduced reliance on custody. The focus was on custody sentences reserved primarily for violent and repeat offenders. Over the past 20 years, the trend has continued to show a downward remand and incarceration trend.

And as you may recall, Drumming Hill Youth Centre, it was an open-custody facility. So just to give you a little bit more context, since fiscal year 2003 and '04, the average daily count for youth custody facilities was 252. For the fiscal year of 2015-16, the average daily count was 150. For the fiscal year 2021-22, the average daily count dropped to 79. For the fiscal year '22-23, the average daily count dropped again to 75. And for the fiscal year '23 till today, this month, the average daily count is 67. So we are at an operating capacity of 45 per cent. So for secure remand it's 45 per cent; open 45 per cent.

We currently have a provincial capacity of 153 beds. So in terms of fiscal responsibility, to have a fully functioning facility in North Battleford with a full staffing complement and maybe two or three offenders, which could be absorbed into either Kilburn or Paul Dojack Youth Centre, where we did have open-custody beds, it was an economic accountability decision to reduce. And there was no job loss. As you know, Drumming Hill staff were offered positions at SHNB and also utilized the provisions under the collective bargaining agreement.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. You anticipated one of my follow-up questions. And I know I'm only allowed one more question, so I'm going to ask, what was the budget for Drumming Hill prior to its closure?

Ms. Scriver: — Yes, I do have that number for you. For salary is 1,314,000, operating costs 221,000, for a total budget of 1,535,000.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. The committee Chair is giving me the hook. That tells me that I'm maxed out for questions. So I just want to take this opportunity to thank you, Minister, for answering my questions over the last three hours and in particular your officials as well for providing me so much information.

I said this before, I believe, but I do really much value the opportunity to come to estimates and have this conversation with you folks every year. I anticipate it and really appreciate it. So thank you so much for everything, the dialogue we had this evening as well as all the work that you do every single day.

I don't always get the opportunity, ever get the opportunity to say goodbye to officials, so I do want to take the opportunity to say to Mr. Wilby — who is cursed with having to follow me in Justice ministry estimates and then on to Corrections, so he's stuck with me for several hours in one particular day — but thank you so much for everything that you've done. I've really much enjoyed the conversations we've had and all the very interesting projects and files you've been working on over the last several years. Very much a well-deserved appointment for yourself in the future.

Thank you so much to the rest of the committee and to all of the folks in the legislature who allow these committees to happen. I really appreciate it. Thanks again.

The Chair: — Thank you for your comments, Ms. Sarauer. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Well of course I can't leave those comments. Anyway . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah, whatever. I'm tired too.

[20:45]

So anyway, thanks to the committee members. Thank you to you, Hansard, and again all of the ministry officials that are here. I can't tell you how incredible it is to have this team here not just today, but as you said, day in and day out. And it allows us, allows me to do my job. And I have absolute confidence in the ability of the people that are here tonight and the ones that are back tonight that unfortunately aren't here. But anyway I want to thank you all very much. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you for your comments, Minister. I too would like to thank you, Minister, all the staff here today, committee members, Ms. Sarauer for her good questions today and co-operation with the Chair.

Do we need some time to move some of the staff out, change the officials? Do you need any time to . . .

Hon. Ms. Tell: — We'll need a couple of minutes to shift everybody around, but it won't take long.

The Chair: — Okay, yeah. No, that's what I was asking.

Oh, having reached the agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates today, we will now adjourn the consideration of these estimates and have a brief break here. Sorry.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Bill No. 99 — *The Emergency 911 System Amendment Act, 2022*

Clause 1

The Chair: — I'd like to welcome everybody back. We'll move on to Bill No. 99, *The Emergency 911 System Amendment Act*, 2022. Clause 1, short title. Minister Tell, make your opening comments and introduce your officials, please.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know what, beside me is Dale Larsen, and Marlo Pritchard with SPSA. SPSA is the one that's going to be dealing with this particular bill, so they're the only ones relevant for this particular . . . for Bill 99. Anyway, I better get to my speaking notes before I babble on much more.

Sask911 system is a vital emergency service that ensures those in danger have timely access to public safety service providers like fire departments and police. Sask911 is funded primarily by a fee paid by all phone subscribers. SPSA is responsible for managing the 911 system, however SaskTel sets the 911 fee, collects it, deposits it in the 911 account, and pays the 911 system expenses when directed by SPSA.

Both SPSA and SaskTel agree that the current Sask911 fee and account administration is complex and inefficient. To fix this, SPSA and SaskTel introduce Bill 99, amendments to *The Emergency 911 System Act* and consequential amendments to *The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Act* and *The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act*. This bill will allow SPSA to set the Sask911 fee, collect it from telecommunications companies, and pay all Sask911 expenses directly.

In addition to this primary change, we are proposing other necessary and housekeeping amendments. Some of the additional changes include allowing the SPSA to meet the evolving, federally mandated 911 technology requirements and standards, referred to as next-generation 911 or NG911.

We also recommend ensuring confidentiality of personal information of 911 users, extending liability protection to all emergency service providers, increasing penalties for violations of the Act, and prohibiting the use of nuisance technology such as automatic dialers. Additionally we propose that telecommunications companies register with the minister so that Sask911 fee can be collected from them.

All these changes will allow SPSA to provide more administratively efficient 911 services while allowing them to adapt to the changing emergency communications environment. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and pleased to entertain any questions.

The Chair: — Thank you for your opening comments, Minister Tell. I'll now open it up for questions. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Minister, for your opening comments, and apologies if I missed this. Have there been any consultation with respect to these changes? And if so, who was spoken to?

Mr. Pritchard: — There was consultations. Marlo Pritchard, president of Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency. Yes, there was consultation. There was work along with SaskTel throughout this process and throughout that process.

Ms. Sarauer: — Do I understand this correctly? SaskTel no longer wants to administer the program? And if so, why?

Mr. Pritchard: — It was a very inefficient process. So SaskTel had a portion of it, basically held the bank account, whereas SPSA maintained the operations, took the bills, sent the bills to SaskTel, and then the auditing process came back to us. So this really is an administrative function. It doesn't change the processes outside of that, but puts it all under SPSA, I guess, control and allows us to not only collect the money, pay the bills, make sure that the system is running properly. It really is just an alignment to make it more efficient and effective.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. No further questions.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 16 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Emergency 911 System Amendment Act*, 2022.

I'd ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 99, *The Emergency 911 System Amendment Act*, 2022 without amendment.

Mr. Grewal: — I do so move, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Mr. Grewal has moved. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Bill No. 118 — *The Warrant Compliance Act*

Clause 1

The Chair: — We will now consider Bill No. 118, *The Warrant Compliance Act*, Clause 1, short title. Minister Tell, you may give your opening comments and introduce any other staff if you want to.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have beside me Dale Larsen, deputy minister, Corrections and Policing; Rob Cameron, assistant deputy minister, Corrections and Policing; Scott Harron is behind me, executive director, research and implementation branch of Corrections and Policing; Devon Exner, assistant deputy minister, income assistance programs, Ministry of Social Services; and of course beside me is Kara Moen, Crown counsel, legislative services.

Mr. Chair, I am pleased to offer opening remarks concerning Bill 118, *The Warrant Compliance Act*. The government is committed to improving public safety for Saskatchewan residents. An important piece of public safety is ensuring individuals wanted for arrest are either presenting themselves to law enforcement or being found by law enforcement if evading arrest.

Furthermore it is our view that taxpayers should not be responsible for subsidizing criminal lifestyles and activities. This bill introduces two new measures to hold prolific, violent offenders, with outstanding Criminal Code warrants for arrest, accountable for their actions.

First, the bill will authorize an investigation unit to be called the warrant intelligence team, to compile and distribute a list of prolific, violent offenders with outstanding Criminal Code warrants to government institutions for the purpose of having an individual's benefits reduced, suspended, or terminated.

Mr. Chair, we understand that not all decisions around suspending an individual's benefits will be cut and dry, particularly where the individual has a dependent spouse or children. Therefore benefit administrators will retain the discretion as to how the stop-payment notice is executed.

Second, this bill will authorize warrant intelligence team to request information from government institutions to help police services locate and apprehend prolific, violent offenders with outstanding Criminal Code warrants. This information will be limited to location information, which includes phone numbers and addresses associated with the individual.

We recognize that some details about the operation of the Act will need to be developed in the regulations. We are proud of the ongoing collaboration between the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; Social Services; and engaging in important discussions that will help prove crucial as we move forward in developing the regulations.

[21:00]

Mr. Chair, with those opening remarks, I welcome questions respecting Bill 118, *The Warrant Compliance Act*.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister Tell. We will now open it up for questions. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. I do have a few questions with respect to this bill. My first one is the consultation prior to the introduction of the legislation. Who was consulted on this bill? And was the request for what is in this bill made by someone, an organization external to government?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — External to?

Ms. Sarauer: — Government. Like policing, for example.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — This particular piece of legislation, the genesis of it was James Smith Cree Nation, the tragedy that occurred last September. We realized that Myles Sanderson was out on . . . There were outstanding Criminal Code warrants. And I cannot say specifically whether he was or not on social assistance, comma, however . . .

The consultations that took place . . . I mean, there are other jurisdictions across the country that do have similar legislation, not in its total picture. The child advocate and the Privacy Commissioner were consulted during the course of the development of the legislation.

Ms. Sarauer: — On the Myles Sanderson issue in particular, he did have children though, correct? So as you said, he might fall in the exception to the legislation that you have just mentioned.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — As I said earlier in my opening remarks, those are circumstances that would be under consideration before any action to cut the person off from social assistance. I don't know what Myles Sanderson's personal circumstances . . . All I am saying is that the genesis of this legislation that is here tonight was the James Smith Cree Nation tragedy.

Ms. Sarauer: — But it wasn't an internally generated piece of legislation, correct?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — That's correct.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. You had already mentioned in your opening remarks that a lot of this legislation is going to be in the regulations. Do you have a timeline for when those will come out? And who is being consulted on the drafting of those regulations?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — We are hopeful that the regulations will be in place by year-end of 2023. The consultations that will take place obviously are with the Information and Privacy Commissioner again, child advocate again, and yeah, I don't know if there's any others that will need to be consulted. But all of the interested parties to this will be involved in discussions as we go forward with this.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. You had mentioned that there are other jurisdictions with similar provisions. Can you provide some details about that?

Ms. Moen: — Kara Moen, Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, Crown counsel. So the two other jurisdictions that we identified in this process are British Columbia and Manitoba. They both have provisions within their social assistance legislation that limits social assistance benefits to individuals who have an outstanding warrant. So in the case of BC it is a condition of eligibility, and in the case of Manitoba there is a restriction based on warrant status for indictable offences.

Ms. Sarauer: — So why was it determined that Saskatchewan would need a separate unit to do this work? It sounds to me like this is built into the Ministry of Social Services in the other two jurisdictions.

Mr. Harron: — Scott Harron, executive director of the research and implementation branch. So the difference between *The Warrant Compliance Act* with BC and Manitoba was we built in the information-sharing aspect of it, which isn't present in the BC and Manitoba Acts.

So that's what the warrant intelligence team does is they really take a lead role in coordinating that in talking with Social Services. This whole thing is a very manual process; it has to be. There has to be lots of discussions between Corrections and between Social Services to make sure we have all the right information. They also then connect with a number of policing agencies across the province in order to pass that information along, making sure that it's accurate, that we're collecting the right information, that we're collecting only the information

that's necessary to locate the person and execute that warrant.

Ms. Sarauer: — Am I wrong in the assumption that policing can have mechanisms that they can utilize to obtain this information without this process if they so chose to?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — The legislation that's before you allows that information to be provided proactively. Of course, when there's outstanding warrants the police can obviously use whatever systems that they wish. But this is just informing, advising the police of the outstanding warrant and the person is on . . . and the potential location.

Part of the issue and challenge is, sure, you know when somebody is out on an outstanding warrant, but you got to find them. And so if we are able to provide that information, that location information to police, it does make execution of the warrant much more efficient and a positive end result.

Ms. Sarauer: — What will the budget be for the warrant intelligence team?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — I've been advised it is \$200,000 per year.

Ms. Sarauer: — Do you know number of FTEs?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — It's two FTEs.

Ms. Sarauer: — How will stopping these benefits deter crime?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — The purpose of this legislation is for people who are serious violent offenders, prolific offenders that have been . . . the courts have issued a warrant and this person collecting money from government sources . . . It's offensive that government would in any way fund an individual who is out on a Criminal Code warrant — serious, serious offences — and that any of their activities would be funded by the government purse.

Ms. Sarauer: — I've heard some concerns from those in police saying that doing this may push folks further underground, either in increasing criminogenic behaviour or making it more difficult to find these offenders. Does the ministry have a comment on those concerns?

[21:15]

Hon. Ms. Tell: — This gives our police enforcement agencies an opportunity to receive information about where the person may be located, which is likely information that they may not have at the time. So I don't know where that particular comment would come from. I don't see any credibility in that at all.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. I have no further questions.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 9 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Warrant Compliance Act*.

I would ask a member that we report Bill No. 118, *The Warrant Compliance Act* without amendment. Mr. Keisig moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. That completes our committee business for tonight. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Yes, Mr. Chair. Thank you again, committee members, Ms. Sarauer, and the officials that are here left . . . the residuals that are left here tonight. Thank you so much for being a part of this. And again we couldn't do any of this without the professional assistance from the various ministries, so thank you. Thank you, committee members.

The Chair: — Ms. Sarauer, do you have any closing comments?

Ms. Sarauer: — Yes, I just echo the good words of the minister. Thank you so much for all the work that you do, and thank you for answering my questions this evening. I very much appreciate it. And those who just came in at the end, thank you for coming in at the late hour to do this bill in committee. Thank you to everyone else on the committee as well.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Sarauer. I too would like to thank the minister and her staff as well, and then I would also like to thank the opposition member and the other committee members, as well as the staff here, and Hansard too, as well.

And I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. McLeod has moved. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until Wednesday, April 26th, 2023 at 3:30.

[The committee adjourned at 21:19.]