



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

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

**No. 30 — April 15, 2024**

**Published under the  
authority of  
The Hon. Randy Weekes  
Speaker**



**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

**Twenty-Ninth Legislature**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

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Ms. Nicole Sarauer  
Regina Douglas Park



[The committee met at 15:28.]

**The Chair:** — Good afternoon. I would like to welcome everybody to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. My name's Terry Dennis. I'll be chairing the meeting. With us today we have Nathaniel Teed. We have Todd Goudy, Gary Grewal, Travis Keisig, Blaine McLeod, and Jennifer Bowes.

Before we begin today's business, I'd like to advise the committee that pursuant to rule 148(1), the following estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 were committed to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice on March 28th, 2024 and March 20th, 2024 respectively. 2024-25 estimates: vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; vote 92, Firearms Secretariat; vote 30, Government Relations; vote 3, Justice and Attorney General; vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport; vote 88, Tourism Saskatchewan. 2023-24 supplementary estimates no. 2: vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; vote 30, Government Relations; vote 3, Justice and Attorney General; and vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport.

[15:30]

Today we will be considering the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, and the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. We will then go to consideration of three bills, and we will recess from 6 till 6:30.

**General Revenue Fund  
Parks, Culture and Sport  
Vote 27**

**Subvote (PC01)**

**The Chair:** — We will begin our consideration with vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport, central management and services, subvote (PC01).

Minister Ross is here with her officials. I would remind the officials to identify themselves for the record before they speak and do not touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn them on for you. Minister Ross, please make your opening comments and introduce your officials please.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And let me begin by acknowledging the land where we are gathered today is Treaty 4 territory and the homeland of the Métis.

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the ministry's estimates for the year. I'm joined by my officials: Deputy Minister Twyla MacDougall; Dan French, the assistant deputy minister of stewardship division; Paul Johnson, assistant deputy minister of parks division; Pam Herbert, executive director of strategic and corporate services; Jessica Jackson, director of corporate services; Tracy Morey, executive director of sport, culture, and recreation; and my chief of staff, Drew Lombard.

The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport enters the new fiscal year on a strong note, committed to the priorities we have worked towards over the last few years. We offer valued experience for all our guests, visitors through our provincial parks and the Royal

Saskatchewan Museum, and our supports to the arts, sports, culture, and recreation sectors throughout our province.

We protect our natural and cultural resources. Our stewardship of the land in our provincial parks and work done at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum are the most visible indicators of this goal. We also protect our history through the heritage conservation branch and our funding to organizations like the Western Development Museum and Wanuskewin. Our priorities remain because they are important to our quality of life in Saskatchewan, benefiting our communities and our people.

Budget 2024 is focused on classrooms, care, and communities. Budget 2024 brings record funding and a clear commitment from our government on these priorities for our province and our people. I am fortunate to represent a ministry that touches on all three of these areas, and today I will share how Parks, Culture and Sport contributes to these themes and has so for many years.

We can start with the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. Now this is a jewel in our province, one enjoyed by locals and tourists. One of their greatest attractions was Megamunch, who retired this year after 37 years of service. So many people streamed through the museum for one last visit with that beloved dinosaur. It was one indicator and one example of the impact the museum has on our city and our province. Multiple generations have passed through its doors, and we all know and love this place.

And yet the RSM [Royal Saskatchewan Museum] is much more than a museum. It is a leading Canadian educational and research institution. They provide school programming, classroom resources, and enhance our K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] curriculums. The museum's curators are also professors at Saskatchewan universities. They share their expertise and inspire the next generation of scientists by teaching university classes and supervising masters and doctoral students who come to the RSM from all over the world.

The Western Development Museum hosts schools at their four locations throughout the province, educating all about our shared past, and they offer resources like virtual programs to teachers. Our funding to the Science Centre helps them contribute to the K to 12 curriculums through field trips, workshops, and resources.

And then there are our provincial parks: campgrounds, natural environments, and historic sites that, combined, cover close to 1 million hectares of our province. Our park interpreters teach the importance of the natural world through engaging programs and events delivered to campers, day trippers, and students on field trips. From nature walks where people discover the flora and fauna of our province's unique ecosystems to activities that help inspire awe and wonder of the natural world, the classroom is the land and our park staff are its stewards.

And this year our park staff have not only set out another year of great programming, they launched an online registration system that makes it even easier for teachers to bring their students to the provincial parks. So far we have over 275 reservations, and that number continues to grow.

And these are just a few ways we support education. There are other examples, but time is limited, so I will continue on how

they contribute to healthy people and communities.

Spending time in nature is one of the best things we can do for our well-being, and our parks are the perfect location. A hike through the woods, a night by a campfire, time to relax with family and friends, connecting with the natural world — all are remarkable medicine for both physical and mental health. My hope is always that every single person in our province will experience what our provincial parks have to offer.

And our commitment to keeping these experiences accessible and affordable continues. There are no fee increases for our parks this year. Fees for park entry, camping, swimming, and our always popular Camp-Easy accommodations remain unchanged. And our commitment to seniors remains; they will continue to have free access to our provincial parks.

We had another great year in 2023 with nearly 365,000 camping permit nights in our Saskatchewan provincial parks. Reservations for 2024 camping season just kicked off, and we're off to another great start. Our campgrounds are filling up fast as people look forward to returning to our provincial parks again this year.

And to make sure that people can continue to enjoy their visits, budget 2024 included 15 million for capital and infrastructure improvements. This is up 1.1 million from last year. And these funds help us begin construction on a new service centre at Nut Point campground in Lac La Ronge Provincial Park; bike trail development, multi-use trail improvements at Buffalo Pound Provincial Park; and water system upgrades at Narrow Hills Provincial Park and Moose Mountain Provincial Park.

And we will complete construction on a new visitor reception at Crooked Lake Provincial Park, a new group pavilion at Rowan's Ravine Provincial Park for large gatherings, and a play structure development at Pine Hill campground at Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park.

We continue to work with entrepreneurs to offer new services to our parks. Businesses like the geo-dome at Blackstrap and the barrel sauna — I don't know if you guys have ever tried it out, but it's kind of cool — at Echo Valley provides services that enhance our visitors' experience. And I will note, it would not only be possible without their investments. These investments help create welcoming spaces for our visitors, and they are another reason people return year after year.

And then there are our regional parks. These are camping, cottaging, and recreational centres in our provinces that serve local communities and tourists alike. In budget 2024, we doubled our support for these areas, increasing the annual grant to the Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association to 1.23 million. Now this grant will continue to a long-term sustainability and help the local economy and communities throughout our province.

Now our contribution to health and well-being is not limited to natural environments. Sask Sport and Saskatchewan parks and recreation associations support community sport and recreation programs in our province, everything from archery to baseball to swimming. They also support professional development for coaches and help keep sports and programs safe and inclusive. In short, they are at the centre of physical activities in our province,

the silent partner that's helped people stay active in their communities.

Everything I've touched on so far contributes to stronger communities. And in a ministry with such a diverse portfolio there are many other ways we foster community well-being. We have the active family benefit. Now this is a tax credit that provides eligible families with up to \$150 per year to help cover the costs of arts, culture, and sport programs for their children.

And we have the veteran service club program which provides up to 30,000 to legion branches; army, navy, and air force veteran units. The grants help pay for repairs and upgrades in operation, special events, and programs.

And we have the community rinks affordability grant, and this helps communities with maintenance and operational costs at local rinks. Now each year we provide up to 1.6 million to more than 500 rinks throughout the province.

Arts, culture, and heritage programming are all elements necessary for strong, healthy communities. It is why our commitment to stable funding for the arts, culture, and heritage sector continues in budget 2024 through more than 30 million in annual funding to our partners. An additional 18 million is provided to SaskCulture through Sask Lotteries Trust Fund. This funding is invested in community-based programs and organizations, both large and small, everything from the Western Development Museum, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, to festivals like Culture Days, workshops, community classes, and small grants for artists.'

Saskatchewan is fortunate to have a vibrant arts and culture community, one that is both active in both urban and rural areas, and stable funding sustains the great work done in our communities. Of course communities come in all forms. It can be geographic, defined by borders — our towns, our villages, our cities, our neighbourhoods — or it can be a group of people who share common interests or backgrounds. In this case it's defined by a feeling, a place where we belong.

Saskatchewan's francophone population is one of those communities. In budget 2024 we announced funding to build new francophone schools and investment in French language services. The francophone affairs branch has recently signed an agreement with the federal government that will inject an additional \$470,000 this year to help the branch improve French language services. Now we bring the community together to celebrate their culture through events like Rendez-vous de la Francophonie at the Legislative Building, and we invest in supports and services that the community needs.

And finally, the Community Initiatives Fund will see a significant increase this year of 8.5 million forecast for 2024-25. And this is up 2.1 million, a 33 per cent increase from last year. Their grant supports community-based projects throughout Saskatchewan, making our communities healthier and safer for everyone.

Now all three items I talked about — education, health, community well-being — require a strong economy, and we have that in Saskatchewan. Our population is growing and investment remains strong. Our focus at Parks, Culture and Sport is on

people and on communities, but we also contribute to strong, sustainable economic growth.

There is the economic impact of camping, the ripple effect of tourism. People don't just rent a campsite. They visit their local outfitters to buy equipment, everything from tents and sleeping bags to campers. They buy gas to get to the park and visit places along the way — grocery stores, restaurants, local attractions along the highway. And we are an employer. Many of our staff live in the small communities throughout the province, and their salaries contribute to their local economy.

Saskatchewan's film industry is growing as more and more producers look to Saskatchewan as a shooting location. As this industry grows, the contribution to our province's economy grows with it. Over the last two years Creative Saskatchewan has committed approximately 28 million to 46 productions, and that has a ripple effect with an approximate economic impact of 128 million and hundreds of jobs. And as interest grows, so does private investment.

I was delighted to attend the official opening of the LED [light-emitting diode] volume wall at the John Hopkins sound stage in Regina. Now this technology creates brilliant, realistic sets. You can create any location in the world and you never have to leave the sound stage. While the wall is a privately funded partnership between Volume Global and Karma productions, it is the direct result of our government's investment in the film industry. It's another strong indicator of the confidence the film industry have in Saskatchewan as a prime filming location.

[15:45]

So as you can see, the ministry has a diverse portfolio with clear defined priorities. We touch on many things that are foundational to our great quality of life in Saskatchewan. We help people connect with the arts, science, and our province's history. We connect people to language, culture, and the natural environment. We also provide opportunities for people to participate in their communities through recreational and cultural activities. We help people learn, stay healthy, enjoy life in their communities.

And through the Status of Women office we will discuss later today, we keep people free from violence and abuse. And we offer people safe, affordable places to get away for a day or a whole season and recharge. Our programs in one way or another touch almost every person in our province. And while they don't seem to have much in common, they all share the same goal — to make life better for people who call Saskatchewan home.

It's been such an honour to lead this ministry over the last few years, to work with the staff who drive these programs, people who are deeply passionate about their work and committed to our citizens. And so today I will end my remarks with a thank you to all the employees of Parks, Culture and Sport, people who are so good at their jobs and, as you have heard today, do remarkable things for the people of Saskatchewan. And I want to thank them for their commitment. And I thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** — Thank you for your opening comments, Minister. We'll now open it up for questions. Mr. Teed.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to thank

you, Minister, for your land acknowledgement at the start of your remarks. And I want to echo the thanks that you offered to all of the officials and staff that you work with every day — a fantastic team of people, agreed. Thank you so much for the wholesome look at the diverse portfolio that you oversee in Parks, Culture and Sport. I am very intrigued by the barrel saunas, I have to say.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — You've got to go check it out.

**Mr. Teed:** — And then as I was thinking about this, I think sometimes these committee rooms in the spring can feel a bit like the barrel saunas.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — That's already today.

**Mr. Teed:** — I know. It's always very warm. I know I have limited time for questions, so I'm going to jump into it here today. I want to start by reading the response by the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance to budget '24-25 into the record. It starts with:

'24-25 provincial budget, *Classrooms, Care & Communities* response.

On March 20, the Hon. Donna Harpauer, Minister of Finance, delivered the '24-25 provincial budget, *Classrooms, Care & Communities*. The provincial government projected a 1 billion surplus for '23-24, only to see it evaporate into a projected 273 million deficit for '24-25.

With the arts in Saskatchewan still being negatively affected by the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, massive inflation, and the continued collection of PST expansion on admissions, entertainment, and recreation, the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance is disappointed with yet another year of status quo funding to the provincial arts sector. A status quo budget for a sector in crisis is simply not good enough. Funding to SK Arts has flatlined well below historical levels, approximately 383,000 less than a decade ago.

We remind the government, and will continue to remind them, that the arts and culture sector contributes significantly to the province's economy and is a worthy investment. GDP generated by arts and culture in Saskatchewan in 2021 was \$922.018 million. Considering that the estimated economic output of SK Arts-funded organizations alone contributes approximately 74 million in economic output to the province, the overall contribution of arts and culture should not be undervalued.

It has been a difficult year for many people in Saskatchewan. We must remember that the arts are not superfluous but essential to the quality of life for those living in this province. The provincial government must recognize that sustainable funding of the arts is a duty and is, in terms of overall public spending, an incredibly affordable investment.

We appreciate the work done by the Hon. Laura Ross and the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport on behalf of the arts. The SAA will continue to work with the ministry in

ongoing advocacy around the needs of the Saskatchewan arts community, and we are more motivated than ever to work in partnership with SK Arts to develop research to support increased funding directly to the arts in Saskatchewan.

The statement then goes into excerpts of the Parks, Culture and Sport section estimates that can be found in our budget documents.

Minister, as you know, I know many performing arts organizations have declared that they are in a funding crisis. They've written to you. They've written to me. We've raised questions in question period. I want to ask, how does the budget allocation to Parks, Culture and Sport address the crisis in our performing arts sector?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Well thank you very much for that question. And I've had the opportunity to meet with numerous arts organizations. And it's also informative, but it's a really good way for us to get a real handle and an understanding of the arts community in Saskatchewan.

As you know, this past year we had the opportunity to provide some additional funding to the Regina Symphony. And there's a good example of, you know . . . A lot of people just kind of think of this Regina Symphony as a lot of men and women sitting in tuxes up on a stage. And that's kind of how they visualize them, not realizing that most of the music teachers throughout the city of Regina and its surrounding areas into southern Saskatchewan, those are their music teachers, right.

So their children, who are maybe taking bassoon, which is never an instrument I would ever encourage a child to take up, but only because it's got quite the sound. I think it's called the clown of the orchestra, if I'm not mistaken. But anyways, you know, so when they came to us, we never turn a deaf ear. We always sit down and we kind of discuss what the situation was . . . [inaudible] . . . And at that point the Regina Symphony was in a really tough spot, and we ensured that they were able to continue on for the season.

Now what I will do is have my official answer further some questions in regards to the allocation and the funding that takes place for that.

**Mr. French:** — Sure. So it's Dan French, assistant deputy minister for stewardship division. So we work closely with all those partners. And as the minister said, we meet quite often with either our funding partners or community stakeholders that are looking either for some programming dollars. There is quite a bit of advocacy for SK Arts, and it's specifically from the Sask Arts Alliance, and rightfully so. As the minister says, it's not a nice to have; it is the fabric of our community — the arts, culture, and heritage — to any community.

So we work closely with them, but ultimately, you know, with competing priorities we . . . One thing we were quite proud of and the work we've done is to ensure that their funding was stable through this budget. It's not always easy. We know, as the minister said, there's been record investments in Saskatchewan, and yet it didn't come from arts and culture. So we're pretty proud of that.

**Mr. Teed:** — Can you elaborate a little bit on where the \$200,000 investment into the Regina Symphony Orchestra will go and any details on that?

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, I can share a little detail. So we have a short-term agreement that we made with them that, when it came to this funding, was to ensure that we were going to be kept in the loop. So we would meet with them on a regular basis. But to be frank, that funding was to keep their doors open. They were a few months away from closing after a century of business in southern Saskatchewan. And as the minister said, when we made the decision, RSO [Regina Symphony Orchestra] . . . The ripple effect that would have happened throughout the music community, the 50-plus teachers that they have throughout southern Saskatchewan, it would have been devastating. So that was to get them through. And they can elaborate more on their financials, but we understand, well this got them through the season. And this is putting them in good shape for the next season and years — and hopefully another century — to come. That's the plan.

**Mr. Teed:** — I know, absolutely. Immensely appreciative of that investment. I think it was an absolutely needed move, you know. And, Minister, you spoke about the ripple impacts of that and a closure, you know, if an organization like that shuts down, we may not ever see a new organization take its space.

I might ask, is there any plans within the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport to look at continuing supporting the Regina Symphony in the next number of years? Are there any strings attached to those dollars? Or are you considering any further investments?

**Mr. French:** — No further investments planned at this moment, but they do get funding though from arts organizations including SK Arts. So there's indirect funding that they get. But you know, through the media and through some of the releases, the citizens of Saskatchewan need to kind of step up and come back post-pandemic and get back into the business. And they're looking at creating a different model, right. So they know status quo is not going to make it moving forward, so they're looking at engaging youth in different ways and engaging audiences and building new audiences. And we're encouraging that to continue.

**Mr. Teed:** — Oh, absolutely. It's certainly the largest concern that I hear from these performing arts. They certainly have been specifically hard hit by post-pandemic situation — you know, getting butts in seats, so to speak — the cost of everything going up. I spoke with Persephone Theatre who used to see projects run 500,000 have now gone up to 750,000.

And I guess this kind of goes into my next line of questioning, in that the support that those arts organizations are seeing from SK Arts, I'm going to preface this by saying, in this section of the budget, the budget line for these funding organizations is prefaced to say, and I quote: "These investments support both the commercial viability and growth of the creative sector." And coming to Sask Arts Board, we are seeing year-over-year stagnant funding to the Sask Arts Board.

And of course, every arts organization I'm speaking to is very thankful that we weren't seeing cuts. But if funding doesn't match CPI [consumer price index] increases, these agencies are



doing more with less every single year. Essentially cuts will have to be made, will have to be looked at. Money will not flow to these organizations that are in such crisis.

So I know I've asked a similar question last year, but how are arts organizations, specifically in our performing arts sector, supposed to stabilize while they're seeing fewer and fewer granting opportunities? How are they supposed to maintain that commercial viability and growth when those funding organizations are doing more with less?

**Mr. French:** — It's a fair question, and it's something that when I spoke actually to the CEO [chief executive officer], Michael, from SK Arts on budget day as a matter of fact, they said, like even throughout his community including nationwide, is they're looking to do things differently. There was an urgency of re-looking at how we do things. We can't do things the way we've done for the last few decades.

And so it was encouraging to hear. And so that's what his message, I understand, is being sent to his funding or funders or fundees, I guess, and like status quo is just unsustainable.

So I know it's easier said than done, but it's looking at how can we do things different while we are trying to stabilize at least the funding in the interim and with the rest of competing priorities.

**Mr. Teed:** — Can the ministry point to any programs of how they might work to support that innovation within their funding organizations?

**Mr. French:** — Yeah. So well there's one program that we proudly invest in every year. It's called artsvest. So artsvest, it's nationally but there's a Saskatchewan regional component. And it's where artsvest works with the artist community to give them mentoring on either partnerships or fundraising or marketing, and they try to really match them with private donations and entrepreneurs. And so that is quite well . . . In fact Saskatchewan is leading the country on that, for that matter, in that file. So we're really proud of that. So that's one example.

A lot of them is just through the programs themselves. So the arm's-length, like SK Arts for an example. SaskCulture, as you know, it's funded through the lottery system for that. They infuse almost \$20 million annually into the culture sector of our province. So we're quite proud to be a part of that as well.

**Mr. Teed:** — In my time working as an arts and culture fundraiser in Saskatoon, one of the biggest challenges that we faced, and I hear from other arts organizations linking up to these private foundations, is that that Saskatchewan just simply doesn't have the family foundations that, say British Columbia or Alberta has.

[16:00]

And so when they are out there looking for this support, you know, they're seeing a lack of family foundations out there that are giving money. They are seeing sponsorship direction change. Post-pandemic sponsorship for companies is now looking at different things to support different areas — mental health, children, those sorts of things. But I appreciate the look at the artsvest, and I absolutely will, yeah, look into that a little bit

more.

I'm going to jump into some questions on the PST [provincial sales tax]. So I spoke a little bit about, you know, the challenges that these performing arts . . . and I'll preface by saying I'm focusing on the performing arts because within the sector I feel like they have been the one that has kind of been raising the alarm bells the most to me as critic for Parks, Culture and Sport. And so I'm going to jump into the third kind of hit that they've been seeing.

You know, we've been seeing it's been difficult to get people back in seats. The cost of everything is going up. And the third has been the whammy of the PST on everything — culture, sport, entertainment.

You know, as I speak with these organizations they continue to cry foul that the government decided to expand the PST on arts, culture, and entertainment, all during a time when they're supposed to be recovering, a post-pandemic recovery. And while they're recovering, they are seeing that they are going to have to pass those additional costs of the PST on everything they see, from tickets and stays and concerts. They either have to eat those costs or they have to pass them on to a cash-strapped consumer, who is then maybe more difficult for them to get their butt in those seats.

And I'm also hearing from organizations, like that concert acts are looking at this PST on tickets, and they see it as just that extra barrier to stop in Saskatchewan on a tour. They're driving through Saskatoon from Winnipeg or Manitoba to Alberta, and if the cost of those event tickets is too high, it's just that extra reason to jump through Saskatoon or Regina.

And I know you mentioned the ripple effects. You know, I think we're losing out on the ripple effects when big acts are choosing to skip Saskatoon and Regina. And so I guess my question is, why didn't the government, through budget '24-25, scrap the PST on culture, recreation, and all things under this umbrella?

**Ms. MacDougall:** — Hi there. I'll take that question. Twyla MacDougall, deputy minister, Parks, Culture and Sport. So you know, I do understand your concerns regarding the impact of provincial sales tax expansion, particularly on our sector. However, the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport has no authority over provincial sales tax, and I would suggest that this would be a good question to ask at estimates with the Ministry of Finance.

**Mr. Teed:** — Maybe like I'll ask . . .

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I also want to say that I'm sure that very large acts are not passing over the province because of the PST. It could be the size of the facility. You know, like there's the economy of scale. So I mean Shania Twain's been to Saskatoon quite a few times, so she hasn't passed by.

But you know, I mean, it's those sort of things, and I know Saskatoon is looking to address that. But that would be a city of Saskatoon, and you can maybe sit in on their city council when they have their discussion about that.

**Mr. Teed:** — I guess I could quickly ask, is there any plans for

Parks, Culture and Sport to offer any support for a Saskatoon downtown entertainment district?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — That's a Saskatoon issue. That's a civic issue. We don't participate in that, in Saskatoon's decision making on that.

**Mr. Teed:** — Okay. Was the ministry involved in any lobbying efforts with the Ministry of Finance to look at ways of reducing the PST impact on arts, culture, entertainment sector?

**Ms. MacDougall:** — I can elaborate on that for you. So as you're well aware, every year we do take material to the Ministry of Finance. It's called our treasury board submission. And in that submission we'll speak to the credibility and the viability and the importance of all of our stakeholders, including arts and culture. And so that's how we get in front of Finance. So you may not see everything that we've put forward, but that's the mechanism we use.

**Mr. Teed:** — And as part of that mechanism, are you able to comment to say if any recommendations were made on behalf of stakeholders to the Ministry of Finance?

**Ms. MacDougall:** — Yes, we'll include that in our presentation and in our submission as far as what the stakeholders had suggested and why and what our recommendation would be based on that.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you so much. In the case of not scrapping the PST on arts and culture, I know that arts organizations have said, well if we're going to continue on in an environment with a PST on our services, why not see a bit of that money returned to the arts and culture sector that is in crisis?

And you can look to the Arts Alliance's request for the 383,000 that would bring them back up to the decade-ago funding. Has there been any discussion or advocacy work done to see if some of those dollars can be returned to Parks, Culture and Sport?

**Ms. MacDougall:** — I really don't have anything further to add in that regard. Expenses, revenue — anything of that nature we provide in our submission to the Ministry of Finance, and that's our opportunity to speak to those pieces.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you so much. I'm going to jump over to the budget allocation for Creative Saskatchewan. Can you give me a breakdown or differentiate the money being allocated into our film and television grant? And how much money is going into the arts community through those grants?

**Mr. French:** — Yes, sure. First, we wouldn't have those details of the money going through those art communities through those grants. We wouldn't have that here. Creative Sask would have that. But what we do have, through their budget allocation, 12 million is dedicated towards TV and film production in Saskatchewan out of their 17.5 million.

**Mr. Teed:** — And one would say that the rest then would be earmarked . . .

**Mr. French:** — The rest would be further operations. And then they fund some parties as well: for SMPIA [Saskatchewan Media

Production Industry Association] for an example, or SaskBooks, SaskMusic. They're all funded through Creative Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Teed:** — Okay. Many arts boards and individuals still wonder the logic of scrapping the film tax credit. And I know I asked this last year, and we probably will continue to ask till the end of time. Has the ministry done any research on the efficacy of the tax credit versus the grant?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Well you know, I guess this is a really good opportunity for you and I to have that very frank conversation. And the program that is in existence today far out-seeds what comes back for the taxpayers of Saskatchewan. Previously there was no money up front. It was a tax credit, right?

Whereas now when I talk to producers, they have to put together their project and it has to be fully funded. And then they bring that project to Creative Saskatchewan. It goes through a very rigorous adjudication which then they have the opportunity to receive funding. But it is for goods and services that are spent in the province of Saskatchewan, so that money directly stays here. Before, the money bled off, right?

And you know, you can talk to any producer. They're going to say, they're going to tell you, this is way better, way better than what we had before. And so I'm really proud of the work that our whole team is doing with Creative Saskatchewan and the whole industry. And as you know, that industry has changed so much. And I'm not sure if you had an opportunity; I'd be more than happy to take you over to the sound stage. Have you been there?

**Mr. Teed:** — I haven't. No.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Oh well, you know what? I'll take you over there. You will enjoy it.

**Mr. Teed:** — Absolutely. I would love to take you up on that.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Well it's not open to the public, as you know, because the volume wall, the LED wall, it's a very . . . It's millions of dollars of investment of a private company into leased space at the sound stage, and there again really is a good indicator of the strength of the industry today in the province. But it also shows that there's been a real turning point on how producers of film and television see Saskatchewan today.

And you know, the interesting thing is, that new wall, that volume wall, it's like out of this world. I have to tell you that. And so it is the second largest in North America. The largest is in Atlanta, right? But ours is the newest technology. And so this is something that we can be really proud of.

And you've had an opportunity to travel to Vancouver or Toronto, which are two of the, you know, major hubs for the television and movie industry. Well you think you're going to get a hotel room for \$200 a night in Toronto or Vancouver? Not likely. Or the snarl with traffic. So all of a sudden now we have producers who are coming to here and saying, I can stay in a beautiful hotel. I can either walk for 10 minutes to the sound stage, or I can take a cab for five minutes, right, which is totally . . . So it changes the whole dynamics.

And as we were discussing dollars and cents, producers are

looking at all of that. So when they realize that, one, that the grant that we are providing puts them way ahead of what they had before, and then they look at the facility. And we've upgraded. We're upgrading the electrical. We're upgrading the connectivity. So all of sudden you start to see that what we have makes it a pretty sweet space to be.

**Mr. Teed:** — Well I appreciate that. The two concerns that were brought forward to me were a finite grant. Do you find that you are seeing more application for those dollars than can, you know, go around? Like once the 12 million is done, are you seeing folks being like, we wish we would have been able to access this?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — No, and the thing too . . . One of the interesting parts is that we have audits take place throughout. And so it's a really good way to know that these are very viable projects, and I know last year I think pretty well subscribed and the year before oversubscribed. So we ended up with additional funding.

But like I said, you know, people are . . . The industry has changed so much. You know, how people watch and what they watch has changed so much, and so we have just a thriving industry here.

And I had the opportunity to meet with the people at Sask Polytechnic who are also doing a micro-credentialing. So I'm not sure if you have a chance to talk to Minister Wyant at all about what they're doing at Sask Polytechnic. So again what we're doing here is not just building up the industry for dollars, for grants, but rather people who are very employable not just in Saskatchewan but elsewhere.

[16:15]

You know, it used to be that kids who were gamers, who sat in the basement, their mom and dads would say, oh man, I'm going to be supporting these kids forever, right. Because like what kind of job are you going to get? Well now of all a sudden, guess what? Those are the people that are going to be saying, don't worry, mom and dad; I got you. Because they are going to have very productive careers.

And so like I said, Sask Polytechnic is looking to micro-credential so that we have the film crews that are able to participate and really kind of roll up their sleeves and get these productions done. And also the universities. So we've got some really good synergies going, and I think that's what makes Saskatchewan so cool too in that we can pick up the phone and say, you know, what about this?

And so we had a round table with both SMPIA, Creative Saskatchewan, with Sask Polytechnic, and the University of Regina. And we had a round table here and said, okay, what do we all need to do to be able to support each other? And I think that's the best part about this stuff.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you so much. One last concern that was brought forward was from arts organizations concerned that a lot of the main funding going into films was cannibalizing any of the granting opportunities that Creative Sask might . . . I've heard some concerns about applications made to Creative Sask that have, you know, not been made more recently, you know, with

funds going into the film and television. But I know that when there's a limited pool of money sometimes, you know, you feel like you're not getting the fair end of the stick. Are there any concerns being brought forward?

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, we're not aware of that. We know that the 12 million is dedicated to film and television, doesn't affect their other grants. So they're still granting as per usual what they had in prior years. So yeah, we're not aware of that situation.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — And also too, I think what's really wonderful is . . . And I've had the opportunity to meet so many writers and producers and you name it. And we really champion Indigenous filmmakers. And we've got some great stories that are being told. And like, even when you look at *Guardians of the North*, there's a really good example of . . . And I don't know if you've ever watched any of them on Citytv. Please say yes.

**Mr. Teed:** — I'm going to have to check it out now.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Oh man, oh man, oh man. Okay, so what they've done is, with drones and in person, have followed the firefighters in northern Saskatchewan. And it's a real story. And it's absolutely a perfect way to portray the kind of work that's being undertaken by northern firefighters. And it's riveting. Plus also I have to say, the quality of the production is incredible.

And then, you know, you look at *Flat Out Food*, and I don't know if you've had a chance to watch any of those productions. And those again are on Citytv. And I had an opportunity to see one of the shows on barley. And so what they do in *Flat Out Food* is they showcase the whole province, in that they went to a farmer who grows barley but he also malts the barley. And so they showed that whole production.

And then they went to a young gentleman, and I think it's other family members that are making the beer, right. And then they met and interviewed him and showed him making the beer. And then the mash that comes off, a livestock producer comes and picks it up. So I mean we're talking about . . .

So they were sitting and enjoying the beer, so it was showcasing another business, a real fine entrepreneur. And then they went to Lafleche, and they went to a restaurant there. And they had a beautiful meal that was prepared by this chef who used to be a lawyer in Edmonton and one day woke up and went, I don't want to be doing that lawyering yet again, so wanted to follow his passion and moved to Lafleche. I mean, it's just kind of a wonderful story.

And so again they were preparing a meal with beautiful Saskatchewan produce that they were growing and had sourced locally. And then it had a beer sauce. So it kind of followed barley, the whole story of barley all the way across.

But what was so wonderful is that it was showcasing the province. And they're out of Saskatoon. You've got to go meet them. They're just great. And again I had a wonderful opportunity to talk to that producer of *Flat Out Food*, and he said to me, Laura, this program that we have is the best. The upfront financing that we can achieve really makes what we do here possible.

And again it's a wonderful way of showcasing what Saskatchewan has to offer. It's not, you know, like . . . Yeah, Citytv is picking it up, but now people are starting to go in and watch it on YouTube and stuff like that because it's . . . Like the production quality. This isn't just homemade. This is like, when you see it you just go, oh my goodness; this is being shot here in Saskatchewan? It's excellent.

**Mr. Teed:** — No, it's absolutely . . . I think there's so many opportunities to highlight the amazing things that are happening in our province. And of course deeply appreciative to see this film industry revived and renewed and continue to see that. And I think you're right. I think there's huge opportunity to support Indigenous filmmaking. Would you say that would be a priority of the ministry going forward?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Well it's part of the whole cadre of films that are being made. And we have such talented writers and actors here and filmmakers that are going across the whole province. And I don't know if you've ever had a chance to — because you were in the artistic industry — to go out to the Yorkton Film Festival, where they show all the short films. And you really get to see the kind of talent we have and how we can showcase it.

**Mr. Teed:** — Oh, absolutely. I will make, you know, a shameless plug here while we're talking about the film industry, because my first knowledge about the sound stage had probably come from featurettes on *The Mandalorian* on, you know, streaming services. And you see how amazing these LED sound stages are. And so I'll make a shameless plug here in this committee to see if we can acquire any Marvel or Lucasfilm productions. And then I'll have to ask an invitation if you ever . . . So that's my . . .

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — You want to be an extra. Okay.

**Mr. Teed:** — Yeah. Only if we can do it together. I'm sure they'd find great . . .

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Yeah. But that's what I mean. And so you know, we've got that talent. But then we have, like I said, Wavelength productions that is up north. They shot *Alone* up north at Reindeer Lake, and that again went . . . Like I wasn't watching *Alone* because it kind of wasn't something . . . And so when I watched it, well the vegans in the crowd didn't appreciate it. I have to be honest with you. But it absolutely again showcased Saskatchewan. And so the first segment of — what was that? — *Alone* 10 or something had, what, 10 million viewers. Boom, right off the hop, like around the world. So there again we were able to showcase Saskatchewan to the world.

And what happens with a lot of viewers of things like *Alone* or even our *Guardians of the North* or *Flat Out Food*, we end up with people who want to come here and see exactly where these episodes are being shot and just really be able to experience Saskatchewan. So even though within our ministry we're not responsible for tourism, we're doing tourism. Because we really are showcasing Saskatchewan at its best.

**Mr. Teed:** — I know there are a lot of synergies between Parks, Culture and Tourism for sure. And certainly a lot of unique opportunity to take advantage of the streaming world, the 10 million views now. I'm very appreciative to see this industry

in such good shape.

I'm going to jump over to ask for a couple updates on the marketing work that Parks, Culture and Sport had done. Post-pandemic we had seen about the \$90,000 spent on marketing as a way to reinvigorate folks, getting people back into our organizations. Would someone be able to provide me an update on the success of those campaigns?

Some of the feedback that I've received, just to preface this, is that there have been organizations who apply that just haven't seen any dollars allocated. There was a feeling that, you know, there is more needed in this recovery process. So just looking to see if you could give me an update on that, on those marketing dollars.

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, and so the one I think you're referring to was done, I believe, almost two years ago. So we'd have no new data further than what we provided before, so we didn't . . . That program ended. It met its mandate by creating that awareness, so we would have no more information on that one.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you so much. I want to jump into a few questions. And realizing that I have half an hour left and I don't want to miss it, I'd be remiss to ask about Megamunch and ask if there has been any plans to . . . And sure, his retirement is well deserved, but any comeback story we might hear for Megamunch? I have to ask.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I'll talk a little bit about Megamunch then. Well you know, Megamunch was there when my boys were little, and they're grown up and they've got their kids. But anyways, 37 years old and loved by everyone. Scared a lot of kids but loved by everyone. And we really found out how near and dear he was to everyone's heart when all of a sudden it was announced that he was going to be retiring.

Now we retired Megamunch for . . . Well it was sad. I mean we still get letters and we still get, you know, comments from people on how much they loved Megamunch. But as you know, and I'm not sure if you have a . . . how often you update your cell phone, how often you update any of your televisions. Megamunch became . . . I don't want to say old, tired, and obsolete but . . .

**Mr. Teed:** — Well I won't say that.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Don't. I won't. We won't say that.

**Mr. Teed:** — I won't say it. Yeah.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — But what happened was we could not find parts to keep him going.

**Mr. Teed:** — Okay.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — And that was the hard part.

**Mr. Teed:** — Yeah.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Because 37 years old, they weren't making those parts anymore. And I don't know if you want to add anything, but we're all sad.

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, we're all sad. Actually we were quite . . . To be honest, I didn't grow up here in Saskatchewan when I was young, so I didn't realize how big of a deal Megamunch was. And it was a big deal. There was a huge retirement party. Three generations long enjoyed its . . . his departure.

[16:30]

The one thing I can say for certain: he is going in our permanent collection, so we're not discarding him. But we are looking, as you may be aware that we are looking to keep these museums relevant at all times. So we are looking for upgrades throughout the years and there will be some new exhibits coming here, so we're hopeful. Scotty is the face of us as you know now, but we're hopeful through new exhibits and new upgrades that we'll have more interactive stuff.

**Mr. Teed:** — Great, thank you so much. No, I'm in the same boat. Having grown up in Saskatoon I did not know of the epic, legendary history of Megamunch. And so you know, I should apologize and withdraw for my un-advocacy for the retirement of Megamunch.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Now you're going to resign. That's . . .

**Mr. Teed:** — No, no, no. It's always a good question. It's always a good question, but . . . So that was my due diligence.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — No, like I said, absolutely we did the cards and the letters and the multi-generations that came to say goodbye was really heartwarming. And everyone was so emotional, you know, and then you have someone say to me, well it's just an entity. And I'm going, okay, you have no idea who Megamunch is.

**Mr. Teed:** — Yeah.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — He's way bigger than that.

**Mr. Teed:** — That's what I've heard. I'm going to ask a few, you know, I guess you could call these the niche Megamunch questions. But I was wondering if you had any update in budget '24-25 for any dollars being allocated to the Meewasin Valley Authority's national urban park application process?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — [Inaudible] . . . get Paul. We're going to have a switch-out.

**Mr. Teed:** — I could . . . Would it help that my next question was an update on any budget dollars allocated to Wanuskewin's UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] heritage application?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — That's the same.

**Mr. Teed:** — Okay.

**Mr. French:** — No, I can answer Wanuskewin, yeah. So Wanuskewin did receive their stable funding of I believe it's \$625,000. So we continue to meet with Wanuskewin as part of our support. So I meet with the CEO personally every month specifically about their UNESCO application. So as you know through the media as well, they've been fantastic in getting

public support through private industries — millions of dollars, in fact — to become Saskatchewan's first UNESCO site.

So we continue to work with them and then we continue to do in-kind service as well. So we have work that's being done through our heritage conservation branch and work being done through us with the Ministry of Highways, the Ministry of Agriculture. And those are all in-kind so there's no cost to Wanuskewin for them. So we continue to support them and we look forward to the final designation of UNESCO.

**Mr. Teed:** — Has there been any specific funding requests from Wanuskewin re: this project?

**Mr. French:** — For this project?

**Mr. Teed:** — Mm-hmm.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — You know, in the past we have supported them at providing both personnel and additional funding in the past. So they have been working very diligently because we know them. We value what this will bring to the province. And I mean this is not a short-term project, right. As you know, it's multi-years to put together the application, but then the application needs to go through the federal heritage branch. And at this point, the federal heritage branch did indicate to me that they were very busy. You can read into that what you like.

I'm very passionate about, as you know, I've spent quite a bit of time there. I think that it is probably the most spiritual place in this province, and the history needs to be shared and told. And we do very much want to see that designation go forward because . . . well first off, it's not just because of the only one in Saskatchewan, but it deserves to be. I don't know if you've ever had a chance to go to any of the other UNESCO heritage sites, but it absolutely deserves to be up there right with them. Like I don't know if you've ever been to Mont-Saint-Michel, have you?

**Mr. Teed:** — No, I don't think I ever . . . I don't think ever.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Oh, okay. Well again, opportunity for you.

**Mr. Teed:** — Yeah.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — If you ever go to Europe, go to France. You must go to . . . and that was a UNESCO heritage that when I walked through it. And I've gone there numerous times now because it's that kind of . . . you don't just do this lightly. That's exactly the same kind of feeling you have when you go through Wanuskewin. And you know, like Ernie — Ernie has given his life for that facility. And he's passionate about it, you know, bringing back the bison, you know, the whole . . . It's a place of wonder, and we really want to see it succeed because it deserves to be.

**Mr. Teed:** — Wonderful. Thank you so much.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Okay, so now we're going to have a switch-out for the parks. Paul.

**Mr. Teed:** — Yeah, if we want. If I can pitch these questions to see if a switch . . . and then we can go back, but I was wondering if someone could speak to the increase in funding to the

Community Initiatives Fund and the decrease to the RSM. Is it easier to answer those first before we switch?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Do you want to do the RSM? Okay, do you want to do those and then we can do Meewasin after?

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, sure.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Are you okay with that?

**Mr. Teed:** — Absolutely.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Because otherwise we're doing musical chairs here for you.

**Mr. Teed:** — Musical chairs. No, we'll make it as smooth as possible.

**Mr. French:** — Sure. So the Community Initiatives Fund proceeds directly from Casino Moose Jaw and Casino Regina. So their forecasts dictate that increase. So they've seen a significant increase at the end of last fiscal and of course going into this fiscal. And in turn the Community Initiatives Fund, you know, spends that throughout the entire province on . . . [inaudible] . . . initiatives. So that's the increase. Like I can speak to . . .

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — That's the community part.

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, that's the community part.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Yeah. Like it's absolutely smart stuff. Across the whole province, applications are made and . . . Do you have . . . You've got . . .

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, so I can speak quickly. So they have the three themes. So healthy growth and development of children and youth, so that's approximately about 3.3 million that'll be going into that fund. And then the second theme is community well-being, so that's approximately 2.1 million. And then the third theme is non-profit and community leadership, and it's approximately about \$300,000 in grants. So for a total of about 8.7 million.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you. And do you have a list of the heritage organizations that this budget allocation will fund?

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, you can get it through the CIF [Community Initiatives Fund] website. Right directly on the website it puts, like, every single dollar spent on every single organization.

**Mr. Teed:** — Perfect. Thank you so much. And then could someone speak to the decrease in funding to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum?

**Mr. French:** — Yeah, so there's two decreases there. So the last fiscal the Royal Saskatchewan Museum had an \$81,000 grant from the federal government for a specific project that ended last fiscal. So that was just a flow-through, that decrease. And the last one was on capital. There was around \$800,000, so we are looking through options for a new facility for their research and collection facility. So that was the design portion. So design is wrapping up here within actually April. So that's what that fund

was, so it was a one-time design cost. So simply that's the project is nearing for the design.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — So it's not a decrease to . . . [inaudible].

**Mr. French:** — No, it's not a decrease. It's just, it was decreased because the money is not required for that specific design.

**Mr. Teed:** — And how is the status of that going, the collection? Do we have any timeline on facility or production of that, for the collection, the money that the feds spent to design?

**Mr. French:** — No, no, this is ours. Sorry, the 800,000 was Saskatchewan's capital plan. The 81,000 was from the federal government. So the 800,000 was actually our capital, and the capital was to design a new facility. So that design should be here in about May of this year. So that's why the money has been . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . It was used. So it was used up, I guess, as a lack of better terms.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you so much. Then yeah, we could jump over to Meewasin Valley Authority . . .

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I need a different chair, as you can see.

**Mr. Teed:** — Oh, no.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — All of a sudden I'm sitting here going oh . . . It's going down, down, down.

Okay, we're ready. We're back.

**Mr. Johnson:** — Good afternoon, everybody. I'm Paul Johnson, assistant deputy minister for parks division in the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. And thank you for the question about Meewasin, and I think the question specifically was about the '24-25 budget for Meewasin. I'm pleased to say that Meewasin is going to receive stable funding from us again this year, consistent funding. And part of the reason why we want to hold it stable is because of, as you're aware, their push to become a national urban park under a new federal policy, the national urban parks policy.

So it's really too soon to say much more about the national urban parks policy. We received a draft in the ministry — and all stakeholders did, including Meewasin — in the middle of February. So we've gone through the policy in depth. We've had conversations with a number of the other partners that are at the table with Meewasin, and many of the partners share the same concerns that we do with the draft policy, things such as governance, jurisdiction, decision making. Many of these things remain unanswered in the policy, and for that reason we are still holding our dollars consistent in a \$513,000 annual grant, same as the previous year for Meewasin.

**Mr. Teed:** — Now I know that, you know, all these organizations of course are probably always looking for increases, but it's another area where the stable year-over-year funding is tough in the face of such increasing costs around inflation. Were there any conversations to see an increase in investment for Saskatchewan's portion of the MVA [Meewasin Valley Authority]?

**Ms. MacDougall:** — I'll take the lead, yeah. Twyla MacDougall. So . . . Now I forgot. The first part of your question was about inflation. And I would just again reiterate what I said earlier. We do take all of our stakeholder information, have that conversation with them prior to going to the Ministry of Finance with our budget document. And that's where we have the opportunity to present their budget and justify our recommendation.

The other piece about asking for additional funding specifically for UNESCO — not UNESCO, now we're talking about the urban park, yeah — is premature until we understand a little bit more and have some more definition around the policy that Parks Canada is putting forward.

**Mr. Teed:** — Can you give any update to the state of those negotiations with the federal government?

**Mr. Johnson:** — Yeah, I can elaborate. I represent the Government of Saskatchewan on a steering committee for the national urban park transition team, I guess you would call it. Again, we received the draft, first draft of the national urban park policy in the middle of March, so only a few weeks ago — or February, excuse me — so we're still reviewing that.

We provided back to stakeholders, to Parks Canada who's working on the national policy, we provided a number of questions on things that I've already touched on, things like jurisdiction, funding, governance, decision making, all these sort of elements that are unanswered. And they're pretty big questions for us to understand, where are the national urban parks going?

And I will say that at the steering committee table that many of the other stakeholders, not just the Government of Saskatchewan, were asking the very same questions. They need to know things such as governance, decision making, operations, all those types of things before they can make a decision on where to go with the national urban park policy.

So it's in active discussions. It's not moving very quickly, but it is moving, and I'm pleased to represent the Government of Saskatchewan on the steering committee.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you. I know we've just . . .

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I just wanted to add that we feel very fortunate to have Paul, and before that we had Jennifer sitting on . . . who come with a very good understanding of parks, because decisions like this have so many moving pieces. Plus also too when we don't have, and we've asked numerous times for the information such as jurisdiction, all of those sort of things, or even the financial commitment, and it wasn't forthcoming.

[16:45]

So we've moved it along further in discussion but it's . . . I think probably too — and as you know, tomorrow is their federal budget day — maybe there'll be some discussion there. But it has been . . . “pulling teeth” would be a polite way of describing how this project . . . you know, the discussions.

I did meet with the federal Minister Wilkinson to talk about our concerns, and he understood. Well he said he understood our concerns and said he would take that information back, and

maybe that's what kind of helped with some of the information that came in February. Because up to then it was very little information that was being shared.

And so something of this magnitude that could very well change the whole tenor of a very significant park in the city of Saskatoon and how people view it . . . You know, like people in Saskatoon feel ownership of Meewasin, and there very well could be a bit of a change if, say, that national entity moved forward.

So these are all things that . . . It's not just the regulations. It's not just the dollars and cents, but in fact it starts to now become emotional for a lot of people. So like there's a lot of, like I said, moving parts. And it's not just Meewasin and the Government of Saskatchewan. We've got the university. Like there's all sorts of . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Pardon me?

**Ms. MacDougall:** — Corman Park.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — And Corman Park. You know, so there's all sorts of moving parts to be able to come up with a decision that is going to be the best for Saskatoon and for Meewasin.

**Mr. Teed:** — Wonderful. Thank you so much for that.

I have a question in regards to regional parks. Certainly happy to see the investment made in the regional parks. Such a valuable collection of parks that basically touch the entire province at this point.

One of the questions I had — and it was brought up to me by the board — was, the access for seniors into provincial parks is free, but regional parks aren't able to offer the same offering. And so it's sometimes seen as a deterrent. Has there been any discussion with Parks, Culture and Sport to provide any funding mechanism to offer that equitable access between our provincial and our regional parks?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Okay. So yeah, as you know, we very much value the regional parks and they really augment what our provincial parks have to offer for tourism, not just for visitors from outside our province but also within the province. So we were pleased to be able to increase their funding, because we sat down with them and we went through the whole . . . their wants and needs. And so we fully understood that they did need some additional funding for a lot of their upgrades and things like that.

Now I'm not sure if you know, but you can go to any public library and get a free seven-day pass for a regional park, right. I'm not sure if you were familiar with that. So that's another opportunity for them . . . as a park. And there's no age limit on that, so it's not . . . you don't have to be a senior, you don't have to be a new . . . Anyone can go and obtain that seven-day pass for a regional park. But also, too, regional parks have the authority to do that for themselves.

**Mr. Teed:** — Right. I guess the concerns were that, while this was a really welcome investment, much needed, it really only brings the regional parks back to their 2016-17 funding levels, is kind of the communication. Not that there's . . . I mean, this is so welcome but it's, you know, there's room there.

One of the thoughts that was brought forward is, is there

opportunities for the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport to offer similar in-kind options for our regional parks? So we mentioned, you know, the in-kind offering that we've offered Wanuskewin in the conversation with the Regional Parks Board.

They're expending money into areas like highways to rejuvenate the roads going towards their parks, and SaskPower applications to build out power in the parks and, you know, the costs to survey land in those parks to build more revenue-generating campsites and cabin areas.

Is there any conversation happening to offer some of those similar in kind? I feel like we have, you know, two arms of government that aren't really working together, and we could maybe be alleviating that budget constraint by offering some of that.

**Mr. Johnson:** — Thank you for the question. Yeah, regional parks, as the minister said, are really, really an important part of the rural fabric of the province and significant offering with the well over 7,000 campsites and golf courses and employing more than 1,000 seasonal staff across the province. So they're fairly important, and I think that's the reason that we increased, we doubled the grant to the regional park association this year from 615,000 to 1.23 million.

It's really, really important to emphasize that regional parks are autonomous. They make their own decision making about how their funding is allocated. And it's match funding as well, so if they are eligible for funding through the Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association, it leverages additional investments from local stakeholders, communities, municipalities. So I think it's very important to emphasize that they're autonomous and they're operated and managed by local authorities.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — So I just wanted to also say that, you know, when we talk about local authorities, the regional parks fall under the jurisdiction really of the RMs [rural municipality], and the RMs did receive a increase this year.

So what's interesting is if you look at the 2006 to 2007 — that's when the NDP [New Democratic Party] were in government — they were giving them \$275,000. Today we're giving them 1.23 million. Totally different. So you know, if we're talking about the increase in regional parks, we have stepped up.

But like I said, I had a really good meeting with them. They sat down. They said, Laura, this is where we're at. This is what we need. Now some regional parks have wonderful relationships with their RMs. Not all of them do. I asked them to go out and kind of work on those relationships because that's exactly, just like when you talk about the highways going to it, that's their RM's responsibility. That's not the Sask parks' responsibility. So there's a little difference, right? Because they're their own entities in that respect.

**Mr. Teed:** — Okay. Thank you so much. I think we have five minutes left, so I have one last question I think should reach us there. I just was going to ask about . . . I want to acknowledge some of the investments that are being made into our provincial parks. Certainly welcome investments, welcome investments in capital that will be used by so many folks in our province.

My question around our provincial parks is that, what is the mechanism or process that's being used to bring private business operation into our provincial parks? And is that the same mechanism that's being used for all the new private business operations coming in the parks budget allocation of '24-25?

**Mr. Johnson:** — Thank you for the question. Of course the investment in parks is an investment in the economy, an investment in the province. And it's very, very important not just to park operations but, as you allude, the increase in investment in our capital program by over a million dollars this year, which will be significant, allows us to do more investment in infrastructure in parks.

When we do investment — including our capital investment, but also our commercial lessee investment, the investment attraction in parks — it's all very transparent. We have a business development framework that we follow for our capital investments and for the business lessees.

We also follow a very public request for proposal process as well and award the most appropriate business or construction company on the capital projects, the work based on merit and their application as well. So a very open and transparent process and very important.

And I will say that I think we have nearly 200 commercial lessees operating in the province, in our parks right across the system. They really enhance the experience of our visitors when they're there. It gives them more opportunities to do things, to experience the park differently or in different ways — more recreation activities; more nature, ecosystem activities. So it's really a great addendum to have the commercial lessee businesses operating in our parks.

**Mr. Teed:** — With two minutes remaining, I think I will end my questions here just two minutes early to allow if there's any final comments, and then allow for the transition to Status of Women.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Teed. We'll now change it over. Minister Ross, do you have any opening comments for Status of Women?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Oh, we have to change over some staff.

**The Chair:** — Oh, okay.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — And I want to thank the Parks people who have come.

**The Chair:** — Do you want to thank your staff now, and then we'll have closing comments? Sorry, we can do it both ways.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — No, that's okay. I know the transition. But I do want to thank Paul and Dan and the people from Parks, Culture and Sport who have really been, have worked really hard to ensure that we were able to provide fulsome answers to your questions. So thank you very much for the respectful questions and the interest that you have in this ministry. It's an exciting ministry to be part of, and I must say I feel so honoured to have such capable, competent staff within the ministry that they just make it shine. So I want to thank them all.



**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister Ross. Do you have any closing comments, Mr. Teed?

**Mr. Teed:** — Sure. I'll echo the thanks of the minister and also say thank you, Minister, and your team for the exchange today. And thank you for all the work that you do in managing that diverse portfolio of exciting things that happen in our province. Sometimes we call it the ministry of fun, but I know we do so much more than fun and there's so much impact on our province.

So I just want to say thank you all so much for the time. And thank you, Mr. Chair, and fellow committee members and all the staff who make it possible to operate tonight.

[17:00]

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Teed. I'd also at this point like to thank Minister Ross's staff. I know Minister Ross is going to continue on here. Parks and Culture, thank you for your good work, and Mr. Teed for your good questions. We will now take a minute to switch over staff.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**The Chair:** — Okay, I'd like to welcome everybody back. We're going to continue on the consideration of vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport, central management and services, subvote (PC01). I'd also like at this time to welcome Ms. Betty Nippi-Albright chitting in for Ms. Ritchie. Minister Ross, you have some opening comments?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I do. Thank you very much, Chair. For the rest of the time here today, we will be discussing the Status of Women office. I am joined by my officials Twyla MacDougall, the deputy minister of Parks, Culture and Sport; Bernadet Hamill, the executive director of Status of Women; Pam Herbert, executive director of strategic and corporate services; and Drew Lombard, my chief of staff.

Now the Status of Women office is a branch of our ministry, yet they work across government on areas that matter to women and girls in Saskatchewan. They have a very clear mandate to lead and coordinate the development of strategic initiatives that support women to live safe, healthy, and prosperous lives.

While the mandate is straightforward, it is also vast and can take very many forms. They coordinate work across multiple ministries; lead and provide oversight on specific initiatives; develop partnerships with external organizations to develop new projects that strengthen our programs and services; and work at the national level, meeting with other provinces and the federal government to ensure Saskatchewan's voice is heard and the unique needs of our province are being met.

Now for the next hour, we're going to talk about how the Status of Women office helps shape the lives of all of us because when we improve the lives of women and girls, we improve the life for everyone.

Like the rest of the ministry, the Status of Women office remains committed to the priorities we have pushed forward over the last few years. The Status of Women office is centred around women's social and economic priorities. More specifically, they

focus on the safety, health, and economic prosperity of Saskatchewan women and girls. The office engages with all levels of government with community partners to achieve this goal. They have had a very busy year in '23-24.

Before we turn to budget 2024 and the year ahead, there are significant accomplishments that I'd like to draw your attention to today. In January 2023 we signed an agreement with the federal government for 1 million in funding to expand crisis line services in Saskatchewan. Our partners in the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General implemented the funding. The final contract was awarded in January 2024 to United Way, and they used the funds to expand the 211 Re:Connect service which supports families and individuals impacted by interpersonal violence.

People accessing this service receive non-judgmental support, including 30 minutes of direct counselling with experts from Family Service Regina who are partners in this initiative.

Last May we had the privilege of announcing a partnership with Shoppers Drug Mart to provide free menstrual products in Saskatchewan. The Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health agreed to donate 12 million pieces of products over three years, and the province would take care of the distribution.

Now the Status of Women office led the development of the program and the implementation of this plan. They worked with partners from across the government to take this project from concept to implementation. By October more than 100,000 boxes of pads and tampons were on their way to schools and transition houses in our province, more than 3 million individual products.

It was the first shipment, and the beginning of this three-year initiative. Another shipment went out in March this year to transition houses and women's shelters, and there will be further shipments later this summer. And the Status of Women office is working with Advanced Education to look at expanding this program.

In July last year we joined with the federal government to announce that Saskatchewan had signed on to the national action plan to end gender-based violence. The Status of Women office negotiated this agreement on behalf of the province. This agreement will add 20.3 million over four years to our work, to the programs and services that help prevent interpersonal violence and support survivors.

Leadership from the Status of Women office resulted in Saskatchewan developing a plan that is prevention focused and meets the unique needs of Saskatchewan. Now this plan, it's not static. It allows flexibility so we can continue to meet the needs of the province in the best possible way. And the office worked closely with seven different government ministries that have programs which can be expanded through this funding. And we have started to roll out that funding.

In the last fiscal year more than 1.2 million was provided to organizations that deliver services and support, including 300,000 to Hope Restored to deliver housing and support services for human trafficking victims. This was year one. The organization will receive 1.2 million over four years.

400,000 to increase the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Community Response Fund. This supports Indigenous communities and their partners to generate solutions with a focus on prevention.

335,000 to alternative to voices services at the Ministry of Health. This program delivers intervention treatment to those who perpetuate intimate partner abuse and violence.

Last year Saskatchewan invested more than 27 million into programs and services that prevent violence, support victims, help break the cycle of violence, and provide safe spaces where people can begin to heal and build a new life. Now this year we will not only continue that work; we will expand further. These programs, now they are a priority for us. Women and girls in our province, they are a priority. And the Status of Women office will continue to lead the work needed to address the violence perpetuated against women and girls.

Now let's move to this new fiscal year and budget 2024. I noted earlier that the priorities for the Status of Women office remain unchanged. Over the past several years, Status of Women office has partnered with the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General on Face the Issue, a campaign to raise awareness of interpersonal violence and abuse.

The goal is to make people aware of this problem, to inspire them to speak up, get involved, but better yet become part of the solution. We know how important it is to raise awareness and spark the discussion if we're going to change the dialogue. We also need to connect people to support services, and that is why Face the Issue directs people to the 211 Saskatchewan.

This spring — within the next few weeks actually — we will roll out phase 3 of that campaign. And it's focused on young adults, ages 18 to 25, and the centres of understanding abuse because too often people want to believe so strongly in someone that they ignore the signs. Now in this series of videos, a young person looks into the camera, explains her situation. And when it's done, they ask the question, is this abuse? We want people to engage in discussions and become informed, so if they see something like this happening to a friend, to a family member, or to themselves, they will protect themselves and be safe.

Face the Issue has been very incredibly successful this year. Not only will we launch this next alliteration; we will expand.

Now early next month we are launching the first phase of a campaign on human trafficking and sexual exploitation. When most people think about human trafficking, the image they have is the Hollywood version of someone lured into an exciting job offer or abducted off the street, then forced into sex work. The reality is that most people know their trafficker. They aren't taken; they are groomed and they're coerced over time. They don't realize what's happening until it's too late. And ultimately it doesn't matter what path brought someone into that life. What matters is that they can find a way out.

The first phase of this campaign is three posters that we will be displaying in high-traffic locations. The official launch will be in early May. The goal is to prevent people from getting into the life, helping those who are in the life get out of it. We are shining a light on another issue that few people want to speak about

because bringing things into the light is the only way we can create true and lasting change.

That was a look at how some of our priorities and our projects will continue to evolve in this new fiscal year.

The Status of Women office will be increasing its grant funding programs. Each year they provide small grants to third parties to support initiatives that prevent interpersonal violence and abuse, support women's health and well-being, increase women's capacity to grow the economy. This year the grant funding will double from 50,000 to 100,000, an increase that's made possible through the national action plan. The grant funding application process for 2024-25 is now under way.

And some of the initiatives and the recipients who have received the funding in 2023-24 include the University of Regina Step Up healthy relationship programs, delivering education and awareness of sexual violence to support intervention and prevention; On Cue Performance Hub, development of women's carpentry for the creative arts and apprenticeship program in Regina, where vulnerable women will receive specialized training in set construction; and RaiseHER, a four-year summer camp held for young girls to strengthen their self-image, support them to establish healthy boundaries, relationships, and lifestyles.

[17:15]

Women continue to be under-represented in our STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] sectors. That is science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. To look closer at the issue, the Status of Women office has established a provincial working group for women in STEM. This group has members from across government, and the group will improve data collection to better understand why women are under-represented in these sectors. And when we understand why women are not pursuing careers in these critical sectors or why they leave, then we can develop strategies to change this.

The Status of Women office was proud to sponsor the Women Breaking Barriers Conference which was last week in Regina but streamed out virtually across the province. This year's speakers and panellists were CEOs, presidents, vice-presidents who lead some of Saskatchewan's largest organizations. There was a leadership panel of women executives within our Crowns, from Lotteries and Gaming Saskatchewan, SaskTel, SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance], and SaskPower.

Now many of these women didn't break barriers. They created paths for others, and in doing so they helped pave the way for more women to enter and excel in careers in STEAM [science, technology, engineering, arts, and math] and careers.

That wraps up my remarks. I look forward to our discussion today. Thank you very much.

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

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome to the minister and her officials. I've got very little time to ask questions today — only one hour — so I'm going to jump right into those

questions. I would also appreciate just if the responses could be kept brief so that we are able to get to as many questions as possible.

So to start off, I will note that this year's budget mentions women a total of two times. There is in fact very little emphasis in this budget placed on women. Given this lack of attention to women's needs in the budget, can the minister tell us what the implications of this budget are for women in the province?

**Ms. MacDougall:** — Okay, I can open up and provide an answer. Twyla MacDougall, deputy minister of Parks, Culture and Sport. And thank you for the question. I guess if I understand the question correctly, you're referring to the Government of Saskatchewan's budget when you say women were mentioned twice in it, I believe. I can't speak to the Government of Saskatchewan, but I can speak to the Status of the Women office budget, and we saw an increase in that budget of more than 425 . . . Let me just double check that.

We saw an increase, yeah, of more than . . . Like we've got 140,000 additional money to help the Shoppers Foundation as far as distribution, and we also got another 38,000 to help manage the national action plan to end gender-based violence. And Minister Ross did mention in her opening remarks that we also received an additional \$50,000 for third-party grants. So I would say that within Parks, Culture and Sport's budget, women are mentioned significantly and budget has increased.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Yes. Yeah. And as you mentioned, my question was around the budget as a whole. I guess stemming from that, does the minister believe that this government's budget overall will improve outcomes for women in Saskatchewan, and what do you anticipate?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I guess I will touch on some of that, part of that comment, and also Bernadet will also elaborate. When we look at the overall budget for the Government of Saskatchewan and you look at the title, which is *Classrooms, Care & Communities*, women are an integral part of that whole budget. We may not say women care, women classroom, women community. In fact it's a given that women are an integral part of the decisions that are being made here for the province of Saskatchewan.

And the Status of Women office, you know . . . And I'm going to tell you something that's very interesting. I'm not going to get too political, but I will get a little political. As you know, I have been advocating for women for years. Probably longer than you were born, I've been advocating very hard for women. And I remember when the Status of Women office was totally torn apart by the previous government and expected individuals, women, to work off the side of their desk.

Well you know, we have placed a lot of emphasis on the status of women within our Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. And I have to say I am so proud of the work that the women are doing there because they're ensuring that our voice is being heard across the whole province, across every ministry. And that's why we have meetings across the government with different ministries that we can touch upon so that when we come forward with decisions that need to be made within the Status of Women, all aspects of government are taken into account. So it's not . . .

We do not work as a silo, but in fact we work across government.

And I'll have Bernadet kind of maybe talk about ICIVA [inter-ministerial committee on interpersonal violence and abuse] and how important it is for the implementation of programs that we are undertaking through the Status of Women to ensure that women's voices are being heard at the decision-making table.

**Ms. Hamill:** — Thank you. My name is Bernadet Hamill, and I'm the executive director of the Status of Women office with the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. And thank you for the thoughtful question.

I think the work that we have undertaken over the last several budgets — two budgets I've been here now — and the importance of the work of respecting women and the status of women in Saskatchewan has a great emphasis. We have managed to see our budget increase last year and again this year to support the programs and services and the strategic direction that the Status of Women office is providing for Saskatchewan for, I would say, women and girls, but also to improve the lives of everyone.

And so I'm just going to talk to a couple of the key points in this year's budget that kind of supports the work that we're continuing ahead. So when we look at our goals and priorities, increasing women's capacity to grow Saskatchewan's economy and advance their leadership is really key because for women to be safe and healthy, having financial independence to do so is a requirement.

So providing opportunities for women and girls that increases their overall health and well-being is fundamental and an additional goal that we added to our business plan this year, which includes supporting the Shoppers program initiative. But we're really proud of being able to partner with third parties to reduce any cost to the citizens of our province to provide them with free critical products that support women and girls to be in school and in the workplace and participate in their communities.

And then of course there is the prevention. And that's key to us — preventing interpersonal violence and abuse — because we know we can't end it unless we strive to prevent it. It's the only way out.

So as part of that, the work that we are doing includes managing the oversight of the Canada-Saskatchewan transfer agreement on implementing the national action plan to end gender-based violence. And as the minister mentioned, Saskatchewan executed this agreement in July of this past year, bringing 20.3 million in new federal dollars to Saskatchewan to enhance the existing programs and services with a variety of initiatives. It's four years of funding; it's a 10-year national action plan. So we know that there's some work and challenges with that.

We're managing all aspects of that four-year funding agreement and continue to support Saskatchewan in this agreement to meet our provincial unique needs. So that means working across all levels of government, continuing to look at what opportunities may be there that support prevention that might not always be obvious. And so we were really able to uncover some unique things this past year, and we will continue to do so.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I just want to mention that I really appreciate the work that Bernadet and her team at the Status of Women office have done. When we undertook the agreement with the federal government, with the national action plan, we ensured that Saskatchewan's needs are going to be met because they kind of had a one-size-fits-all. And I have to say I'm so proud of the work they did because they said, you know what, that's not exactly how Saskatchewan, the needs are here. So they made sure that the programming that is going to be funded and implemented here in Saskatchewan is . . . This program is tailor-made for Saskatchewan.

And it was good, because you know, when Saskatchewan kind of put their elbows up and went to the table and said okay, this is what we need here, other provinces and territories took a lead from us and said, well this is exactly what we need to do too. Because you can imagine. The Maritimes provinces — yeah there's lots of similarities, but there's a lot of differences between those areas of the country and here. Or large, huge, large urban centres as opposed to in Saskatchewan.

So I must say I'm so thankful for the work they did. But they were trailblazers because they made sure that other provinces and territories made sure that their voices were being heard at that table so that the programming now meets and fits the needs of each individual province and territory.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you. Your business plan is very clear that the Status of Women office does not directly deliver programs and services and it instead works within government and with partners to identify and address equality gaps. So my question is, how did you work with your colleagues in cabinet as the budget was developed to address equality gaps in the province? And did you take forward a women's package to treasury board?

**Ms. Hamill:** — So thanks for the question. The Status of Women office puts forward, as with other ministries and divisions within their respective ministries, a business plan. And the business plan for the Status of Women office for '24-25 includes three distinctive goals that supports women across all areas of government.

We work across government to identify strategic initiatives to be developed. And that is providing not only strategic advice, but it's also supporting their business plans and their business cases that they may take forward.

And so in the '24-25 business plan for the Status of Women office — I'm just going to elaborate on that a little bit here — is that increasing women's capacity to grow Saskatchewan's economy contributes to a better quality of life for Saskatchewan's families and communities. The Status of Women office will support achieving this goal by leading and coordinating the development of initiatives that provide opportunities for women and girls in innovation and technology.

[17:30]

And so the approach that we're going to take to achieve that goal this year, to increase capacity for women to work in non-traditional sectors and industries . . . And we know that that's really important because there's such quality wages there, and there's been a gap for many years for women to enter or elevate

their careers in those sectors.

So a couple of the key actions that we're looking at supporting that goal include leading and developing a provincial working group that was identified earlier to leverage opportunities that increase women's participation in the areas of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics, and other non-traditional sectors; and leveraging the opportunities with strategic partners across government and in the community as well, to expand on existing programs and services that enable greater participation for our women in Saskatchewan in the economy; and leading and coordinating opportunities with third parties that encourage women and girls to contribute their leadership in Saskatchewan.

The second goal, and the new goal that we added this year in the business plan, is to support women's health and well-being. So supporting women's health and well-being contributes to a better quality of life for Saskatchewan families and communities. The Status of Women office will support this goal by leading and coordinating initiatives that provide opportunities for women and girls to support access to programs and services that increases their overall health and well-being.

So how we're going to achieve this goal is providing leadership in working with our partners to identify strategies and initiatives that increase their access to programs and services that increases their health and well-being. One of our key actions for that is leading and providing oversight for the Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health menstrual equity program in Saskatchewan.

And then our third goal, which often takes kind of the front-and-centre suit of the work we do, is preventing interpersonal violence and abuse in Saskatchewan. So supporting women in this area by preventing interpersonal violence and abuse supports strong families and stronger communities. To achieve this goal, we are going to lead and coordinate initiatives to prevent interpersonal violence and abuse from occurring.

Leading and coordinating increasing women's safety, security, and well-being is how we're going to approach this to achieve the goal. And the key actions to get there include leading the implementation of Saskatchewan's implementation of the national action plan to end gender-based violence; support and implement prevention initiatives that target interpersonal violence and abuse; and leading ministry actions to support the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ [two spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual plus] people national action plan and pathway forward.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay, thank you. Yes, I'm aware that there's a business plan and there are, you know, the stated goals there. The question was whether a women's package was taken forward to treasury board. I'm going to take that answer as no.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — No, that's not what she said.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay, so . . .

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — That's not what she said.

**Ms. Bowes:** — That's not what I heard.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — In fact . . .

**Ms. MacDougall:** — If I could answer directly about treasury board and our submissions. So I think earlier I said that we do speak to all of our stakeholders when we are preparing our treasury board submissions and budget documents. We talk to various ministries as well when we are preparing them, and we present the budget then to treasury board. So we do present a budget from the Status of Women office.

What I would like to add — and Bernadet did allude to this in her remarks — is that we work closely with several ministries, probably most of them, as they prepare their budget submissions as well and provide advice and feedback and input into any program areas that affect women. So you know, I can speak about Bernadet's relationship with Justice, for example. I don't know that there's a day goes by that she's not talking to those officials. So there's regular interaction and input into their budget documents.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay, thank you.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — And then we also have a lot of conversations with Health and, as you know, through direct conversations with the Minister of Health to ensure that we have better access or increased access for breast cancer treatment. And so it was through personal conversations that I had with the Minister of Health to ensure that the new centre is going to be located here in Regina, which will serve the city of Regina, surrounding area, and southern Saskatchewan. So we do advocate on behalf of women very strongly with other ministers.

Also a good example is accessibility to abortions, in that the Saskatchewan Health Authority — we have lobbied them very hard, or I have lobbied them very hard, to ensure that we align within Regina and Saskatoon the accessibility. And so that was going to be coming into completion this year that they were able to have . . . both Saskatoon and Regina will have the same protocols.

So we do advocate very strongly on behalf of women at the cabinet table. And you can ask any of my colleagues, but I am always ensuring that women and girls and gender-diverse individuals and people in this province have . . . I have their back and that we are always advocating very strongly on their behalf at the cabinet table.

**Ms. Bowes:** — So in terms of the budget overall, government-wide, I'm wanting to know if you're aware how much is in the budget as a total to support gender equality. And do you do a roll-up of all investments government-wide?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Okay, so you asked about the roll-up for all ministries. I can't speak on behalf of other ministries. What I can speak to you about today is the Status of Women office. That's the estimates and the budget that we will be discussing here today. And if you wish, you can sit in on some of the other committees and request that information, but theirs are all specific also. That's how estimates works. Estimates works on specific, you know . . . Like today, you and I are having a conversation on the Status of Women and our budget for there.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Yes, I'm aware of how estimates works. But I

would think that it would be pertinent for you as the Minister of Status of Women to know what investments are being made across government that impact equality measures for women.

Moving on, last year's budget provided a \$110,000 increase to the Status of Women office to facilitate Saskatchewan's participation in the national action plan to address gender-based violence. In comparison, this year's budget provides a 228,000 increase to lead that plan and to support a partnership with the Shoppers Foundation, as you mentioned, for women's health, the menstrual equity program in Saskatchewan.

I was wondering about the plan. Is it the case that the national action plan program is a dollar-for-dollar matching program with the federal government?

**Ms. Hamill:** — Thanks for that question. So it is a matched funding agreement where provinces and territories need to provide the level of equality in the match of funding that we receive from the federal government. And provinces and territories are able to use their existing funding.

As mentioned earlier, last year it was over \$27 million in just one pocket alone that was put from Saskatchewan forward for initiatives for interpersonal violence and abuse. And this year it's just over 31 million. So Saskatchewan receives, in '23-24, \$3.33 million out of that contribution agreement. And we're scheduled to receive just over 5.5 million in '24-25. So our contribution significantly overrides what the federal government is providing to us.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you. Is it the case that these federal dollars are only to be used for new initiatives and they are not to be used to supplement already existing initiatives?

**Ms. Hamill:** — Funds are to be used to expand and enhance, which can be existing initiatives, but it cannot offset any existing initiatives.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you. And just coming back to the dollar-for-dollar matching, is it the case that the federal government offered up more money than the total amount represented in the agreement? And if so, is it the case that the province wouldn't agree to match that higher number?

**Ms. Hamill:** — No, that's incorrect.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you. Now coming to the total, the 20.3 million overall over four years that the federal government is allocating to Saskatchewan to end gender-based violence, how much is being allocated directly to the Status of Women office?

**Ms. Hamill:** — Thank you. For the '24-25 budget year, the Status of Women office is to receive 197,500.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay. And are you aware, is the remainder of that money going to Justice and Government Relations? Or are there additional ministries also involved in the allocation?

**Ms. Hamill:** — So the Saskatchewan plan includes multiple ministries that are to receive funding through the implementation of this plan, and they work with treasury board, Ministry of Finance to receive their funding.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay.

**A Member:** — List them off.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Yeah, list them off.

**Ms. Hamill:** — Oh, okay. Sure. So I can list them to you. So the ministries that are participating in the plan include Corrections, Public Safety and Policing; Justice and the Attorney General, formerly was also integrated justice services. Other benefactors including Government Relations, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Highways, Immigration and Career Training. And other individuals that would be . . . There's other partnerships that are also happening across some of those other ministries in collaboration, that some details are still being worked on.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay, thank you for that. Are you able to tell me, is Saskatchewan's federal funding going to be relatively higher than other provinces given that we have the worst rates of domestic violence in the country?

**Ms. Hamill:** — So thank you for that question. And during the conversations that we had with the federal government, that was one particular issue that we brought forward. The federal government set the funding formula, and we did try to inquire why it was set the way it was, considering that per capita we among the provinces had some of the highest rates. The response we received from the federal government was that Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat set the funding.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay. And so are you aware of that scale that's used through the federal government to have allocated the funding?

**Ms. Hamill:** — They did not provide the actual model. What they did advise was there was a base amount set for the provinces and there was a separate base amount set for the territories, and the calculations were made with that. But they didn't actually provide the actual funding model to us.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay, thank you. And do you think that this will be a disadvantage to results if we're not getting, you know, an increased amount of dollars based on the extent of the issue here in our province? Do you think that this will be a disadvantage to the results to Saskatchewan to have to spread their money thinner?

[17:45]

**Ms. Hamill:** — Well I think that's a fair statement. However I will say this about the partners across the ministries, and particularly about the community-based organizations that are going to be participating in the delivery: a substantial amount of the work of our plan is to include those experts and the work with stakeholders that the ministries have conducted for many years — not just in the last few years, but many years — to identify the unique opportunities to try to come at the programs and services in a unique way.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay. Thank you. Your business plan contains a goal of reducing interpersonal violence and abuse, yet the only measures or targets for interpersonal violence that we can see have to do with video views and engagements for your public

awareness campaign. Why doesn't the business plan include specific measures and targets for reducing interpersonal violence?

**Ms. Hamill:** — I'm not sure of your question. Can you repeat that please?

**Ms. Bowes:** — Sure. So I had asked, in your business plan, to my knowledge there's no inclusion of specific measures and targets for reducing interpersonal violence. And the question was, why is that not included?

**Ms. Hamill:** — Actually we have two measures in our goal 3. The first measure is implementing the national action plan to end gender-based violence. So it's Saskatchewan's implementation of the plan to end interpersonal violence and abuse by March 31st, 2027.

The second measure that we have in our plan is to implement the grant funding designated for the Saskatchewan Status of Women office under the national action plan to end gender-based violence by March 31st, 2025.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay. Yes. I should have probably been a bit more clear. So when I say measures and targets for reducing interpersonal violence, less about, you know, when these implementations will take place and more about measures of how you will determine whether your measures have been successful in reducing interpersonal violence.

**Ms. Hamill:** — So again thank you for your question. Interpersonal violence and abuse is such a complex problem that has existed for hundreds of years. And the work that we do, we have \$50,000 under the national action plan, and plus Status of Women office is matching that with another \$50,000 to have \$100,000 specifically.

And maybe that doesn't seem like big dollars — and I know we don't have a lot in our Status of Women office envelope — but to the numerous community groups that we provide funding to that work in the area of prevention . . . And that is our priority is prevention because we know that raising awareness — and I hear what you're saying — that raising awareness is the first step in contemplation of people recognizing their own behaviour, their attitudes and beliefs which factor into their behaviour, and their decision to act violently and be abusive.

And we know, as much as we want to be able to do it and control all human behaviour, that I wish that we could come here one day and say, guess what, everything we did led to zero, zero incidents. I've worked in this area for a very long time, so it's a bit of a passion for me as well. But the work that we do across government with our ministry partners and our community groups, organizations, is critical to one day getting to that point.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Yes, thank you. And I agree. I mean I think that work is essential. I don't mean to downplay it. You know, just hoping to see if there had been any sort of evaluation in terms of numbers that had been possible to be undertaken by the office.

Moving on a bit here. In 2022 Saskatchewan had the highest number of live births to teens of any province in Canada, and last fall the Government of Saskatchewan indefinitely suspended

third-party sexual health education in schools, including age-appropriate lessons about sexually transmitted infections and contraception. What feedback did your office provide around that decision, if any?

**The Chair:** — If I can intervene I would just say, Ms. Bowes, to stay on the estimates for this year, please. That doesn't have any bearing on this year's.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I'll rephrase my question. Were there any resources or dollars allocated through the Status of Women office to assess the impact of the suspension of sexual health education in K to 12 in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I think maybe this question is maybe a little more focused to the Minister of Education in regards to what takes place in the classroom. However we will have . . . Bernadet will discuss some of the programming that we do undertake with different organizations.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay, that actually wasn't my question.

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Okay, we're more than happy to have that conversation here.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Yeah, I appreciate that. And if you could provide that in writing to me afterwards I would very much . . .

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — No, we have time now to take that conversation because everything else is, like you say, these are the kind of questions that you wanted answered. Because we do work with other organizations to have . . . like, the sexual assault centres and things like that. So we do have those kind of conversations with them, and Bernadet can allude to that.

**Ms. Hamill:** — Yeah, I can speak to the funding that we provided this past year, which included funding for the Coalition of Regional Sexual Assault Centres to research and create sources and tools that address emerging issues in sexual violence; Saskatchewan Polytechnic Building Healthy Relationships program delivering knowledge, tools, and strategies for intervention and prevention of sexual violence; the University of Regina's Step Up healthy relationship program to deliver education, awareness of sexual violence to support intervention and prevention; the university of Saskatoon First Responder to Sexual Assault and Abuse train-the-trainer program to provide support for survivors on their path to healing and recovery. That's just a few of the ones that we funded this past year.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you. So has your office dedicated, or will your office dedicate, any resources, in terms of dollars, to ascertain what effects the decision to cancel third-party sexual health education has had or is likely to have on domestic violence, sexual assault, and unplanned pregnancy rates?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I think one of the things that we talked about earlier was the Face the Issue campaign, and that is the new campaign that the third, I think it was the third, the third tranche that we will be . . . And again, that is aimed at university, probably technical schools, you know, the Sask Polytechnic, young adults, to find out exactly, you know, is this abuse? And so that will be . . . When are we launching that? A couple weeks

we'll be launching that. So this is an opportunity to do some education, and I think we've got three or four different videos that are going to be launched to really target that age group.

**Ms. Hamill:** — We also provided funding, I'll just add, to the Battlefords Boys and Girls Club, their drop-in program that's educating youth on healthy relationships and positive behaviour, as well as we provided funding to Family Service Regina for the early intervention support program, intervening with families before violence occurs.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay, thank you. I am told I have one question left, just time for one more question. So I'm going to skip ahead a little bit here. Okay. So for the last question, were there any stakeholders that reached out to your office concerning the decision to cancel third-party sexual health education?

**The Chair:** — Again, Ms. Bowes, I'm sorry. This doesn't have anything to do with this year's estimate. If you have one more question, make it a good one. Otherwise we're going to call it.

**Ms. Bowes:** — Okay. Last question I have, in this year's budget highlights there is no mention of women whatsoever. So I have a question stemming from that. And what role . . . This has been on the forefront across Canada is the push for universal contraception. And what role, if any — in terms of dollars, in terms of resources — has the Status of Women office dedicated in terms of researching or advocating for the implementation of universal contraception in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — Well that would be a federal program, and their budget's coming out tomorrow, so that would probably be a good opportunity for you to watch and find out exactly what the federal government is undertaking in regards to that. We know that a lot of times they will get very excited, mention a whole bunch of programming, and then nothing to back it up. So until such time that the federal government is prepared to bring forward some information, I don't really want to comment on their programming.

And I do take exception, I have to say, I take exception to how you were referencing that women are not a part of this budget. And this budget in fact talks about the importance of community, and women are a very important part of community. We talk about care, and I had the opportunity to talk about some of the work we're doing with care, such as the breast cancer centre here in Regina and for southern Saskatchewan. We've got the urgent care centre. You can't tell me that women and girls and gender-diverse people will not be using that facility — absolutely.

So when we talk about care, we talk about classrooms. You can't tell me that we aren't paying attention to what's happening in our classrooms, with the largest amount of funding ever to our educational system. So in fact women are underlying . . . They are a lot of decision makers, and they are a very important part of our economy. They're a very important part of our province, and for you to indicate that in fact they were never taken into account when the budget was being developed, I'm not comfortable with that because . . . absolutely not true. Classroom, care, and community very much speaks to women in our province. Thank you very much.

[18:00]

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of Parks, Culture and Sport, we will adjourn the consideration of these estimates. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

**Hon. Ms. L. Ross:** — I just want to thank you very much for the questions from the opposition, both before with member Teed, and yourself, Jennifer. I feel honoured and privileged to be able to be a minister that has the portfolio. It's a diverse portfolio but is probably one of the most rewarding portfolios in the Government of Saskatchewan. And I'm proud and pleased and honoured to sit at the cabinet table.

And as you know, I think women's voices sitting at decision-making table, good decisions are being made. So thank you very much.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Ms. Bowes, do you have any closing comments?

**Ms. Bowes:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just would like to also extend thanks to the minister as well as your officials for the time you've taken today. I know it's, as has been said in past and perhaps also this year, a small envelope of money, and I know that you do what you can extending that money as far as you can make it go. So thank you for that, and appreciate all the time that's been taken today. And thanks to Hansard as well.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. I too would like to thank the minister and her staff for all the work they do and their good answers today, and Ms. Bowes too as well and the opposition for their questions. We'll now recess until 6:30 p.m. and continue on after that.

[The committee recessed from 18:01 until 18:28.]

**General Revenue Fund  
Justice and Attorney General  
Vote 3**

**Subvote (JU01)**

**The Chair:** — Thank you. I'd like to welcome everybody back. Next on our agenda is . . . Before we get going, I would welcome Nicole Sarauer back, filling in right now. Oh, she is on the committee. Okay, I welcome her here. Thanks.

Next on our agenda is the consideration of estimates and the supplementary estimates no. 2 for vote 3, Justice and Attorney General, central management and services, subvote (JU01). Minister Eyre is here with her officials. I will remind the officials to identify themselves and not to touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn them on for you. Minister Eyre, can you please make your opening comments and introduce your officials.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Certainly. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good evening. I'm pleased to provide the highlights of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's '24-25 financial plan. This year's budget continues to focus on access to justice and public safety through a variety of ongoing and new investments. It also continues to focus on the protection of women and children, and prevention of interpersonal violence and abuse, and

on families who need support as a result of separation, divorce, and related matters.

[18:30]

The Ministry of Justice ensures that citizens have access to justice and access to services which they can use to resolve disputes, including those provided by the Office of Residential Tenancies and the dispute resolution office.

We also oversee organizations that resolve disputes between government agencies and police such as the Highway Traffic Board, the Public Complaints Commission, and the serious incident response team. And the ministry acts as government's in-house law firm, advising on legal matters and representing it in the courts.

I'm joined this evening by deputy minister of Justice, Dennis Cooley; and deputy attorney general, Max Bilson, K.C. [King's Counsel]. Also in the room this evening are chief executive officer of Legal Aid Saskatchewan, Jayne Mallin; assistant deputy attorney general of justice services and tribunals, Kylie Head, K.C.; assistant deputy attorney general of public prosecutions, Elizabeth Hiltz, K.C.; assistant deputy minister of courts and community justice, Rory Jensen; legal executive director of public law, Darcy McGovern, K.C.; executive director of family justice services, Lionel McNabb; executive director of community safety and well-being, Gina Alexander; and Noel Busse, executive director of the communications branch at the ministry; and the director of financial and resource planning, Dan Dierker.

Mr. Chair, this budget aligns with our government's record investments in Saskatchewan's communities. Overall we have increased our appropriation by approximately 12.17 million over last year. This is a 5.1 per cent increase, almost all of it the result of transferring budget and FTEs [full-time equivalent] from integrated justice services. In total we are investing approximately \$250 million to maintain and enhance the justice system for Saskatchewan residents.

As part of this year's budget, we will be investing approximately 4.7 million to enhance the safety and efficiency of our courts. New expenditures this year include 2.8 million for the installation of more video-conferencing equipment which will decrease prisoner transport and free up police resources; and \$200,000 for the implementation of a new detention area in the Battleford Court of King's Bench; and standardized security and distress button systems throughout Saskatchewan's courthouses; and 1.9 million in ongoing improvements to the judicial scheduling, tracking, and amalgamated reporting, or J-STAR, system.

Enhancements being made as part of the ongoing J-STAR implementation this year include a province-wide scheduling system and a web portal that will allow for the electronic submission and communication of court documents. As part of our ongoing commitment to therapeutic courts, we will be investing \$120,000 to expand the drug treatment court to North Battleford. Currently there are two drug treatment courts in Saskatchewan: one in Regina and one in Moose Jaw.

The goal of these courts and all therapeutic courts is to improve



criminal justice processes for adult clients by addressing underlying causes of criminal behaviour. Therapeutic courts are an ongoing collaboration between the judiciary, public prosecutions, Legal Aid, community corrections, and the Ministry of Social Services, and we are very pleased to work with our partners to expand the drug treatment court program to North Battleford.

We will also be implementing changes at the Regina domestic violence court to reduce wait times in collaboration with our Justice, Corrections, and community stakeholders. The results of these changes will be tracked and evaluated to make sure that we are creating positive outcomes for people and families who participate in the Regina domestic violence court. And this work continues our ongoing commitment to making the courts more accessible and more efficient for the people of Saskatchewan.

We have also taken other steps to modernize our courts in recent years. Last fall we announced that we are raising the monetary limit for small claims court from \$30,000 to 50,000. This increase came into effect on April 1. As a result of this change, Saskatchewan now has the second-highest small claims limit in Canada, which ensures that more people have access to small claims court as a cost-effective way to resolve disputes without needing the services of a lawyer.

I'm also proud to highlight that in November we signed a five-year lease extension for the Lloydminster Provincial Court. This provides certainty that in-person services and access are now firmly established and will continue in that judicial centre.

The Weyburn Court of King's Bench judicial centre and registry office were also officially reopened in April of last year, allowing Weyburn and area residents to once again access the court to pay fines and file court documents in person. And, Mr. Chair, I was in Estevan last fall and asked a court staff whether the reopening of Weyburn has helped them and has continued to help them in terms of easing the caseload at the court, and they said that it absolutely has, which I was very happy to hear. The reopening of these court locations represents our renewed commitment to ensuring access to justice across the province.

Saskatchewan is also leading the way in First Nations bylaw enforcement. Last year we introduced a simplified legal framework that enables First Nations to enforce bylaw on-reserve through tickets, fines, and other measures administered through the Provincial Court.

This legislation is a direct result of a memorandum of understanding that we signed previously with the Muskoday and Whitecap Dakota First Nations to explore ways to better enforce laws under the *First Nations Land Management Act* and bylaws under the *Indian Act*, and we are looking forward to continuing this work with the Muskoday and Whitecap Dakota First Nations to improve the enforcement of laws on-reserve, work that is gaining national attention.

In public prosecutions we're investing \$490,000 to establish a case readiness unit which will streamline how prosecutors address high caseloads and prioritize complex criminal files. This unit will review cases as soon as they are received from police and access them to ensure all relevant disclosure has been provided to prosecutions and the accused. This will allow

prosecutors more time to assess cases and ensure that cases are ready to move forward to resolution or trial as soon as possible.

We will also be dedicating 186,000 to hire a dedicated gang prosecutor for the southern part of the province as part of the gang-violence reduction strategy. That dedicated gang prosecutor will focus on ensuring that known gang members are prosecuted quickly and effectively and will collaborate with other aspects of the gang-violence reduction strategy to ensure a holistic approach to addressing gang crime in our province.

Since becoming operational at the beginning of 2023, SIRT [serious incident response team] has undertaken a wide variety of operations as part of its duty to investigate all serious incidents involving police officers. On January 9th of this year, SIRT released its first investigation report which provided a transparent and in-depth overview of a police-involved shooting that occurred in Prince Albert in June of 2023. Our government is certainly proud of how quickly and effectively SIRT has developed over the last year. And to ensure that this team can continue to function at this high level, we are increasing its budget from 825,000 in '23-24 to 990 in '24-25. This additional funding will be used to hire a team commander and to expand the team's operational capacity.

This year's budget also supports a strong suite of programs and services to support families during times of crisis. As a ministry we continue to support the promotion of early dispute resolution in family law to provide families with an alternative to the often lengthy and expensive court process. Last fall we launched the child support calculation service, which helps to ensure fairness around child support payment calculations without the need to go to family court.

The '24-25 budget also continues our commitment to addressing violence and abuse in Saskatchewan. This year government will be dedicating \$31.7 million to interpersonal violence and abuse programs and services. This includes \$4.6 million provided through the national action plan to end gender-based violence. As part of the government-wide increase to funding for community-based organizations, our community safety and well-being branch is providing an additional \$577,000 to our community partners this year, including those who provide supports and services to individuals and families who are impacted by interpersonal violence and abuse. We will also invest 328,000 into second-stage shelters this year as part of a three-year \$984,000 funding commitment.

We know that outreach and education are critical to addressing violence and abuse, especially among young people. And as part of our ongoing efforts to raise awareness on this issue, we have partnered with the Status of Women office to launch phase 3 of the award-winning Face the Issue campaign as well as a new campaign focused on human trafficking. And this will officially be released in the next few weeks.

This is in addition to a variety of investments that we made last fiscal year to support access to interpersonal violence and abuse services. In January we announced 634,000 to support 211 Saskatchewan and the new ReConnect service to support families and those impacted by interpersonal violence. 211 Saskatchewan is a one-stop service for people who are seeking a wide range of supports and information, including those

impacted by intimate partner violence, sexual assault, or family violence. 211 also partners with Family Service Regina to operate the ReConnect hotline, which provides families and communities with immediate crisis management and de-escalation support.

The government has also worked with the University of Saskatchewan College of Law over the last year, and as part of this year's budget, to expand work placements provided through its experiential learning program. Two weeks ago I took part in an event at the college to announce that we would be investing \$100,000 in new practical learning placements with a focus on placements within the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, public prosecutions, and rural placements with Legal Aid. The dean and legal stakeholders, including the Law Society of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan branch of the Canadian Bar Association, have been very positive about this announcement. It is programs such as this that are critical to ensuring that Saskatchewan law students receive practical learning opportunities.

Comparing the ministry's '23-24 estimated appropriation budget to the '23-24 estimated appropriation budget in the '24-25 Estimates book, you will see that the estimated appropriation budget increased from the 170.576 million last year by 68.063 million to 238.639 million this year. This is the result of the dissolution of the integrated justice services vote. As you know, IJS [integrated justice services] was a separate vote, which previously provided integrated services to both Justice and Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. And the decision was made to dissolve IJS and place staff in either Justice or CPPS [Corrections, Policing and Public Safety]

In closing, Mr. Chair, '24-25 is poised to be a critical year for the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General and for Saskatchewan. The ministry's budget this year will continue to support the promotion of Saskatchewan's interests at both national and international tables, and as part of that we look forward to hosting the human rights federal-provincial table in Saskatchewan next year. We will continue to work with our partner ministries, with the courts, and with our community stakeholders. The funding for the '24-25 fiscal year will ensure that the ministry can continue to provide a fair, accessible justice system for the people of this province. And I would now be pleased to answer any questions.

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

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks. And first of all I'd just like to thank all of your officials for being here this evening and for all of the work that I know it takes behind the scenes, both for you and your staff, in putting together the questions and the dialogue that we'll be having tonight.

I want to start off close to where you had ended your remarks, Minister, which is about the dissolution of IJS, just so I have a good picture of what has moved within Justice and what has moved within CPPS. So can you provide some more detail on that front, please?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Yes, certainly I can. And so as you know and

as I referenced obviously previously, IJS served both ministries. And really the purpose was to simplify and to streamline existing processes between the ministries and really allow the new branches greater flexibility in order to focus on, you know, their expertise, their areas, and really support an attention that they could then exercise on the needs of the specific ministries. Again I mean I think of, you know, the Energy and Resources, Trade and Export Development dissolution a few years ago.

I mean there come to be, I think, phases in integrated ministries where integration works to a point but can become slightly unwieldy. And for example, in Corrections we've seen, you know, the marshals service, for example, the Firearms Secretariat, so quite new areas of focus. And so there come to be just, I think, the sense that, for efficiency and for other reasons, it was perhaps time to stick to each other's, you know, areas of expertise.

[18:45]

So prior to its dissolution, just to be clear, IJS was comprised of seven branches. So there was financial services, community safety and well-being, strategic policy planning and reporting, research and implementation, strategic systems and innovation, audit information management, and safety and communications.

So four of those were split in the dissolution: financial services, strategic policy planning and reporting, audit information management, and safety and communications. And the other three remained whole and reside within one of the two ministries while serving the other under a shared services agreement. And so there were no incremental resources provided to those three branches.

And you know, certainly happy to answer anything else. I mean there's more detail if you want to get further into it in terms of FTEs and so on. But certainly happy to go further into it if you would like.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you for that information. Specifically for my purposes, I need to know which ministry I should be directing my questions to with respect to specific programs. For example, I'm thinking as one example, the Saskatoon Tribal Council has that home for women who are leaving Pine Grove. So I don't know if that's a CPPS program that's managing that or if that's a Ministry of Justice program. So if you could provide me some information from a program perspective, which ones are housed within Justice versus CPPS, I would greatly appreciate it.

**Mr. Cooley:** — Dennis Cooley, deputy minister. Yeah, certainly we can. The program in Saskatoon to which you're referring is a CPPS program. So those questions should be directed to that ministry, although it is administered . . . Like the grant money will stay in community safety and well-being, which is a Justice program. That's the type of . . . We're retaining that collaboration.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So if I have questions about the program, who do I direct it to?

**Mr. Cooley:** — Corrections and Policing.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Corrections? Okay. Are there any other ones?

What other ones are through CPPS?

**Mr. Cooley:** — I think there's 60-odd grants that remain administered by community safety and well-being but are programs that are housed in Corrections and Policing.

My colleague, Gina Alexander, just noted that the gang-violence reduction strategy, which is a large initiative, is a . . . CPPS sort of has the authority for that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Feel free if I ask a question this evening to tell me if it's CPPS-directed now and I will make a note of that. I do appreciate that. It's been a bit of an evolution. At one point we had both ministries in estimates together, and then they were separated. But then we had IJS. So I'm just trying to stay on top of who I should be asking the appropriate question to.

I have some questions about the national action plan on gender-based violence. You mentioned it in your remarks, Minister. Can you remind us how much money is showing up in this year's budget that is money flowing through the national action plan?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — So it's 4.6 million, and that includes 250 for CPPS, you'll be pleased to know.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And is that federal dollars? Is half of that provincial and half of that's federal? Can you explain?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well through national action plan that's all federal.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And then is it matched then, 4.6 of provincial dollars?

**Mr. Cooley:** — So it is matched funding, but not in the traditional sense of matched funding that the federal government typically uses, where you have to put new money in to match new money from the federal government. In this particular case the federal government has permitted all provinces and territories to use existing dollars as their matched contribution.

So we have 4.6 million of existing programs that we have related to intimate partner violence, and we are allowed to use that money as the matched contribution.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — And I'll just add, I think, that was one of the things that the Minister of the Status of Women was very pleased to have achieved in those negotiations around the NAP [national action plan] funding, that we could use it for things which obviously were, we felt, very, very strong programs — the feds agreed — and could be used to complement them. And we've seen that in a number of cases.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Where is that 4.6 million being spent in this fiscal year?

**Ms. Alexander:** — Good evening. Gina Alexander, executive director, community safety and well-being. Sorry for the delay. So there are five primary pillars with the national action plan to end gender-based violence: pillar no. 1, support for victims and survivors and families; prevention pillar; response to the justice system; the next pillar, implementing Indigenous-led approaches; and social infrastructure and enabling environment.

We've completed a few things already this year, including operational funding to Hope Restored for \$300,000 for this year, as well as we have issued two RFPs [request for proposal] using a procurement process.

With respect to . . . The first one has to do with streamlining tools across a system, including the development of a universal domestic violence assessment tool. And we're not quite finished the request for proposal process. We're just kind of at the tail end of it, and we're close to identifying a successful proponent. So that is one initiative that's been completed already.

The second initiative that went out as a request for proposal is a human trafficking prevention tool, including the development of a tool kit to support the prevention of sexual exploitation and trafficking. And this is also in progress. We're very close to concluding that procurement process, and we'll be in touch with the successful entity in the next few weeks.

As the minister mentioned in her opening remarks, we've also expanded public awareness also to fall into one of the pillars, including a new campaign related to human trafficking. We've also provided legal development support to the private bar to increase the number of lawyers able to respond to applications under section 276 and 278 of the Criminal Code, which allows building capacity for the private bar to represent sexual assault victims when applications are made for third-party records on sexual history.

And then the last initiative that is under way is in partnership with the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and the entity Safe & Together. The ministry has worked hand in hand with Social Services to enhance human services system collaboration to support families that experience family violence by focusing on the behaviour and the actions of the person who uses violence in that relationship and, where possible, focusing there, and if it's appropriate, to be putting wraparound services and approaches for, where possible and appropriate, keeping the family intact but paying attention to the victims, including the children, in that circumstance.

So that's what we've completed so far. In terms of where we're going and just some high-level information, we're working on culturally responsive training for service providers, including police, ministry officials, and other criminal justice professionals.

We're also working on Indigenous family violence intervention programming, expanding supports to survivors exiting interpersonal violence and abuse, including supports for individuals leaving an abusive partner to increase their independence and remove barriers.

We're looking to do some research on how the government can use a public health approach to reduce interpersonal violence and abuse. We're also paying a lot of attention to adverse childhood experiences and how we can learn more as a province about the impacts of adverse childhood experiences and what we can focus on for protective factors.

We're looking into national supports for victims, including training for non-experts. What we hear over and over again is that people may have known, or they've observed, but they really

didn't know what to do or how to intervene or how to help. And so this particular approach, where we're looking for natural supports, would assist those folks in increasing their comfort in making some sort of steps to assist.

And then finally prevention as it relates to bystander programming and support for younger people who can positively influence the attitudes and behaviours of their peers to address negative social norms. And, sorry, one other one: enhanced Indigenous-led approaches to support survivors of interpersonal violence and abuse.

Most of this, a lot of these items that I've mentioned, they'll go through a procurement process. So it won't be work that's done in-house; it will be work that is . . . a request for proposal will be issued, and a successful proponent will be sought so that they can carry on with the work and identify from their perspective what the best approach might be.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Ms. Alexander. There's lots of very important and interesting work that's being done. Can you provide . . . I know you just gave a lot of initiatives, but can you provide a dollar allocation for each of them?

[19:00]

**Ms. Alexander:** — Thank you for that. It's fairly early in the process to really define specific numbers for each of those initiatives. There's a lot of factors that will be at play, including what the RFP might go out at and what the successful proponent might come back with. And so the numbers may fluctuate, and so I'm . . . As I said, it's just a bit too early to be identifying specific numbers. Yeah, I'm just thinking within the next several months a lot of this information will be identified through request for proposals that will be moving, I'm thinking, fairly quickly over the next several months.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What about the two RFPs that you say have been completed? Can you provide those numbers?

**Ms. Alexander:** — I can. So for the human trafficking prevention kit we will be providing up to \$200,000 in '24-25, this year. And also for the universal domestic violence assessment tool kit, up to \$200,000 in '24-25.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I don't know about the human trafficking one, but I do know that the tool kit one closed quite a while ago — back in January, I do believe. Can you explain why it's taken so long to pick a successful proponent?

**Ms. Alexander:** — Although we would hope that it moved a little bit quicker than it did, we had a number of, you know, competing processes that were going on. And I know the team that's working on this is moving as quickly as possible on this. And we are very hopeful that we're going to be able to identify, be in touch with the successful proponent within the next couple of weeks.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So just to reiterate that, because I know some folks are waiting to hear back on that one particularly, is it fair to say that they'll know before May?

**Ms. Alexander:** — It would for sure be by the middle of May.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay, thank you. What about dollar values for the other programs that you said have been completed? You said there's a partnership with PATHS [Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan] on system collaboration as well as a legal development process for the private bar to enable more private bar lawyers to be able to do some of this work. And then another one around public awareness. I'm sorry, I didn't get the full . . . I didn't write the full thing down. But of all the ones that you said have been completed, are you able to provide numbers for those as well?

**Ms. Alexander:** — I was probably talking quite quickly too. So we'll just start with the PATHS and the Safe & Together project. So for this PATHS and Safe & Together project, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Services we have allocated up to \$350,000 in '24-25 for this particular project. And it will be working to identify a couple of communities who are interested in piloting this and then also working to initiate an evaluation quite early on. And the evaluation will help us make iterative changes as we go, as opposed to waiting for an evaluation at the end of a pilot project. So up to 350,000 for the PATHS and Safe & Together one.

We will be expending out of the national action plan funding up to \$200,000 for the public awareness campaign. And so that's that figure for that one.

And the other one that I mentioned was the legal development support, and although I don't have that number, \$20,000 I think is what has been expended on that particular one. It was for developing training and then paying a facilitator to provide that training.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I really appreciate you providing me that detail. Minister, do you know how much money the federal government originally offered the province under the national action plan?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — No, I don't. And I think I would refer back to the Minister of, you know, Responsible for the Status of Women just because she was so, you know, pivotally on the ground during that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. One of the pillars is, as has been mentioned and as you well know, is on prevention. And of course education's a really important part of prevention which is . . . I'm very pleased to hear about the publicity campaign that's ongoing and continuing.

Another piece of that of course is educating in our schools. And knowing that third-party organizations, like CBOs [community-based organization] that are funded through Justice, are still not allowed to provide that education in schools in Saskatchewan, I'm asking if the ministry has any idea what . . . the status of the review that we understand was going to occur about that. And when are CBOs going to be let back in to teach consent education to our kids?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — So my understanding is the review is still under way; the pause is still under way. And that would be of course something that the Minister of Education could better answer, as that's, you know, in the ambit obviously of Education. But really that's my understanding, that that pause remains in

effect.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What is the current status of the domestic violence death review panel, and when will the report come out?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — So as you will know, the first DVDR [domestic violence death review] report, final report was released May 24, 2018. And there have been some positive steps since then. So the second process has continued to support the work from the first one.

And I think important to highlight what the first one, you know, did lead to. I mean it did provide 19 recommendations that resulted in legislative changes and program changes. So again, Clare's Law, the fixed-term tenancy legislation, 10-day leave from work for survivors of interpersonal violence, expanded services in rural Saskatchewan, the public awareness campaign, provincial call line, new transportation initiatives. So quite, you know, quite significant recommendations and changes that came out of it.

So that has continued then, and the work has been done to identify, you know, other areas where, you know, progress and other recommendations could flow from. And the work of that review began in '21-22, and it's been informed by ongoing conversations with experts in domestic homicide, in domestic violence, advocate service providers, community leaders. There was further input that was provided through stakeholder engagement sessions.

And so those conversations resulted in a few notable differences between the 2018 review and the current one. And some of them were inviting family members, loved ones of victims to participate and provide recommendations to the governance committee and the implementation of regional case review teams to ensure the needs of rural and remote communities. Those have been considered, and increases in the number of cases have been reviewed in detail.

And so in terms of just steps to date, there has been a governance structure that's been established. There have been sharing agreements around confidentiality and information sharing between the various ministries, the coroners service, police services across the province. There have been three case review teams that have been established. Those have been made up of 27 experts across the province. They have reviewed urban, rural, and northern cases. And those 27 experts have spent over 1,700 individual hours, so 65 hours collectively reviewing cases, developing recommendations. And so those next steps are going to include finalizing the recommendations and the final report that's expected to be released later this spring.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — How much money is allocated in this budget for transportation for individuals and their children fleeing violence?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — So '24-25, North Sask Victim Services will receive 72,000 in funding to deliver the NTSI, so the northern transportation support initiative, for individuals and families leaving interpersonal violence in the northern Saskatchewan administration district. And then a further 102,000 is allocated to address transportation barriers for those outside of the NSAD [northern Saskatchewan administration district] and so who are

leaving violence through the transportation reimbursement policy.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. As I'm sure you well know, Minister, Ontario's government recently announced that they are comfortable going to declare their IPV [intimate partner violence] situation an epidemic. Their rates are substantially lower than ours. Has the ministry considered declaring our situation around intimate partner violence in the province an epidemic?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well certainly aware of Ontario's recent move in this area and certainly, you know, it's an interesting one. I think just off the top it would be, I guess, our position certainly that I mean actions, if they don't speak louder than words, they certainly are as loud. And so I would point to the 27.5 million that's been committed by the government to addressing interpersonal violence. And we've talked about some of the additional funding that's come from the federal government that complements that and complements programs that we're already, you know, participating in.

I think that that is, you know, again a cross-government effort, cross-ministry effort, and has been very substantial in terms of, for example, first time ever in Saskatchewan's history, the second-stage housing funding. We've talked about that, obviously talked about that last year. And you know, support for Hope Restored, \$1 million again — relatively recent announcement — which helps victims of human trafficking. And as always, there are those wraparound legislative supports that have become, you know, that are part of the approach obviously but also separate from the funding, which I think have been significant. And we've seen, you know, those in recent years and you'll be aware of many of them.

[19:15]

But I mean again, you know, from Clare's Law to the human trafficking legislative efforts . . . And we'll be talking about that in greater detail later this evening. But just really to make it, you know, on the human trafficking side, the most recent legislation will cut ties between a trafficker and victims of trafficking, or at least certainly attempt to, around protection orders. We've seen that in recent years.

So I think, you know, there are different approaches by different governments. But I think that certainly, in terms of addressing the issue that we have in Saskatchewan, the commitment has been very, very clear on the investment side, and that continues. And we've seen additional commitments, you know, even in the last few months in that regard and also on the legislative side, so really a government-wide effort.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Minister. Ontario does have a few programs that Saskatchewan doesn't have. For example, a provincial intimate partner violence strategy. They have consent education, healthy relationships built into the core curriculum of their education system. My question to you, Minister: hearing your response, would you be prepared tonight to put words to your actions and declare Saskatchewan's intimate partner violence rates an epidemic?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well I've been very clear I mean in

discussing this with you previously and on other occasions, that we want to do everything we can to address the issue. And as I say, I do believe . . . I don't know, you know, what the overall investment is government-wide in Ontario and how Ontario funds this issue.

But I would say that in terms of our commitment, which has been, you know, \$27.5 million in funding to support and reduce interpersonal and sexual violence, that has been clear. It has been a big priority. And we've seen evidence of that in terms of additions and first-in-the-province's-history announcements of new investment in new areas, which I think are very important.

And so I think I would say that the practical speaks always very loudly. And I think in terms of the commitment, you see that. And I think the people in the province see it in terms of that which we have invested in. And again, happy to go through, you know, the other areas which we have invested and which are part of that 27.5 million. And would have to look at, you know, Ontario's and cross compare in terms of . . . I just believe that everyone is trying, and every province is trying to address it as they see fit.

And certainly I would suggest that our commitment at 27.5 million and the ways we've committed that funding and the new ways we've looked at committing funding certainly speaks to the commitment to address the issue.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Minister. Could you provide to the committee the total cost to date for private bar legal counsel for the pronoun litigation?

**Mr. Bilson:** — Thank you. Thank you for the question. Max Bilson, deputy attorney general. Unfortunately I don't think we're able to answer that specific question. We're going to assert privilege over that, given that it's the details of a retainer with a private outside firm. So at this point we're not going to be able to answer that question.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Why would this be treated any different than the private bar counsel that was retained for the carbon tax litigation? That information was provided to me at committee.

**Mr. Bilson:** — Well I can't speak to the specifics of that. I can't speak to the specifics of that question. All I know is that we are unable to answer that question at this time.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — When will you be able to answer that question?

**Mr. Bilson:** — Well again I don't think that we will be in a position to answer questions related to the specifics of a retainer agreement at any time, and that's our position.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Well, Minister, this is a stark difference, like I said, from the way the ministry handled the carbon tax litigation that was contracted out to the exact same law firm. The ministry was able to provide us with a dollar value for that. It was, I believe, \$570,000. It's concerning that the ministry is refusing to provide this information at this time. Can you please explain, Minister, why something that wasn't privilege before is privilege now?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — So I think it's important. First of all, you know, it's an ongoing case. And I can't speak for the previous

information that was provided around the carbon tax case. I wasn't, you know, in this role, and I just don't know at what point that was shared in terms of cost. But I think there simply isn't — I think, you know, you would understand — a level of comfort or non-comfort about retainers in the context of an ongoing case.

And I believe this also came up in committee in the fall where there were questions along these lines, and the answers were the same. I think that the ministry, it's fair to say, simply feels that the precedent of, you know, sharing cost particularly at this point . . . But really that does fall under, you know, that which is privileged as relates to the case.

I think, you know, in terms of the support by private firms to the ministry, I mean obviously that's available by firm in Public Accounts. I mean it's no secret that a private firm has been used. Private firms have been used. You pointed it out yourself in terms of the carbon tax case. I've made the same point that, you know, there have been a number of areas where the ministry has occasionally had support of private counsel. This is one in terms of the parental rights legislation, but there are others and have been others. And my understanding is that occasionally those requests come in around specific cost of retainers and that it's not a unique thing to this case around parental rights.

It's simply a position that that is, you know, part of privilege in that context, but also perhaps particularly because we're at a stage in the case where it could, you know, it's still very fluid, as I say. So I think in terms of support by private firms, I mean that information is available and will be available, and I think that we have to . . . You know, if the level of comfort of the ministry is that that be something to be cautious about, I think that has to be respected. And if there was different information shared at a different time on a different dollar value, then I think that's its own context.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — A few points. And I understand that the litigation is ongoing. We don't know how long the litigation will take for it to conclude. But I do know, as well as I know you know as well, Minister, that firms will bill ongoing. They won't wait till the conclusion of a file before they're billing. So I'm sure there have been invoices received and invoices paid to the firm on behalf of the government for this litigation.

I think it's important for the people of Saskatchewan to know how government dollars is being spent. And I would hope that your government would feel the same, Minister, especially as I said, this information has been disclosed before. It will be disclosed eventually in Public Accounts as a global number paid to this firm. I don't know how many retainers the firm has for government work. It will be difficult for the public . . . And that's what this is about, not comfort for the ministry but for the public, for transparency on the public's behalf to have this information.

So once again, Minister, I implore you, because I do not see a reason for this to be treated any differently than the carbon tax case, which you can correct me if I'm wrong but I do believe that number was provided prior to its conclusion. I think it was before it went to Ottawa. And I understand in conversation at estimates, there was a hard cap, that there was an agreement between the ministry and the firm that the firm would not exceed that amount of dollars. So the ministry at that time was very comfortable sharing that information with me.

So again, can the minister please provide the committee the total cost to date for private bar counsel for the pronoun litigation?

[19:30]

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well thank you. Again I can't speak to the timing of the carbon tax in terms of when that amount was discussed or divulged or there was talk of caps and non-caps. I can't speak to that because I wasn't minister and I just don't recollect when that was done and at what point in the case.

But again I mean in this case of course, you know the Ministry of Education is the client. And so there is a matter of privilege and of not disclosing privileged information of a client and that, you know . . . My understanding is, I mean, the ministry will receive these types of requests in all sorts of contexts around individual cases and amounts to date and the rest, and that there is a concern about privilege and there's a concern about precedent. And I respect that. And it's not a matter of non-transparency; it's a matter of privilege.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Which ministry is paying the bill?

**Mr. Bilson:** — Sure. Thank you. Thank you for the question. We, the Ministry of Justice, pays the bills and receives the invoices. Obviously the instructions, the instructing client is Education. We are paying for the invoices as a simple matter of government accounting. That was the decision that was made. But you can be assured that Education is giving the instructions and that we are carrying those out.

**The Chair:** — I would at this time ask that we move forward on this question, please.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sure, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to move forward from this question this evening. I will talk a little bit about . . . I have a few questions about the economic assessment tribunal if you don't mind, Minister. How many staff does the economic assessment tribunal have in support of the members of the actual tribunal?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — There are two staff, an executive director and an admin.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. What is the total budget for the economic assessment tribunal for this calendar year? And if there was a budget for the previous . . . or actuals I suppose for the previous, I'd like to know that as well.

**Mr. Cooley:** — The budget for the tribunal is 277,000 for the fiscal year.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — For this upcoming fiscal year?

**Mr. Cooley:** — Correct.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Are you able to provide some more detail as to the process the economic assessment tribunal will be using to examine . . . You have two issues before them right now.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Process in what sense?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — The steps in terms of information gathering as

well as reporting out. I know you've talked a little bit in the Chamber about timelines, but I'm just curious as to what the process is going to look like.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well the process is very much set by the tribunal and by the Chair — I mean Mr. Milani and the Vice-Chair — and so when we refer the clean electricity regulations to them, really where we left it is we'll receive the report back. And that comes next month, May 15, I believe, and similarly with the two referrals which we provided them last week. So the two interwoven, methane 75 and the cap, again it was, you know, take this and clearly with the . . . You know, take this and analyze and report back. And so again it will be in September. Oh, it's May 1st. I'm sorry. I thought it was May 15th for the first referral.

And so again, and as I signalled last week, I mean with the clean electricity regulations — and I'm merely speculating here because again the work is absolutely independent — but a lot of the information, more of the information probably around the pricing out of the clean electricity regulations is, you know, "out there." I mean SaskPower has done quite a lot of work. We've talked a lot about, you know, meeting 2035 around a clean electricity and net zero and so on and some of the challenges of transitioning off coal without being able to use natural gas to a nuclear potential around SMRs [small modular reactor] and so on. So that's perhaps maybe been a little bit more analyzed.

More complex I would say is methane 75 interwoven with the cap because there's so little information out there and the federal government itself has been unable to really quantify any of this. Clean electricity also have been unable to quantify but perhaps there's a little bit out there in the public realm. So again, up to the tribunal completely in terms of, you know, what they will need to do the analysis to carry out the report.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you for that information. I have some questions about the coroner's office. I hope someone can answer them this evening. First of all, if you could provide us some stats to kick off the conversation, that would be appreciated . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, number of deaths.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Oh, deaths. I'm sorry. I didn't hear you.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yes, to date. Okay.

**Mr. Jensen:** — Rory Jensen, assistant deputy minister, courts and community justice. So for the coroner's service, in terms of number of cases investigated, so the most updated we have is at the end of 2023. The coroner's service investigated 2,992 deaths, which is a decrease of 93, so just about 3 per cent. Over the last three years we've seen kind of a bit of a plateau, the number of investigations hovering right around that 3,000 investigations. Of those investigations, the number of drug toxicity deaths confirmed and suspected, as of the end of February we are at 476 confirmed and suspected drug toxicity deaths. This is an increase of just over 100 of those deaths.

As we go through we also have a number of other . . . The number of body transportations conducted is 1,910, which we've also seen a decrease in this number by about 322 body transports. And then the number of inquests held this year was 14, which is up four from the previous year. However inquests have been higher because we are trying to catch up as well, the impact of COVID.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you for that. Just focusing on the 2023 numbers, because I know you have a full picture of that now, I do believe, could you provide us how many of those deaths were minors?

**Mr. Jensen:** — So according to the data the coroner services have, I don't have it broken down by a specific year, but from 2017 to 2023 there were 620 deaths of children and youth from birth to age 19 in Saskatchewan. Of those deaths, 351 were without underlying medical causes, so meaning there's an average of approximately 50 children and youth that are dying each year from preventable causes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Would all of those have been in care of government, of a ministry, either Social Services or Corrections?

**Mr. Jensen:** — No, those would not be.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — How many? How many were in care?

**Mr. Jensen:** — I don't have that data in front of me.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — In previous years there has been conversation with the coroner about a child death review. What is the status of that work? Has it started?

**Mr. Jensen:** — So right now we are still working through the proposal for the minister. So we're still using internal research and expertise, so gathering research, compiling and analyzing data from all sources of the child death review committee. So the committee was made up of Justice and Attorney General represented by the coroners service; Health; Social Services; Education; Corrections, Policing and Public Safety as well as police services; SGI; SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority]; FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations]; universities.

So the proposal right now is we're starting to analyze whether the enhancements of the existing . . . whether the child death review committee would provide enhancements over the existing structures or investigations that are done by the coroners service, Social Services, the advocate for child and youth versus the cost that it would cost the government to implement a child death review in the province of Saskatchewan. So we're looking at . . . We've looked and analyzed what the purview of the child death review committee would look at, and now we're starting to do the analyzing versus what existing structures are in place versus what the new one would be and kind of that cost-benefit analysis.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — When was that proposal originally made to the ministry?

**Mr. Jensen:** — So that proposal has not made it to the minister yet. We have had a number of priorities. This work is being led by the coroners service. There's been a number of priorities that they've been working on that have been very pressing in theirs versus . . . Not to say that the child death review committee review is not pressing. It's just the priorities that they need to go through and pressing issues. So that recommendation's not made it to the minister at this point.

[19:45]

And we are now in the process of hiring a new Chief Coroner for the province, so looking for their input before we provide any further recommendations up to the minister.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. My question wasn't to the minister but to the ministry. So when did the coroner make that recommendation to the ministry?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Just before we answer that question, could we remove the opposition staffer to behind Ms. Sarauer? Or whoever he is? He's not a Justice official.

**The Chair:** — Sure. I would ask if you came over to this side.

**Mr. Jensen:** — So in 2017 there was a formal review of the coroners service conducted, and part of one of the 44 recommendations was a child death review committee for the province. So from that piece of work where the coroners service has gone, they went and they started gathering deaths on youths under the age of 19.

So they investigate, they looked at all the different ways that Saskatchewan investigates deaths of children and youth: the items I've mentioned for the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth; SGI and police services; our healthcare system investigates deaths, some children in hospitals; First Nations and Inuit health branch investigate deaths on-reserve; and then the Saskatchewan Coroners Service investigates sudden and unexpected deaths.

So coming out of 2017, the Chief Coroner formed a child death review stakeholder committee. So this committee was made up of coroners service, Health, Social, Education, all the stakeholders I had mentioned. So this committee identified all the investigation models into child deaths. They identified some inconsistencies which created some gaps. This led to, last year the Chief Coroner identified that there was more formal work that it was going to undergo to create a formal proposal to the ministry.

I have not, as the ADM [assistant deputy minister] responsible for the coroners service, I have not received a formal proposal from the coroners service at this point. And that is where we get into, now I am . . . We do have work ongoing with the coroner service and we are waiting for a new Chief Coroner to come on board to finalize some of that work, add their input into it. So we're looking at a proposal in the upcoming year.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Going back to 2023 numbers, how many of those deaths were incarcerated individuals?

**Mr. Jensen:** — I do not have that number with me right now. I can endeavour to provide that number at a later point, table that number later.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. So I'm looking for the number of individuals who are incarcerated, the number of individuals who are minors, and the number of individuals who are minors within the care of a government ministry. Do you know how long it would take for your office to provide that information to the committee?

**Mr. Jensen:** — I will have to . . . I am not entirely sure how long



it will take to get that. That will be . . . It may be a significant undertaking as I am not entirely sure that we track the cases in that level of detail, if we have the connections to . . . if they are in the care of Social Services or not.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Being cognizant of the time — we always run out of time in estimates — I'm going to move to the experiential learning through the College of Law. Can you explain to the committee what the review committee did under your direction, Minister?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Sorry, the work that what had done?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — You had a review committee struck to look into experiential learning opportunities with the college and they were going to provide a recommendation to the ministry. I'm not sure what concluded in that work, but I do know about the recent announcement that was made. So this was a conversation we had last year in estimates.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Yes, yes. I'm not sure it was formally called a review committee per se. I mean, there were certainly conversations that were held with the college, with the dean, with the vice-dean, conversations that I participated in a number of times, or at least on two occasions that I can recall where we talked about, you know, what we can offer and what they can offer.

The U of S [University of Saskatchewan] is looking to make . . . Well, the U of S is undertaking, as you well know, a pretty major fundraising drive, and part of the fundraising drive as it impacts the College of Law is around experiential learning. And that was one thing that the dean and I had talked about when we first started talking about this last year and before we talked about this in estimates.

And so there had been discussions around, you know, we know that this fundraising campaign is being launched by the U of S. The College of Law is . . . One of its key priorities is going to be to expand experiential learning, as it's called, but learning placements, clinical legal placements. And so you know, what role can we play, and what role do they want to continue to play and what do they want to offer?

So as I said, I'm not sure it was wildly formal, but certainly those conversations happened and were ongoing for quite a long time leading up to the announcement two weeks ago.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Did this group provide you with a written report?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — My understanding is that it was the college's committee, and so it was an internal committee. And some of those who they met with were Legal Aid, the SHA, Federated Co-op, Nutrien, USask [University of Saskatchewan] General Counsel.

Again, I can't really speak to all the conversations that the college had. They have carried on with their experiential learning placements, including I believe it's six in CLASSIC [Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc.] this year, but there have been others. I think there have been conversations between the college and the FSIN around the

College of Med, I believe was another possibility at one time.

But again, I can't speak for the college. I can only speak to the fact that there's a great interest and drive by the college to expand experiential learning and really to coordinate that with efforts that they are seeing and we are seeing in other colleges of law across the country, and that it was something that the college felt was high time to expand.

And so how they do that now and what they do, whether it's Law Foundation funding, whether it's private donor funding, whether it's U of S funding and so on, that becomes, you know, a matter for them, and one they want to undertake. And the 100,000 which we're providing is for, as you know, public sector placements. And that was very, very welcome by the college.

And there's a proposal that the college sent to us at one point — just this year, yeah. It included current offerings, ongoing exploration, opportunities and gaps, and so on. And as I say that, you know . . . But the dean spoke at the event and highlighted some of the areas which they want to expand, and certainly was very positive about the potential placements in the Ministry of Justice and prosecutions and Legal Aid early.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So there was a written report provided to the minister?

**Mr. Cooley:** — There was a report that the . . . This is the college's experiential program, so the college prepared a report on it in order for funding. In that report they said this is . . . You know, they identified placements in Legal Aid, placements in prosecution services, etc. So I think, you know, you may want to contact the college to see if they could provide you with a copy of that report.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — But I will say that as soon as conversations began around this, that really that was always on the table, as it were, that there would be potential looks at, as I say, prosecutions or Legal Aid or Ministry of Justice. And those were always very positively received. So again as the college seeks to expand its placements, this is part of that. But their work in terms of this, including fundraising work, you know, continues.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. So the ministry has the report. Will the ministry table that report with the committee?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — My understanding is it's a proposal, not a report.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Will the ministry table that proposal to the committee?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — My understanding is that it's not our document to share. She'd have to ask that of the College of Law.

**The Chair:** — I would say that we stay on track with the estimates. And if that's not their proposal, then move forward, please.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — How many spaces will be allocated to students with this new experiential learning opportunity?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — So again that is something that the college

now will have to work on with the ministry and with prosecutions, with Legal Aid. What I had said two weeks ago based on the funding and the opportunities, we're hoping up to 10 placements a year. And again some of those, it will depend on whether students would remain, for example, at prosecutions in Saskatoon where there would be then less, you know, funding required.

The main purpose will be of course for funding for change of accommodation if a student were to, you know, within the course of a term do a placement for Legal Aid in a rural community or in Regina at prosecutions or the ministry, for example. But if more stay in Saskatoon and only one does a rural placement, obviously . . . But that was what we had signalled, that it could be hopefully up to 10.

[20:00]

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I thought based on the announcement that this program was going to be directed primarily for rural locations. So is Saskatoon going to be an option for students as well?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Yes, it is. And sometimes I think just the way that sentence parsed perhaps left that impression. It is, you know, Ministry of Justice, prosecutions, and rural Legal Aid. Yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Three different placement opportunities, is what you're saying.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Yes. Yes. Yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Gotcha. That makes more sense. Now coupled with this, of course, is the announcement that the ministry will no longer be providing the \$100,000 that they were providing in funding to CLASSIC. I fully understand that that was money that was being flowed through the college via the Ministry of Justice for the last two years. However that was long-standing money provided to CLASSIC for the purposes of experiential learning of students. Why has the ministry made the decision to no longer fund CLASSIC for that dollar value?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Right. Okay, well so a couple of things that I'll mention on that. So first of all, and as you noted, so last fiscal, or last year, we straddled the two fiscal years with the 100,000 and had signalled to CLASSIC that we would move the funding to the College of Law. And so that was done, and the way then that that funding flowed, so last year.

And I don't want to speak for the college overly, but I think it's fair to say that the college also preferred that approach in terms of — and as I was previously referencing — just some of the college's activities around experiential learning, where they want to move it, and how they want to retain, you know, if you like, a certain . . . well not autonomy necessarily, but control over how this looks because of course it's their course and their experiential learning opportunity which we will be funding, you know, the public sector portion of, if you like.

I think a couple of things are important to reference. First of all, in terms of CLASSIC, students are still being placed with CLASSIC, so very important to remember that. They will, I'm sure, continue to be, I mean, through the College of Law, which

has a memorandum of understanding for funding with CLASSIC moving forward. So I think that's important. And CLASSIC's budget currently is about \$1 million. Funding for it continues to be provided from the Law Foundation, among others.

And again all of this really was about expanding opportunities for students as part of the college's wish to expand experiential learning placements for students, so again, working with the college as it really does that and as it expands the placement program for students. And I think that, I mean, again in terms of the 100,000, and I mean . . . So the memorandum of understanding continues with now the College of Law, you know, to CLASSIC.

I think that from our perspective, if the College of Law is going to have, you know, control if you like of its experiential learning sort of umbrella for students, what we felt we could offer were the public sector opportunities, right, so for prosecutions, for Ministry of Justice, for Legal Aid. And we felt and I think certainly got the clear sense that the announcement . . . And I've referenced, you know, the Law Society and the Canadian Bar Association, Saskatchewan branch and the dean and students most of all were extremely positive about being provided with an opportunity for variety. I don't think that a clinical placement program can lead just perhaps with one body as it's traditionally been, and I think that this just expands that.

So as I say, students are being placed with CLASSIC as we speak, will I'm sure continue to be, but we felt that we could offer this as part of the public sector approach in terms of legal placements for students and continuing to attract students to the ministry and to prosecutions, which I think is very important, as well as Legal Aid where there's a real need, particularly in the rural communities.

So again I think it's about expanding opportunities but also attracting, you know, interested students to the ministry, to prosecutions, and to Legal Aid. And certainly there's been, I think, great positivity around that.

I will also point out, and I think it's interesting context, that when you look at — and I have this here — funding sources of clinical law programs in Canada. Traditionally it has only been for UBC [University of British Columbia], for U of A [University of Alberta], and for U of S that there's been any provincial government funding at all. And so most provinces are law foundation, some are students' union, some are municipal government, in two cases legal aid, the university, one the federal government, several corporate private, and others special, so a special category. I don't . . . you know, can't speak to exactly what that is, but I think that's interesting too.

And so I think, you know, to the question why, I mean I think our feeling was if we are going to continue with, you know, helping the college on the experiential learning side, then our offer then was on the public sector side and to attract students to those areas where there is need. But there's also need around access to justice and so on. So I think it really is, I mean, as the Law Society president said, a win-win in that sense.

And I think it doesn't preclude other placements, further placements, continued placements with students who are interested in CLASSIC, with CLASSIC through the College of

Law.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Just one point of clarification. I believe CLASSIC has stated publicly that because of this reduction in funding, they are not sure what the future of their student learning component is going to look like. As you have mentioned, they have funding to do a variety of things, which is why their budget is a million dollars.

I'm focused exclusively on the student learning component of CLASSIC because we are talking about expanding experiential learning opportunities, which is of course a great thing. I think when people hear expanding experiential learning opportunities, they think — and I think — that will mean more students have more opportunity, not one opportunity being sacrificed for another opportunity.

So I guess my question, to frame this as a question: is there any conversations about . . . If the ministry's not going to provide that \$100,000 anymore . . . And you have indicated other sources of revenue that other clinical programs have. Understanding, I'm sure, that the Ministry of Justice sees how imperative it is for their province's College of Law to have experiential learning but particularly clinical learning opportunities, clinical legal education opportunities, are they working with other partners to ensure that clinical legal education can continue in this province?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well I think that's precisely the point where I spoke to earlier about how in many ways this is something that the College of Law wants to increasingly lead, and not perhaps the province lead it for them.

And so keep in mind that, you know, this is actually about expanding opportunities because of course we, you know, are expanding into other areas of experiential learning. It's not . . . I mean it's traditionally been one placement opportunity, and so I think that there was a need. I mean that's not just I saying that. I mean for example, as I've said, the Law Society, and I'm quoting:

The perennial problem has been the limited number of opportunities for students to access these experiences. The Law Society applauds these efforts by the ministry and the college to increase student exposure to real-world scenarios, particularly in rural Saskatchewan. It is a win-win.

So I think that that was the point. I think it's very relevant to remember that the U of S continues to have a memorandum of understanding with CLASSIC, and that CLASSIC has funding of a million. I mean you're right; it covers a broad base of services. But there is also . . . there are natural, you know, synergies in terms of funding through, for example, the Law Foundation. And that's been something that has been raised and pursued and is certainly pursued as I listed, you know, in other provinces.

So again I think if the College of Law is seeking to expand placements and would not argue with the fact that they had signalled that, along with the fundraising campaigns of the university as a whole, their focus from that fundraising would be to expand legal placements, clinical legal placements . . . And we're positive about this offer of ours because they have a memorandum of understanding with CLASSIC and will continue now these conversations not only with CLASSIC but about how

legal placement opportunities look at the college going forward. I think that what we were offering is . . . As I say, what we are, you know, are public sector opportunities. And that was the goal and, as I say, I think a very welcome one, you know, in terms of the college and stakeholders in terms of how they saw that, most importantly students.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Being cognizant of the time, I'm going to move on. I have a couple of questions about the Office of Residential Tenancies I'll try and get out quickly. Did the ORT [Office of Residential Tenancies] conduct any in-person hearings in 2023?

**Ms. Head:** — Kylie Head, assistant deputy attorney general with the Ministry of Justice. I do not have an exact number for you, but I do know that they have conducted them upon request. So if parties have requested it, you can get a still in-person hearing. But as you know, that's not their normal course of business any longer, so I imagine it would be a relatively small number.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Does the ministry track that number? And if so, could they provide it to the committee at a later date?

**Ms. Head:** — I can look into whether we track it or not. I can't guarantee that we do track it, but if we do I can undertake to provide that to you.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I may get the same answer to this question, but I'm still going to ask it. I understand that claimants can make a request to a hearing officer for a decision to be anonymized. How many decisions were anonymized in 2023?

**Ms. Head:** — I'll have to give you the same response on that one, that we will have to look into that for you. It's not something that we normally track, but I will check to see if we can put that together.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Another question similarly focused, I also understand that the ministry . . . I guess my question is, has the ministry started tracking files that have closed, decisions that have been made because one of the parties did not show up for the hearing? And if so, do you have a number?

**Ms. Head:** — I think you're asking us some interesting statistical questions that we just normally wouldn't track, so I will undertake to look into that one for you as well. It's just not part of the normal sheet that I have here that reports.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. If you could endeavour to look into it and report back whether or not you have that information, and if you do, what those numbers are, I would greatly appreciate it. I also understand that . . .

**Ms. Head:** — Sorry, I'm just getting a text.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

**Ms. Head:** — I'm getting a text here which may be helpful. If the applicant doesn't show, then the case is simply dismissed. So we may not be able to parse those numbers out; it would just show that the case was dismissed. But I will go back and look into it for you and see if there's anything we can produce.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Yeah, I understand that the case would be dismissed. I was wondering if that would be tracked. As you probably can guess, I'm trying to dive into if there are any challenges regarding phone accessibility of the hearings right now. So that's why I'm diving into that now. So if the ministry's doing any tracking with respect to challenges of applicants and respondents in being able to access the ORT via phone conferencing, that would be greatly appreciated.

Minister, you mentioned in your budget response that the ministry is currently looking into the broken windows model. Can you expand, please?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Yes, absolutely. That is very preliminary work. And I think I was simply signalling that as we go forward into this next year — and I forget the other example that I raised in conjunction than that — but just looking at that as really in terms of the proverbial cross-jurisdictional scan — you know, what has it meant in other countries, in other areas, how has it worked or not worked. And so, as I say, very, very preliminary and I know referenced with something else at the time, in terms of potential interest.

[20:15]

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I think the other thing you had mentioned, which was going to be my next question anyways, was you mentioned that you were going to look into police time clogged up by attending traffic safety court. Can you expand on that as well?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Also very, very preliminary. And this is something that I know my colleague, the Minister of Corrections, has also heard from police chiefs and organizations across the province that there are some challenges there in terms of, you know, proverbial person power and models that one might look at in terms of easing strain. But again very, very preliminary. Just simply of interest because we've heard it, you know, from a number of stakeholders and are interested in hearing more about what this could mean in the province.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Now that was a problem that was going to in part be addressed by the e-justice project. Why is the ministry no longer looking at operationalizing that work?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well as I think I said last year — and as we said last year when you raised this and we chatted about this last year — I think the point that I make in saying that we're speaking with police chiefs and other stakeholders across the province is precisely the point. I think the goal certainly of the e-justice program was very laudable and remains so. And so it's, of course, about looking at ways that we can free up court time and so on. And of course that remains a goal.

The issue with e-justice program, as we chatted about last year, was an IT [information technology] issue primarily. And again, I think it was ADM Head who did a very in-depth analysis at the time of, you know, IT systems dovetailing on each other and some of the challenges that that represented. And that really was the issue, that finally there were IT challenges, cross-referencing of IT systems which hadn't perhaps been completely apparent at the beginning. And so the intention really was to look at where we were at on that IT side.

The goals though of the program remain. And as I say, I think that work — and certainly Dennis or Max can speak to that further in terms of where that's at — there has been work done in terms of, you know, IT and other assessment and where we go from here, as they say.

But part of that has been talking to, you know, groups across the province. And for example, it was in a meeting of police chiefs that I participated in about six months ago, I would say, where they talked about, again the goals of an e-justice-type program and how that's played out in other provinces. One of the provinces they mentioned was Manitoba. And again I don't remember all the details around how they . . . I'm not sure they were completely clear, to be honest, on how all of that played out in that province or other provinces in terms of what we might be able to look at.

But I think, to your question about traffic court, I think that the workings of what we might do and the goals, as I say, remain the same. The concern around that was merely sort of the IT issues and just where that was looking and where we had to make sure we weren't, you know, going too far before we weren't sure that the systems would work together and so on.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is that project still on pause?

**Mr. Bilson:** — Yes. Max Bilson, again, deputy attorney general. Yes, their project is still on pause. We've reviewed and we're continuing to review the project, as we indicated last year, with an eye to the costs of restarting a project versus the costs of other opportunities that may arise, as the minister has just mentioned. There are other models that we're looking at. There are other potential projects that we're looking at.

So yes, I mean it's on pause. We're continuing to look at it. And there's every possibility that, you know, in the future we will restart the e-justice project in some form, whether it's the provincial offences project as we knew it, that time will tell. I will say that the provincial offences project, the work that was done to date has been frozen in time as it were and is ready to be restarted at any time, fully cognizant of the cost that that would take to complete the project.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And now, as was indicated in committee, I believe it was last year, the ministry stated that all of the components of the paused project would be used in the future. Correct me if I'm wrong, I'm not sure if that is necessarily the case for sure anymore. Can you please elaborate?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Just simply if . . . I mean again, I think keep in mind that there is that IT component. And so it's really that all the work to date in terms of all the IT and other components are all there.

And I think the point that was made last year is the same point we would make this year, which is that as we look at potentially not necessarily other models, but models that fit the same goal — whether it would be, you know, in another jurisdiction, as I say, as has been raised by police chiefs about the Manitoba model, or we look more specifically at the traffic court situation — I think that the point really is that all the work that's been done to date can be employed to that end.

And that hasn't changed, but the reason, as I said, for the pause and for the review really came about primarily because of this IT complexity issue.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Apologies for jumping around a bit, but I'm cognizant of the time. Can you provide to the committee the status of the litigation that Justice is overseeing against the federal government concerning the remediation of uranium mines in northern Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — I believe that we have some new information on this in terms of — and Max can get into that; we talked about this earlier — in terms of, you know, efforts with the federal government.

But just to review where we are at, so it was last December that Justice Canada had indicated that, you know, mediation was something that they didn't want to pursue further. And so there was, you know, an offer made. They wanted to apply for a summary judgment, and we rejected that based on the best-foot-forward argument and so are at the situation where we, as I say, we rejected that because we felt that the case is strong and didn't want to be limited in terms of options going forward.

So we are going to, you know . . . The decision was made at that time that we would carry on with the litigation. And as I say, I think there have been some developments of late which, Max, you can update on.

**Mr. Bilson:** — Sure. Max Bilson again. Thank you for the question. Yes, we are right now preparing. We have filed today, so I can talk about it. It will be filed in court today. We've brought an application forward to amend our statement of claim, and our intention is to prosecute the case fully from here on out. As Minister just indicated, we have not been able to resolve the case or the matter with the federal government, so we will continue to prosecute the case and, as the minister said, put our best foot forward from here on out.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you for the update. I appreciate that. Minister, in your opening remarks you mentioned that there were going to be some changes made to the Regina domestic violence court. Can you expand on that?

**Mr. Jensen:** — So Rory Jensen, assistant deputy minister of courts and community justice. So in 2023, the ministry undertook what we would call a value stream mapping process to identify the current state and ideal future state of domestic courts, particularly the Regina one. Some of the improvements that were identified have already been implemented.

So after the value-mapping session, legal aid has implemented a process where administrative staff sends text messages to clients to remind them of their appointments. So this has reduced the number of no-shows and times wasted on rescheduling. Addictions services has implemented a new process where two appointment times are reserved regularly on Tuesdays. This allows for the program to pull clients in as they are referred, which has reduced the wait times and allows the client to continue through the process flow more rapidly.

The team also is working towards a revised treatment referral form that will create a single source of truth for each client, so

addressing and collecting the required information that is standard among service providers. So this will reduce the duplication, which saves time and reduces also non-value-added process for clients and employees.

And the program has also shifted to a closed program. So the entry point is every six weeks, which means that that becomes the longest potential wait time for anyone to enter the domestic violence court. So this has already impacted the program.

There are a number of recommendations that are still in progress. So case management meetings are being used as a tool with a clear purpose and goal, where the issues get resolved on the go. And there's a focus on what adds value for the client. So this work's in progress. And then a standard referral form that can be used with the referral package, including relevant information, is under development. So this will reduce instances of missing information or extra work required to track that down.

There are a few improvements that we have not yet started yet that we are going to be working on in '24-25. So it's develop a standard disclosure checklist to ensure files are complete. Ensure conditions are appropriate at police charging stage. Include a standard process to ensure the accused is escorted to pick up necessary possessions at earliest convenient time. Develop a standard process road map for clients, so this becomes their journal, reporting tool, a place to record appointments, along with a standard section that explains the treatment-options process. And then developing text-message reminders for all appointments that would reduce waste from missed appointments and even court.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. You mentioned that you're moving . . . This is my last question? Oh.

**The Chair:** — No, no. You get one. I'll give you one more question.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — One after this one?

**The Chair:** — No.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — This is my last question? Okay.

**The Chair:** — Take your pick.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — All right. This is my last question. So thank you for that. I have one more question. I'm going to ask it about SIRT.

Could you provide me how many investigations are currently ongoing? What has been the length of time those investigations have taken to date?

[20:30]

**Mr. Jensen:** — For the 2023 calendar year — SIRT is tracking data on a calendar year — there was 31 files opened in 2023. Twenty-five of those files remain open at this time.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Seeing that we have reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of Justice and Attorney General estimates, we will now adjourn consideration of these estimates. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — No, just thank you for the questions, despite the intense heat. And I would like to thank officials certainly and give a particular shout-out to Lionel McNabb. This is going to be his last appearance before committee after 44 years with the Government of Saskatchewan. So he retires at the end of April.

So thank you, Lionel. You didn't get to answer a question tonight, but you were there in spirit through all of them. And certainly on behalf of me and the government and the ministry, we are all very, very sad to see you go, and thank you for everything. So I wanted to end there, Mr. Chair.

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

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Mr. McNabb, I had no idea this was your last estimates.

**The Chair:** — I could give you one more question. Or not.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Just first of all, thank you, Minister, for this dialogue. I do very much look forward to it every year. And thank you to all of your officials for answering the questions this evening and all of the work in preparing for estimates. And I actually was going to apologize to those who I did not get to this evening. I had, as always, lots of questions but not enough time to ask them.

But I specifically want to apologize to Mr. McNabb, who I've always enjoyed my conversations with in estimates. I hope you have a wonderful retirement, and thank you so much for your service to the province. Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. I'd like to thank the Minister and the opposition and my colleagues and the staff here too, as well and, Minister, your staff too. And wish Mr. McNabb . . . I didn't ask him any questions, but I wish him well on his retirement. We'll take a couple minute break to maybe get some fresh air, and we'll be back in a few minutes.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**The Chair:** — I'd like to welcome everybody back. Minister Eyre is here with her officials for consideration of bills. I would remind the officials to identify themselves.

### Bill No. 149 — *The Franchise Disclosure Act*

#### Clause 1

**The Chair:** — We will begin with Bill 149, *The Franchise Disclosure Act*, clause 1, short title. Minister Eyre, please make your opening comments and introduce your officials.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. So pleased to offer opening remarks on Bill 149, *The Franchise Disclosure Act*. Saskatchewan is the only western province without franchise disclosure legislation, and this bill will afford Saskatchewan business people the same protections as in other jurisdictions by regulating the franchise marketplace and protecting parties to a franchise agreement.

The bill sets out requirements for the disclosure of information

prior to entering into a franchise agreement. It will ensure that prospective franchisees have all of the required information needed to make an informed decision prior to entering into a franchise agreement. The bill includes a duty of good faith it imposed on all parties and the right of franchisees to associate with each other.

Mr. Chair, a House amendment will also be presented to clarify the effect of a notice of rescission where a disclosure document has not been provided by the franchisor. So in subsection 7(2), that grants a franchisee a right of rescission within two years of entering into the agreement if that franchisee has not received a disclosure document.

The statutory right of rescission does not include the opportunity for the franchisor to correct the franchisor's failure to provide the necessary disclosure documents. The existing wording in 7(2) could leave the door open for a franchisor to attempt to correct the franchisor's failure to provide disclosure documents in accordance with the Act, which was not the intention of the rescission provision. So rescission is effective when notice is received by the franchisor, and clarification of subsection 7(2) is necessary to ensure there are no unintended consequences that occur as a result of the provision.

So, Mr. Chair, with those opening remarks, I will certainly welcome questions regarding Bill 149.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. I would ask if it would be possible to give the amendment to the opposition.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Absolutely, yes.

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

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I'm just quickly reviewing this House amendment because this is the first time I've seen it.

Thank you for your opening remarks, Minister. Can you provide some details as to the consultations that occurred pursuant to the enactment of this bill?

**Ms. Markatos:** — Thank you. Maria Markatos, legislative services branch. A public engagement document was posted on Saskatchewan.ca and was also sent to the Canadian Bar Association, Saskatchewan branch; the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce to circulate to their members; as well as the Canadian Franchise Association.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Ms. Markatos. Can you explain what the feedback was that was received on this legislation?

**Ms. Markatos:** — The feedback that we received was supportive of the franchise legislation, and the franchise legislation that has been presented follows the *Uniform Franchises Act* that was prepared by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada and has been followed by the other jurisdictions in Canada. And there was no suggestion that we should deviate from that uniform approach.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Can you please explain how disclosure obligations will apply at each stage of the disclosure

process pursuant to the legislation?

**Ms. Markatos:** — Thank you. So right now in Saskatchewan there is no obligation to provide a disclosure document prior to entering into a franchise agreement. The legislation will provide that, prior to the franchisee entering into the franchise agreement, they receive the disclosure document package 14 days prior to entering into that agreement.

[20:45]

And so that disclosure document package is going to include certain documents that are going to be prescribed in the regulations including, for example, contact information for other franchisees, business background of officers and directors of the franchisor, previous convictions and bankruptcies, as well as the costs of establishing the franchisee — so franchise fees, royalty fees, marketing and advertising fees, any start-up costs — so that the franchisee knows up front what is required of them before they enter into the contract and what they can expect as a result of the franchise agreement.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Who can be relied on to fulfill these disclosure obligations?

**Ms. Markatos:** — Well the obligation would be on the franchisor to provide the disclosure document prior to entering into the agreement.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Can they empower an agent or something like that to provide that information?

**Ms. Markatos:** — They can. The bill does provide a definition for a franchisor's associate or a franchisor's broker, and they can provide those materials on behalf of the franchisor.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. What will be considered material in a disclosure document?

**Ms. Markatos:** — So “material fact” is defined in the Act to include any information that would reasonably be expected to have a significant effect on the value of the franchise, the price of the franchise, or the decision to acquire the franchise.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Was there a reason why this definition wasn't made more prescriptive?

**Ms. Markatos:** — Well we did try to maintain uniformity with all of the other jurisdictions across Canada, and this is the definition that's found in those Acts. So we didn't want to deviate from the definition, like I said, that they have because there is case law in other jurisdictions that does address this.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Are non-refundable deposits expressly excluded from the restriction on the ability of franchisors to accept deposits?

**Ms. Markatos:** — Sorry, one more time?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Are non-refundable deposits expressly excluded from the restriction on the ability of franchisors to accept deposits?

**Ms. Markatos:** — That's not expressly considered in the legislation.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is there a reason why?

**Mr. McGovern:** — I think again uniformity being one of the key elements here, that's the ... When we're looking at the legislation, as Ms. Markatos had mentioned, we're one of the last provinces to have a franchise legislation.

And the balance that we're just trying to strike with the legislation here is that we want to have disclosure protection with respect to the smaller parties who are entering into these agreements, but at the same time we're trying to be aware that if we create unusual provisions in standard contracts for Saskatchewan, you know, a reaction by a particular group might be just to pass Saskatchewan by, not offer franchises in the province. So we have been fairly careful to stick to the uniform process and I think this reflects that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Are there any deviations from the uniform legislation at all?

**Ms. Markatos:** — No, we followed the BC [British Columbia] model which is the most recent version of the uniform Act. And there are a few drafting changes that were made, but otherwise, no.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Turning to this House amendment, is this a deviation from the uniform legislation, the BC model?

**Ms. Markatos:** — The existing one that's ...

**Ms. Sarauer:** — The amendment. Just the amendment.

**Ms. Markatos:** — The amendment is moving us to the BC version.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. How was this discovered and why is this change being made? I know you explained this already a bit in your opening remarks, but forgive me for asking you to repeat it again.

**Ms. Markatos:** — Sure. Thank you. There are a few deviations, like we said, where we tried to improve the drafting because the BC Act is a few years old and the uniform Act is even older. We tried to bring it into our drafting standard. And this was one of those provisions where we thought we were making it clearer, but it deviated too much from what the other jurisdictions are doing. So if you look at 7(2), our existing draft says, or the bill says:

(2) A franchisee may rescind the franchise agreement, without penalty or obligation, within 2 years after entering into the franchise agreement if the franchisor fails to provide the disclosure document within those 2 years.

So “within those 2 years” should say “never.” The drafting that's in the bill leaves it open to the franchisor to say, “Oh here it is. Here's the disclosure document. I'm providing it to you within those two years even though I didn't provide it to you within the 14 days that are required by the Act.”

**Ms. Sarauer:** — How was this issue brought to your attention?

**Ms. Markatos:** — It was just going through and trying to see, anticipating a question about what deviations we had from other jurisdictions and what changes there might be and this was one of the ones that was identified.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So predictable. I'm glad to see this change. 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 6 inclusive agreed to.]

### Clause 7

**The Chair:** — Clause 7. I recognize Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. B. McLeod:** —

**Amend subsection (2) of Clause 7 of the printed Bill by striking out “fails to provide the disclosure document within those 2 years” and substituting “never provided a disclosure document”.**

I so move.

**The Chair:** — Mr. McLeod has moved an amendment to clause 7. Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Is clause 7 agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried . . . as amended. Sorry.

[Clause 7 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 8 to 17 inclusive agreed to.]

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

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 149, *The Franchise Disclosure Act* with amendment. Mr. Keisig.

**Mr. Keisig:** — I so do move, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Is there any closing comments on the bill?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — No, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Okay, thank you.

### Bill No. 150 — *The Securities (Saskatchewan Investors Protection) Amendment Act, 2023*

#### Clause 1

**The Chair:** — Next we'll move on to Bill No. 150, *The Securities (Saskatchewan Investors Protection) Amendment Act, 2023*. We will begin consideration with clause 1, short title. Minister Eyre, please make your opening comments and introduce your officials.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will also just say for Ms. Sarauer, so that she's aware, there will also be a House amendment moved on this one. It will allow the Financial and Consumer Affairs Authority to make regulations that establish defences for issuers who make climate-related disclosures in compliance with Saskatchewan securities legislation. So before I begin my remarks perhaps that can be provided.

**The Chair:** — Thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — So with me, Mr. Chair, Neil Karkut, senior Crown counsel, legislative services; Mo' Depo-Fajumo, legal counsel, Financial and Consumer Affairs Authority; and Dean Murrison, director, Financial and Consumer Affairs Authority.

So I will now offer opening remarks for Bill 150, *The Securities (Saskatchewan Investors Protection) Amendment Act, 2023*, which contains three sets of changes that ensure the integrity of the capital markets sector and protect investors.

The first set of changes will allow designated dispute resolution service providers to make binding decisions in certain disputes between investors and registered firms. This update is based on recommendations from the Canadian Securities Administrators, or CSA, and will harmonize provisions across Canadian jurisdictions.

Under the changes it's expected that the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investments, or OBSI, will be designated to carry out this role. Consumer advocates and international reviewers have criticized the current lack of enforceability of OBSI's decisions, and granting OBSI binding decision-making authority will provide a level playing field between investors and firms in disputes and increase access to fair resolutions for investors.

The second set of changes will increase the maximum administrative penalty for violations of securities laws from \$100,000 to 1 million. This increase aligns with most other Canadian jurisdictions and will help deter contraventions of securities laws.

The third set of changes will grant the securities commission authority to take additional measures to ensure compliance with



securities laws. These changes would, for example, allow the commission to order the closure of websites by entities that contravene Saskatchewan securities laws or extend an order to third parties, such as social media sites, to remove information of users who contravene Saskatchewan securities laws.

Mr. Chair, an additional amendment as referenced will also be moved, which will allow the Financial and Consumer Affairs Authority to make regulations that establish defences for issuers who make climate-related disclosures in compliance with Saskatchewan securities legislation. And this change is based on the recommendation of the CSA, which is currently reviewing sustainability disclosure rules for reporting issuers, which are based on uniform standards developed by the International Sustainability Standards Board.

Climate-related disclosures can create unique challenges for issuers. First, it can be difficult to obtain accurate data. Also there can be climate-related events which are sporadic and unpredictable, which leads to uncertainty in terms of reporting. And these factors create a risk of errors in disclosures that expose issuers to liability potentially. And as a result, issuers may rely on generic or boilerplate disclosures that are not meaningful to investors.

The proposed amendment allows the FCAA [Financial and Consumer Affairs Authority] to prescribe new defences for issuers who make climate-related disclosures. And the defences would be harmonized across all CSA jurisdictions, implemented through regulations at a future date. This change will ultimately benefit investors by ensuring the clear and honest disclosure of climate-related information by issuers, which in turn will help inform the decision-making process for investors.

So, Mr. Chair, with that I welcome questions respecting Bill 150.

**The Chair:** — Thank you for your comments. We'll now open it up for questions. Ms. Sarauer.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. The Investment Industry Association of Canada wrote a letter to this committee dated November 21st, 2023 expressing some concerns about the legislation, and in particular the use of the Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investments. Can you please provide a response to that letter for the committee?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Yes, certainly. I am aware of the letter, and officials can respond. I know it was on the binding nature of the changes. And I know the CSA is in favour of moving forward, but as I say, I'm aware of the letter. So certainly feel free to speak to that.

**Ms. Depo-Fajumo:** — Hello. Okay, my name is Mobolanle Depo-Fajumo from Financial and Consumer Affairs Authority.

Yes, we did receive the letter from IIAC [Investment Industry Association of Canada] in relation to concerns about the binding authority. Some of the concerns they raised was that designating OBSI as the independent dispute resolution service would create a monopoly. And in response to that, designating OBSI for binding authority does not create a monopoly because it's not mandatory for investors to use only OBSI. Investors will still

have the option to go to other alternative dispute resolution services. For instance, they still have the option to go to litigation, mediation, or to negotiate directly with the firms.

[21:00]

The other piece, big piece in their letter, another thing was that ombuds services typically do not issue binding decisions. And many jurisdictions similar to Canada, such as UK [United Kingdom], Australia, and Ireland have similar financial ombuds services that deliver binding decisions. And also the binding decision does not only help investors; it also helps firms because it means that if they receive a binding decision through the OBSI process, investors cannot re-litigate the matter, and provides some finality for issuers as well, or the firms as the case may be.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. One of the concerns that the IIAC raised was the feeling that the timing of this was moving fairly quickly. Can you please provide a comment on that concern?

**Ms. Depo-Fajumo:** — Yes. And so this is a conversation that we've had at the CSA, the Canadian Securities Administrators, which is the representative body for provincial and territorial securities regulators. The content of the bill just happens to be a timing thing for Saskatchewan that right now we have this opportunity to go ahead.

The bill contains harmonized policy objectives and outcomes that have been decided and agreed to by the jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction is still relating with their governments, and of course each government has their own calendars. And it's not something that we can speak to in terms of when they do decide to bring it forward, but at a CSA level these are all harmonized policy objectives that have been agreed upon. So it is our understanding that other jurisdictions would also be pursuing this with their governments.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So just to reiterate what you've just said and I think you've also said, Minister, the CSA is supportive of the contents in this bill. Is that correct?

**Ms. Depo-Fajumo:** — Yes. And to add a gloss on that, we are aware that BC, I believe, agrees with the outcomes but they are going to be following a different path. So for instance, whereas Saskatchewan is providing . . . will be implementing regulations following if this bill is approved, they would be . . . The nature of their regulations may be a bit different but all the outcomes are exactly the same, that we all have harmonized policy outcomes. And our understanding is that that's what they are discussing with their government as well.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. And just to further elaborate on that point, can you explain how Saskatchewan will compare to other jurisdictions once this legislation passes?

**Ms. Depo-Fajumo:** — Could you be more specific?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Are we the first to take this step forward? Or are there other ones, other provinces who have taken similar steps? I'm looking for a cross-jurisdictional scan, basically.

**Mr. Karkut:** — Right. Neil Karkut, Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. We're the first jurisdiction that has introduced

this legislation. There has been discussions at the CSA level about the policy objectives, what the wording would look like. So there's definitely been conversations with the other jurisdictions to develop this legislation. We can't say with certainty what their exact legislation would look like because we're first out the gate. But it's definitely been a collaborative effort, and the anticipation is that when other jurisdictions move forward, their legislation is going to be very similar to what we're preparing here.

And I guess the other piece to keep in mind is that much of this will be implemented through a national instrument that's created by regulation. And that will be a uniform piece of regulation, introduced by and passed by all the jurisdictions.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Has there been any other feedback received by the ministry with respect to this legislation?

**Ms. Depo-Fajumo:** — So we publish part of the CSA process . . . When regulations are going to be implemented, they are published for public comment. And regulations, proposed regulations in relation to OBSI were published for public comment in November of last year. And the comment period just recently closed, so the CSA is reviewing those comments, and was public, so industry and investor advocates as well as personal investors were also able to comment.

So that's the extent of consultation we've done so far. And some of those comments are still being collated by the CSA and discussed.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I suppose that would've led to the argument about the timing of this. Would it make more sense to wait until all of those comments have been reviewed prior to passing this bill?

**Mr. Karkut:** — Just to clarify, what we're doing here is setting up the legislative structure for it. However nothing in Saskatchewan will come into force until all the jurisdictions are ready to go. So based on the timing of our legislative schedule, we moved ahead with it first. However there's going to be a collaborative effort to bring everything into force at the same time.

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

**The Chair:** — Thank you. 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 13 inclusive agreed to.]

#### Clause 14

**The Chair:** — Clause 14. I recognize Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. B. McLeod:** — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

#### Clause 14 of the printed Bill

Amend Clause 14 of the printed Bill by adding the following clause after clause (b): [which will be]

**“(c) by adding the following clause after clause (dd.1):**

(dd.11) respecting circumstances in which a person or company is not liable, or defences a plaintiff or defendant may have, in any action or proceeding pursuant to the common law, a statute or otherwise, with respect to any information disclosed or omitted to be disclosed in compliance with or intended compliance with this Act or the regulations, including but not limited to climate-related disclosure”.

I so move.

**The Chair:** — Mr. McLeod has moved an amendment on clause 14. Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried.

[Clause 14 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 15 and 16 agreed to.]

**The Chair:** — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Securities (Saskatchewan Investors Protection) Amendment Act, 2023*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 150, *The Securities (Saskatchewan Investors Protection) Amendment Act, 2023* with amendment. Mr. Goudy moves?

**Mr. Goudy:** — I so move.

**The Chair:** — Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Is there any closing comments?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — No. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

#### Bill No. 152 — *The Protection From Human Trafficking (Coerced Debts) Amendment Act, 2023*

#### Clause 1

**The Chair:** — Okay. Our final item of business is consideration of Bill 152, *The Protection From Human Trafficking (Coerced Debts) Amendment Act, 2023*. Clause 1, short title. Minister Eyre?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Yes. And once again want to . . .

**The Chair:** — Would you please make your opening comments?

Sorry.

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Sorry, Mr. Chair. Want to signal an amendment, and so we'll provide that also to the critic. That will be on coerced debts around collections, and the amendment would prohibit any person or entity from collecting or attempting to collect a coerced debt. And so we'll get to that and I'll speak to that.

So thank you, Mr. Chair. With me, Darcy McGovern, K.C., legal executive director of public law; and Kara Moen, Crown counsel with legislative services. So pleased to be able to offer opening remarks on Bill 152, *The Protection From Human Trafficking (Coerced Debts) Amendment Act, 2023*.

This bill aims to cut the strings of financial control that traffickers can exercise over their victims. And it does this through targeting coerced debts, which can occur when a trafficker of course forces a victim to take out a loan or other debt for the trafficker's benefit. In many cases, the victim has no means to repay the debt and so the credit score and financial future of that person is put in jeopardy as a result.

This bill and the House amendment being proposed would target three facets of coerced debts in order to improve victims' lives. The first facet addresses lenders. So under this bill, lenders are not permitted to consider the existence of coerced debts or take those into account when making lending determinations.

The second facet addresses credit reporting agencies. This bill amends *The Credit Reporting Act* to prohibit credit reporting agencies from including information on a credit report with respect to a coerced debt.

And finally, the House amendment being proposed this evening would target a third facet, namely collections. The amendment as stated would prohibit any person or entity from collecting or attempting to collect a coerced debt. And, Mr. Chair, this is being brought forward following consultations with the Canadian Bankers Association and the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, which advocated for its inclusion.

This bill will also offer victims a process to have the existence of a coerced debt verified with a certificate. Victims services will administer the process and ensure that those seeking assistance will be treated in a trauma-informed manner. We understand that victims coming forward may be divulging very sensitive and traumatic information, and they certainly deserve to be met with a process that does not make them feel re-victimized. The certificate process is also designed to assure creditors that there is a procedure for determining the validity of a coerced debt.

Mr. Chair, we are aware that this bill and its proposed amendments will not ever solve the problem that human trafficking creates in Saskatchewan, but we hope that this bill that we are introducing will also introduce new tools with which to assist victims with gaining economic and personal freedom. And so with those opening remarks, Mr. Chair, I welcome questions regarding Bill 152.

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

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, can you walk through what the process will be for getting relief pursuant to this bill? The relief that's going to be provided pursuant to this bill, can you walk through what the process will be for survivors?

**Ms. Moen:** — Kara Moen, legislative services. So essentially the process for victims is that they have the opportunity to approach victim services. It's overseen by an authorized person, which we anticipate will be the interpersonal violence specialist at victim services. It essentially mirrors the process that's currently being used as part of *The Residential Tenancies Act*, which is already a part of *The Victims of Interpersonal Violence Act* process for certificates when it comes to ending a fixed-term tenancy.

And so in practical terms, an application can be made by a victim to the authorized person to receive a certificate confirming that they were in fact a victim of human trafficking at the time that a coerced debt was incurred.

The application may include a copy of any court orders in place to protect the victim from their trafficker, or a statement from a designated person outlined in the legislation, which could be peace officers, shelter workers, or employees of any agency that provides support services to victims of human trafficking. The authorized person will review that information and decide whether a certificate will be issued, and the ministry will establish a process to provide that certificate to the relevant creditor, collections agency, or credit reporting agency.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — The process to provide that information to the creditor or credit reporting agency, will that be laid out in the regulations?

**Ms. Moen:** — It's something that we have work going on under way with victim services to establish what that process will be. I'm not sure if it will be in regulations or if it will be a policy-based process. And we will be consulting with Canadian Bankers Association and the Canadian Credit Union Association while we're developing that process.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Understanding that this process may or may not be laid out in regulations, you mentioned a few organizations that will be consulted in the development of that process. Will there be any other consultations with any other organizations while the regulations are being drafted?

**Ms. Moen:** — So there's a number of organizations that have already been consulted and some that will certainly be looped in as we proceed. Equifax Canada and TransUnion Canada have been part of consultations already. They are the only two credit reporting agencies that collect and sell information in Saskatchewan about an individual's credit history.

We also have the ICIVA, which is the inter-ministerial committee on interpersonal violence and abuse, the subcommittee on human trafficking. And the membership of that subcommittee includes representatives from the Ministry of Justice, of course; Corrections and Policing; Health; Social Services; Status of Women; and Education; and also non-government agencies, including the Sask Health Authority, the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], the Regina Police Service, Saskatoon Police Service. So those groups, as part of that committee, are aware of the work that's ongoing.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Has Hope Restored been consulted with respect to this legislation?

**Ms. Moen:** — Hope Restored has been spoken to by victim services.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And what was their feedback with respect to the bill?

**Ms. Moen:** — They were supportive of the legislation.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Will this be a provision that will be accessible to those who are also labour trafficked as well? There are two forms of human trafficking really: sexual and labour. Just ensuring that it will be available to both.

**Mr. McGovern:** — The definitions in the human trafficking legislation will apply with respect to who's a victim here, and as you say, that Act contemplates already a range of what constitutes human trafficking. And that, as you say, can include a horror story of physical, sexual abuse, but it also includes extensive hours, etc., for someone who's working in a labour context. So that full range of human trafficking is contemplated within the definition of "victim" in that Act, and therefore in these changes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. What work will be done to ensure that the public is aware that this is an option available to them if they are a survivor?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — Well certainly, I mean as this now comes forward, we hope to, you know, get the word out, as it were, I mean, as much as possible. And I mean one of the things that I think is important to highlight is the content of the amendment because I think it's very impactful and certainly that's something that, you know, I'll be saying and that we will be trying to impart as much as possible and get out there.

I mean namely the fact that from a ministry perspective and in terms of sort of the journey, if you like, of this legislation that as it had been, you know, envisaged, it had been a phased-in approach in terms of, you know, targeting credit reporting agencies initially and then later focusing on the role of creditors.

And I think it's not to be underestimated that within the context of this legislation the fact now that creditors are on board, if you like, to the extent that they are, and that that really came from the Canadian Bankers Association is very significant. So just that it's more sweeping than we had even, you know, previously envisaged and as I say that that had been a phased-in approach which now can become more of a complete response, I think is something to your question about what we get across and how responsive we hope to be with this.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Have any dollars been allocated in this budget for any public awareness campaigns with respect to this bill?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — It's a very good question and, as I say, one of the things that certainly I've tried to do in the last, you know, few months has been to raise awareness as much as possible about the various supports that are out there. And so I think that now that as this will come forward, I think there are a number of opportunities to highlight it in the context of 211, to highlight in

the context, you know, in the new services being provided through there and supports that are being provided through that; that are provided through the awareness campaign that I mentioned previously is coming in the next few weeks. And there is actually more than one which will probably be more specifically around, you know, efforts that involve human trafficking.

So I think absolutely the most important point now is how to raise awareness and where to raise awareness. And so there are issues around, you know, really conversations around how detailed that can be. I mean for example, with posters and, as I say, location, all of which is incredibly important, and to get that across. So very, very important now as the next stage and through a number of different routes would be my hope, our hope.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Absolutely. Moving to this amendment, when was this amendment drafted?

**Mr. McGovern:** — The Canadian Bankers Association reached out following the passage of the Ontario bill. And the member may be aware, Ontario had a private member's bill that raised some of these issues in a different sort of an approach. And it did include a provision with respect to not pursuing the debt or cancelling the debt from that perspective. But of course, as a private member's bill, it had a rocky path.

It ended up receiving endorsement from all parties in Ontario. I shouldn't say all parties — three major parties. I'm not sure if there's other parties that I'm not aware of in Ontario. And it was passed following changes in committee, and that occurred relatively recently. And the Canadian Bankers Association, as part of that process, came to the conclusion that they could support a cancellation of the debt where the debt was incurred as a part of human trafficking, so it was a coerced debt. And so once they've reached that conclusion, and they indicated to us that having a similar provision in Saskatchewan was something that they could support, credit unions took a similar position.

And at that point, just to . . . even just for the record, you know, it's a very interesting narrative. Obviously we have an Act that's already in place that seeks to help people get away from the people who are human trafficking. That survivor at that point tries to start their new lives. And one of the ways obviously that could be a problem is if, either through credit reporting agency — which was where we were initially focused — say that this person's credit rating is ruined, and they should not have access to credit. This removes that problem.

And as the minister said in her comments, the second step that we're now able to take only just recently with respect to the amendment — and literally within the last six weeks — is to be able to look at that and say . . . And not only that, if you have a debt that was taken out under your name under coercion, that once the certificate is provided, if the bank or the credit union, for example, says we'd like to see your certificate . . . They could of course just honour it and say we're not going to, you know, we recognize that we shouldn't be enforcing coerced debts. But the certificate process is a way of, without much bureaucracy and in a sensitive manner as Kara mentioned, to be able to go forward and say, yes this did occur as a victim of human trafficking.

I mean due diligence is important just in the sense that we don't,

you know, we have to be able to assure the banking community that well, you know, someone can't just do this just to dodge a debt. Not that we think that's going to be a big problem. This removes that problem and does so in an easy fashion.

So that's a good narrative. Not only is your credit reporting going to be resolved, that you can start over, but you're not going to be saddled with debts that someone horrible imposed upon you.

**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 4 inclusive agreed to.]

#### Clause 5

**The Chair:** — Clause 5. I recognize Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. B. McLeod:** — Right here. Clause 5 of the printed bill. And excuse my voice. I hope I can get through this.

Amend Clause 5 of the printed Bill: [first of all]

(a) by adding the following section after section 19.2:

#### “Prohibition on collection of debts

**19.21** Notwithstanding any other Act, no person or entity shall, through any means whatsoever, knowingly collect or attempt to collect a coerced debt”; and

(b) by striking out section 19.3 and substituting the following:

#### “Certificate to verify coerced debt

**19.3(1)** A victim may apply for a certificate to verify a coerced debt pursuant to section 12.41 of *The Victims of Interpersonal Violence Act*.

(2) A certificate obtained by a victim pursuant to section 12.41 of *The Victims of Interpersonal Violence Act* that is provided to a credit reporting agency, creditor, person or entity constitutes proof of a coerced debt”.

I do so move.

**The Chair:** — Mr. McLeod has moved an amendment to clause 5. Do committee members agree with the amendment as read?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Okay. Is clause 5 as amended agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried.

[Clause 5 as amended agreed to.]

[Clauses 6 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 Protection From Human Trafficking (Coerced Debts) Amendment Act, 2023*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 152, *The Protection From Human Trafficking (Coerced Debts) Amendment Act, 2023* with amendment.

**Mr. Grewal:** — I do so move.

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

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Is there any closing comments from the minister?

**Hon. Ms. Eyre:** — No, not particularly, Mr. Chair, other than to thank you, thank committee for the questions, thank Hansard.

Certainly on the legislative side these are always long journeys, and one feels when it's finally delivering something forth at this phase and in this case, well in all three, some late-breaking amendments which were I think important and impactful. And in this case, you know, certainly thank you to officials for your work in terms of getting these to this point, and also in this latter case the Canadian Bankers Association for their position which I think is very welcome and I think will be very impactful for the province.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. Ms. Sarauer.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Just an emphatic thank you to you, Minister, and all of the officials for their hard work.

**The Chair:** — I too would like to thank the minister, her staff, and the committee members here today and the staff as well, their committee members.

So that completes our committee's business for tonight. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. McLeod or Ms. Sarauer?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sure.

**The Chair:** — Sure. Ms. Sarauer. Ms. Sarauer has moved. All agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until Monday, April 22nd, 2024 at 3:30. Thank you, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 21:30.]