



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

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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 15:31.]

**The Chair:** — Good afternoon. I'd like to welcome everybody here today to the Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice meeting. Today we will be considering the . . . Oh, first of all I'm Terry Dennis. I am the Chair of the committee. With us today we have Ms. Nippi-Albright in for Ms. Ritchie. We have Mr. Vermette in for Ms. Sarauer. With us we have Todd Goudy, Gary Grewal, Travis Keisig, and Blaine McDonald . . . McLeod. Why do I call him McDonald? Sorry.

Today we will be considering the '24-25 estimates and the 2023-24 supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Government Relations and the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. We will recess from 6 till 7.

**General Revenue Fund  
Government Relations  
Vote 30**

**Subvote (GR01)**

**The Chair:** — We will begin our consideration of vote 30, Government Relations, central management and services, subvote (GR01). Mr. McMorris is here with his officials. I'd remind the officials to identify themselves for the record before they speak and not to touch the microphones. Hansard will take care of that.

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

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have some lengthy opening remarks, but we're here for five hours total in Government Relations so I'll take some of that time to go through my opening remarks. And it is a privilege to be here to outline the priorities of the Ministry of Government Relations, its budget and business plan for the '24-25 fiscal year.

I'm joined today by acting deputy minister Sheldon Green to my left, and to his left is assistant deputy minister Giselle Marcotte, and to my right is Jeff Markewich, assistant deputy minister. I have other officials here that will come up if it's a specific area that the questioning is going in. So we've got lots of, I think you call that bench strength, a lot of bench strength.

Before I begin I want to acknowledge that the land on which we are gathered is Treaty 4 territory, the traditional and ancestral lands of the Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Lakota, Nakoda, and the home of the Métis.

This afternoon I will begin by providing a few general comments on the budget of the Ministry of Government Relations and the Provincial Capital Commission and a few highlights and priorities for the coming year. Afterwards I'd be happy to answer any questions from committee members.

The budget of Government Relations for '24-25 remains stable and its spending priorities continue to focus on key strategic investments to build stronger, safer communities for all Saskatchewan residents. We ensure residents live in safe and well-governed communities through record municipal revenue

sharing, resources to support officials with governance and administration, investments in integral infrastructure, and support for timely and accurate tax assessment.

We are building our relationship with First Nations and Métis communities through new investments in the duty-to-consult process, supporting these communities to participate meaningfully in consultation. We honour our commitment to reconciliation through funding that promotes the safe and well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people in our province.

The '24-25 budget allows us to provide exceptional services to our residents, protecting Saskatchewan as a great place to live, work, and raise a family in safe and affordable communities. In the coming fiscal year the ministry's budget is set to be 843.7 million. This is a 6 per cent increase from previous year.

Municipal revenue sharing. To begin I wanted to talk about the municipal revenue-sharing program which hit a record high again this year. The MRS [municipal revenue sharing] formula is based on three-quarters of 1 percentage point of the provincial sales tax revenue collected two years prior.

In '24-25 our government will commit 340.2 million to the MRS program, an increase of 42.4 million or 14.2 per cent from last year. This no-strings-attached, predictable provincial funding allows Saskatchewan's 767 municipalities to address key local priorities and plan for growth.

This funding is divided into four funding pools, and each of the four pools has its own distribution formula that is designed to meet the needs of each municipality. Since 2007 our government has provided more than \$4.3 billion to municipalities through the MRS program. Through the MRS program this government empowers locally elected leadership to serve their unique communities to the best of their ability.

Targeted sector support. Included in the MRS, or the municipal revenue-sharing funding, is the targeted sector support initiative. The TSS provides 1.5 million in funding for cost-sharing grants that support partnering municipalities with projects that strengthen our core operational capabilities through increased regional co-operation. These projects lead to more efficient and effective municipal service delivery and enhanced government and administrative capacity.

Government Relations is pleased to work alongside our steering committee partners, SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], and the New North, with SUMA administering the program with our support. We have seen dozens of successful initiatives in this program over the last few years, and we are currently accepting new applications.

MRS is far from the only direct support we provide municipalities. Infrastructure and other grants. Providing funding to Saskatchewan communities for infrastructure projects continues to be one of the main priorities for Government Relations. This year the '24-25 Government Relations budget includes 350.1 million in provincial and federal funding to support community infrastructure programs through federal-

provincial programs. These programs protect the quality of life of Saskatchewan residents and support the building of strong, safe, and sustainable communities.

In '24-25 we will see 8.9 million in provincial funding for the New Building Canada Fund, 126.6 million of provincial funding for the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. These dollars build projects ranging from replacing bridges and culverts; work supporting efficient transportation of people, agriculture products, and other goods; decommissioning landfills; efforts that will better protect the environment for years; installing solar panels and related equipment to harness sustainable energy; improving and upgrading water systems; improving community health, wellness, and culture through enhancements of new recreation facilities.

So far nearly 470 ICIP [Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program] projects have been approved with more than \$700 million of provincial funding invested through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. More than 1.7 billion will be invested in infrastructure programs across the province.

Saskatchewan is allocated to receive more than 907 million in federal funding under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. I am proud to say funding under all Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program streams has been fully allotted. The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to investing in infrastructure that improves the quality of life for residents, building stronger communities and families, and growing a stronger economy. We are advocating for a new federal infrastructure funding program to reflect the needs and priorities of our province.

We continue to administer the federal dollars of the Canada Community-Building Fund, formerly called the Gas Tax Fund. The Canada Community-Building Fund, or CCBF, is a federal program which provides predictable, long-term, stable funding for municipalities to help them build and revitalize their local public infrastructure. To date Saskatchewan has approved over 2,700 projects over the term of the current 2014-15 to 2023-24 CCBF program. Currently we are in the process of renegotiating the next 10-year CCBF agreement.

Government Relations is proud to provide 3.8 million this year to several municipalities under our transit assistance for people with disabilities program.

Government Relations also supports local governments with tools to serve their residents, including new and ongoing building and technical standards, new funding to support timely property assessment, as well as educational supports. For example, this year the ministry will continue to promote the adoption of the new buildings energy and plumbing codes, which came into effect January 1st. This includes the development of skills and capacity in the sector.

Provide a \$900,000 increase to the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency. This is an operational increase to support and maintain SAMA's [Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency] ability to meet its goals and targets for property re-inspection across the province. Timely assessment supports municipalities' budgets and ensures accurate collection of

education property tax by the province. Accurate, timely assessment helps us all in our budgeting process whether you're the province, a city, a town, or a rural municipality.

There are also considerable resources available to supported elected and appointed officials with governance and administration. Our government has a significant number of online resources. The ministry officials can be made available to provide workshops, webinars, and presentations at the request of municipalities. Upon invitation officials will join a council to field specific questions about governance and the resources they can tap into.

The municipal leadership development program, or MLDP, is an educational series of modules and workshops developed exclusively for elected and appointed municipal leaders in Saskatchewan. The municipal peer network connects municipal officers and administrators with highly experienced mentors. There are also numerous programs and training opportunities available through dedicated post-secondary programs and institutions in the province.

First Nations and Métis gaming. This year the Government of Saskatchewan will provide 91.2 million for gaming payments to the First Nations Trust, community development corporations, and the Clarence Campeau Development Fund. '23-24 was the first year with budgeted online casino profits where 50 per cent of the profits would be distributed to the First Nations Trust. These First Nations and Métis organizations then use the funding to support initiatives such as economic development, social and justice programs, and culture. This number is slightly down year over year, but it is based on estimated casino profits calculated and could change once we reach year-end, as we saw in '23-24 with an additional \$35 million in additional payments.

First Nations and Métis community grant program. The Ministry of Government Relations also administers grant programs targeted to First Nations and Métis communities' initiatives and events. These grants are open to all Indigenous organizations in the province.

This year the government will invest 1 million in the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund, an increase of \$600,000 or 150 per cent. The First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund can support First Nations and Métis communities participating in government consultation processes where there is a duty to consult. As well we're providing an additional \$330,000 in operating funding to enhance Government Relations' role under the revised First Nations and Métis consultation policy framework.

The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to fulfilling the Crown's legal duty to consult and accommodate, as articulated in its First Nations and Métis consultation policy framework, and has strengthened its commitment to meaningful consultation with changes to the consultation policy framework. The revised CPF [consultation policy framework] and increased funding support reflects our government's dedication to building positive relationships, honouring Aboriginal and treaty rights, and supporting economic reconciliation while planning for growth across our resource sector.

[15:45]

Advancing economic reconciliation also continues through treaty land entitlement claims. Through our TLE [Treaty Land Entitlement] Agreement, Saskatchewan has transferred more acres to reserve land status than any other province in Canada — more than 888,000 acres. This accomplishment speaks to the effectiveness of the Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement and the partnerships that have been built with First Nations and Canada.

So far we implemented 36 TLE agreements worth 687 million, with two more First Nations currently in negotiations with the province. Reconciliation with Indigenous people is demonstrated through the negotiation and implementation of the treaty land entitlement settlement agreements which supports First Nations land acquisition for new reserve land under these agreements. It is my hope that we will see more TLE agreements announced in the coming years.

The ministry continues to work in partnership with First Nations and Canada to create reserves in both urban and rural areas. Urban reserve development enables First Nations communities to participate in the mainstream economy by initiating new economic development projects. These projects increase employment, opportunity, and economic benefit for both the community and the First Nations. Currently there are 76 parcels of urban reserve located throughout Saskatchewan.

Government Relations also provides grant programs to support innovative, community-based projects and events that advance reconciliation in partnership with First Nations and Métis organizations. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls+ Community Response Fund will provide up to \$800,000, of which half is coming from Women and Gender Equality Canada, and First Nations and Métis partnership and sponsorship will provide up to 400,000. These grants support our government's priority of care and community, particularly those projects and events to address the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people in our province. Overall our province has committed a record-breaking 255.2 million for First Nations and Métis individuals and organizations in the '24-25 fiscal year — 6.1 million or 2.4 increase from the '23-24 fiscal year.

The Provincial Capital Commission. The Provincial Capital Commission will receive 7.3 million in funding this year from the province. This is unchanged from the previous fiscal year. The PCC [Provincial Capital Commission] enhances pride and quality of life for the general public, tenants and landowners, users, and future generations in Wascana Centre and at Government House. The PCC is responsible for the preservation and stewardship of the land, heritage, and culture; enhancements and maintenance of assets and service delivery; facilitation of visitor experience; and regulations of use. The PCC is now in its final stages of the review and renewal of the Wascana Centre master plan, which provides a road map to guide future growth, development, and sustainability in Wascana Centre.

Public and stakeholder engagement is a critical component of the Wascana Centre master plan review and renewal project, and the Provincial Capital Commission has actively engaged with the public, Indigenous communities, and other stakeholders throughout this project.

Updating the 2016 plan, the 2024 master plan will include the

100-year-old term vision for the centre, as well as recommendations to park improvements and operations for the next decade. Ultimately the revised master plan will preserve, promote, and enhance Wascana Centre, now and for decades to come.

In conclusion, overall Government Relations continues to manage its budget responsibly by providing investments into our municipal and Indigenous sectors. Our municipal investment and investments in infrastructure and Saskatchewan communities accounts for nearly 87 per cent of our '24-25 budget. Program and supports for First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs are more than 11 per cent. That's 98 per cent of the ministry's budget. That remains 2 per cent that goes to central management and services, the Provincial Capital Commission, and the Saskatchewan Municipal Board.

This underscores the ministry's commitment to working transparently and efficiently, focused on our government's goals to invest in our communities. By investing in our communities, we build and protect Saskatchewan for everyone who calls this province home today and into the future.

This concludes my overview of the '24-25 budget of the Ministry of Government Relations and the Provincial Capital Commission. My officials and I would be more than happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

**The Chair:** — Thank you for your opening comments, Minister. We'll now open it up for questions. I guess, Mr. Vermette, go ahead.

**Mr. Vermette:** — I guess starting out, I want to thank the minister and your officials for being here to give us an opportunity to ask some questions. Of course, I'll be talking about the Northern Affairs area, just so your officials know that's kind of where I want to go. I may just touch on some amounts of dollars to split between First Nations and Métis, if I have some clarification at some point. You guys can provide that now or you can provide it later to the committee. That would be great if you could do that.

So I guess I'll start out. Right now staffing-wise, FTEs [full-time equivalent] that you have currently in Northern Affairs and northern municipal affairs, if you could give me a breakdown of the employees you currently have. And if you could give me what was last year, and have we had more staffing or where staffing goes, just to see a pattern.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I've got a chart here that lays out the staffing for the last number of years. In 2023 — so the previous fiscal year and we don't see it changing much — but there are 20 employees. One was moved to Prince Albert to satisfy a vacancy. In 2022 there was 21 positions. But if you go back over the 10 years, you know, like 2020, 17; 2019, 18; 2018, 18. So it's around that 17, 18, 19. We're at 20 moving forward in this fiscal year.

**Mr. Vermette:** — And is that for Northern Affairs or both? Are you covering both or just the one? Northern Affairs, and then I said northern municipal affairs.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Yes, that would be for both.

**Mr. Vermette:** — I guess I'd look at ways your ministry and yourself as a minister . . . and I've been in estimates before where we've asked this question of previous ministers to see the involvement and I know it's key. I understand years ago it was the way Northern Affairs was done. It was a stand-alone ministry. It did certain things and powers that it had to act and to work with other ministers and ministries to make sure they were advocating for northern people — to make sure our northern leaders, our First Nations, our Métis residents — whether it's roads, you know, highways, whatever it was that needed to be addressed would meet with the minister and the officials. How is that relationship going these days?

And your dollars out of your budget that you currently allocate, could I get just a little feeling of the meetings that are done in the North, from yourself or your officials, to just have an understanding of those meetings that are going on? So that you can speak when you're at cabinet, and then you know, when we're asking for dollars for the North and leaders identify the needs, that you can address that and how you're advocating for northern people. Because I hear sometimes the frustration. They feel like they're not being heard. So this gives an opportunity to say maybe they are being heard, and I would like to hear some of that response if I could with the dollars being allocated.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — This answer could be two or three parts because there's a number that have interface with the northern communities and northern leaders. But what I'll kind of do just from my perspective . . . How I get informed, I guess, is a couple of ways. I have a briefing every Monday, pretty much every Monday from GR [Government Relations], and there's usually four or five elements on it. And quite often Brad Henry will join, and if there's an issue regarding whether it's a northern trust or whatever. So he kind of brings me up to speed on kind of what he's been hearing in the meetings that he's been at. I know Giselle will talk a little bit about another program that is really targeted towards the North.

And the other . . . I've been fortunate to have a Legislative Secretary, the member from Athabasca, who attends all of our briefings and as many events as . . . probably more events than I go to. But he attends an awful lot of events within his own constituency but around the greater province. So his feedback along with the ministry's feedback from the meetings that they attend each and every week, I feel like I have a grasp.

Now you know, it's always communities that if things maybe don't go the way they want, they feel like they haven't been heard. It's not always that they haven't been heard, but we can't maybe make the change they want at that time. But for the most part, I think, most of the concerns we hear and try and address as many of them as we possibly can. But with that maybe I'll turn it over to you, Giselle.

**Ms. Marcotte:** — Giselle Marcotte, assistant deputy minister, First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs division. Good evening. So through our ministry we provide the secretariat support for the Embracing Life initiative, a collaborative approach among agencies throughout the North to ensure that we can support suicide prevention and other Embracing Life initiatives.

Other approaches, we support the northern Saskatchewan

environmental quality committee, where we bring in 22 community members who have been nominated by their communities to meet with various ministries and agencies and possibly industry to talk about environmental issues going on in the North to provide that opportunity for community members to understand what's going on as well as to ask questions. We also chair the northern mines monitoring secretariat where there's two meetings a year with mine regulators, and we share that information through the northern Saskatchewan environmental quality committee as well.

[16:00]

And we co-manage the mine service lease agreements, which are agreements with various corporations to ensure that they are working with community and they look at the numbers of northerners who are hired and companies that are procured, some of the products they procure. The team has a fairly pragmatic approach where someone calls upon them to advocate or navigate through government. We provide that assistance.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Brad, you want to just . . .

**Mr. Henry:** — Sure. Thanks for the question. My name's Brad Henry. I'm executive director of northern municipal services. Primarily through northern municipal services and the Northern Municipal Trust Account, a lot of our work is liaising with the appointed and elected officials of municipalities in the North.

Primarily the priorities we focus on are supporting interests and needs around municipal infrastructure, primarily water and wastewater and solid waste management, as well as assisting them with other municipal service delivery and administration concerns that they're dealing with in their municipality.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Yeah, thank you for that. I guess it's like everything, Minister. You have commented about certain ways that you have those communications going back and forth and you're understanding the issues. And I guess there is still leaders, there's still residents who don't feel the North, with the resources it has and it brings back out of the industry.

And I've heard many leaders, I've heard different people talk about . . . They're willing to work with industry, our northern trappers, our fisherman. There are people, landholders, you know, and leaders that say they're willing to work with industry to make economics and they want to be a part of the economics. They want to make sure the resources are taken care of, the water's taken care of, the land — traditional land. And that's very important, I know, to many leaders. Some of them feel frustrated sometimes. They feel like that doesn't always happen.

So when I'm at meetings I hear it, and for me to be able to relay that message as the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for the area I represent, the Cumberland constituency . . . I can't speak for the member of Athabasca. That's his and I'll leave it to the constituents and yourself that you work with him in that area and that's fine. I understand that. I'll leave that to the good people of Athabasca.

I know my frustration sometimes, and you know, there's probably areas where our ministry does . . . And staff, I know they have some of the good staff and do the good work that they



try to do, and they're limited, like everything else, with budgets and dollars. I understand that. Some people want . . . But I just want to relay the concern sometimes is, I know a minister of Northern Affairs where we used to have a body and that it advocated, and it did amazing things and I did good partnerships.

And I'm not saying that couldn't happen again. But I wish we would have that dedication of the ministry of Northern Affairs with the minister allocated that way to make sure with industry, with all the different ministries . . . And I think about highways, and I think about some of the challenges that we're seeing. And I give the Athabasca . . . You know, we talk about the road; we talk about Wollaston Lake road. And I was in committee and got some information from the Ministry of Highways which was good. We want to move in a good way.

And I just hope. I'm on my way out and, Mr. Chair, you know, probably will never get to ask you questions as a member. But I do take Northern Affairs and the issues that people are faced with, safety and stuff. And I know and I hope. We all do. And you know, they rely on whether it's a government of the day or they have a representative member of the opposition or . . . All I want to say is, to me, I'm hoping that some day we have a Northern Affairs office that's dedicated with a minister, and maybe that can happen some day.

I think it's important because there's so many challenges with the cost of living. We see the suicides. We see the addictions. We see the crisis right now in crime and the addictions in many of our northern communities. I hear leaders speaking of it all the time. They want to work together and they're trying.

Maybe you could give us an update, and some of your officials give an update, the work that you're doing, if these dollars or more dollars that are needed, partnering with whoever, to make sure that some of these issues are being addressed and they're not going on deaf ears. We feel like it's going on deaf ears because it's overwhelming. I wouldn't mind an update on how you're working, whether it's our Northern Affairs with other ministries — policing, corrections — and different areas where you're working to try to help about safety in our northern communities because I see our leaders trying.

I watch. Whether they're First Nations, Métis leaders, municipal leaders, they're trying to do their part. But some days I look at them and it's a pretty rough battle when you see some of the crime that's going on in northern Saskatchewan. And I know it's happening all over, but for many of our northern communities we're just seeing it more and more and feeling it.

We're limited. People are limited to resources. Poverty, we see so much going on in the North that they sometimes get angry. You see parents in frustration that they're saying, we're not good enough? Like how come nobody's hearing us? How come they're not trying to help us in our communities? And they're desperate and they're hoping a government, and you know, the Northern Affairs ministry would work. So I just want to share that with you, with the frustration I hear.

And this isn't attacking anybody. I say this genuinely. They want the ministries to help them. They want the Minister of Northern Affairs to be able to work with all the ministries to bring the resources, to make sure that northern people, our youth, our next

generation, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren have that next opportunity at a good economics and a good life and a quality of life. So I share that with you, and maybe you guys can have a little discussion and see where you're working and where you can work to make sure safety is a priority and where we're working together.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I don't know if other ministers get bogged down in this carpet trying to roll the chairs back and forth, but I know I certainly am. It must be something I'm doing wrong.

Anyway you know, not necessarily perhaps a question but just a general comment were your comments, I think. And I'll let Sheldon talk maybe about more specifics. But you know, it started kind of, should there be minister just for Northern Affairs? And you know, in the title, in my title it's Government Relations, First Nations, Métis relations, and Northern Affairs, so it kind of looked like a tag-on. And maybe in the past there was a specific Northern Affairs minister, and that could be something that could be looked at. That's just more administrative kind of through the Premier's office and how he divides up the responsibilities.

But what I would say as far as meeting with groups . . . And I certainly understand there will be some frustration. And you know, it's not always in the North. Sometimes there's lots of frustration in the South too. But what we try and do, any opportunity that we have and any request that we have to meet, I like to meet with, you know, whoever.

I know I had . . . Just last week at SUMA there was a couple of delegations in, that I met with directly for a half hour and hear their concerns, met with some people from New North. And so we try and meet, and try and . . . When we know what the meeting is about, when we kind of have an idea what the meeting is about, I will probably be sitting in on it, but we'll have other ministries sit in on it as well and the Premier.

I can remember a couple meetings in the fall that we had where, you know, it wasn't always in person but virtually where the Premier would sit in on a meeting as well as other ministers. I think we had a number from around the Meadow Lake area come down and just raise their concerns directly with ministers.

And I don't know if we've ever turned down a meeting. I hope not. We try and meet with any group that wants to. If it's on their ground, that's perfectly fine. I know I was up in — I hate to use Meadow Lake twice — but I was up in Meadow Lake a year ago and met with the tribal council there on some specific issues as well as when they were down here. There was one meeting I remember distinctly was on mining.

But it is a combination of a number of things. It's just not one ministry. It's a combination of other ministries. And you used the example a couple of times about industry and how it benefits but wanting to make sure that things were protected properly i.e. the water. And so Environment would be involved. The Ministry of Environment would be involved or the Minister of Environment would be involved. Often the Minister of Corrections and Policing is involved depending on the subject matter, as well as often both Health ministers will sit in on meetings because so often the subject crosses different ministries.

And I guess I am, as the Minister of Northern Affairs, kind of a conduit to hopefully bring all the ministers together — at least when the request comes in of ourselves and we know the subject matter — then making sure I have the proper people in the room that can hear their concerns and move on from there. But with that, I'll just turn it over to Sheldon to further it.

**Mr. Green:** — Good afternoon. Sheldon Green, acting deputy minister of Government Relations and for First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs. Thank you for the question. You asked about the amount of involvement we have in and around northern communities, where we're working with a variety of other agencies and so forth. And so I can speak to a few examples.

For example, on the infrastructure side, it's daily and weekly interactions that are occurring between our officials, through the northern municipal services branch, with individual municipalities. We work very closely with SaskWater, based out of Prince Albert. They do a lot of work on projects that the ministry is assisting to coordinate, big, big projects. For example, regional solid waste management is one. But there's a variety of them related to other individual projects — water, wastewater in multiple communities, various other types of community projects where SaskWater will provide some engineering services to us to help us understand the issues related to it, if it's in a settlement that's administered through the northern Saskatchewan administration district.

And so that work, I've mentioned close working relationships with SaskWater weekly, almost daily in many weeks. Certainly the Ministry of Environment is commonly involved in a lot of those discussions, along with Indigenous Services Canada. And then of course the individual communities themselves. And that's ongoing all the time as a staple of our business.

I think another example that I can give where we're working closely with counterparts to ensure that we've got effective services for citizens in northern Saskatchewan is work that's led by the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency. Just recently they put out a call and speaking with different ministries as to, can we identify employees that have been a part of emergency response in previous years and have received some training or do we have new volunteers from the ministry that would be willing to obtain some training should there be need for them to be deployed as the fire season gets into play, for assisting with evacuations and related services?

And I'm very proud of the ministry. We've had a number of people, a few from previous deployments that have put their name forward again, and we're happy to support that cause along with all ministries and agencies of government being led by SPSA [Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency]. And then we've got a few new recruits this year, volunteers that will be taking training soon to support. So those are a couple of key examples.

[16:15]

**Mr. Vermette:** — And I appreciate the information. And I did talk a little bit about the crime area — and I didn't get much — and the concerns ongoing. If there's any way you guys are working with Justice? Or do you work with local RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], local communities to deal with First Nations, Métis in the North that you work with when it comes to

justice and, as I said, the crime? And just watching the violence and what's going on in some of our northern communities, like it's, you're hearing leaders, the alarm bells are going off. They're doing what they're going to . . . If you could touch on that area I asked about.

And maybe I went on with my question quite a bit, but I think it owes, you know, some attention to the families that have lost loved ones, to those leaders that are trying to say, we're trying to do what we can. And I think about, you know, Pelican has declared certain emergencies. So I just want to see if you guys have worked in any way with other ministries to bring in services and help and address the issues that they've raised.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — The ministry really isn't the lead on many of these areas such as, you know, the issue around crime and escalating crime and the violence of the crime. On the addictions piece and the potency of drugs, we don't tend to lead that. Other ministries will. But we sit on the committees that are struck to deal with those, various committees and Sheldon will talk a little bit about the SPSA committee that we sit on as well as others that come forward.

So quite often the community will talk to another minister other than myself, but that doesn't mean we're not privy to what that conversation is or what the committee that is dealing with that specific issue, that we're understanding and know what that committee is talking about. Because for most committees we have representation, especially if it has anything to do with First Nations and Métis.

But I'll let Sheldon kind of get into the detail of the different committees that we sit on, as well as he's going to touch on the targeted sector support initiative too.

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. I'll mention, as Minister noted, we're not leading the committees but we do sit on several. And one I'll note that's led by Justice is the community safety well-being committee. Representatives from our northern office do participate on that committee with them so they're privy to all of the activity of the committee and are working on it. We also sit on the provincial emergency operations centre with the SPSA if those various tiers of work get activated for any kind of community safety activities.

And then under our targeted sector support initiative — which is, in Minister's remarks, he noted is funded through the municipal revenue-sharing program — we work on that initiative with municipal associations, and community safety officer programming is an eligible activity if municipalities want to jointly work on it together. Generally what we've seen with the dollars in communities are using it either as a kick-start to help fund an initiative or undertake feasibility because they work closely with the ministry of Corrections, Public Safety, and Policing if they're looking at setting up a community safety officer program.

The targeted sector support initiative will provide grants based on applications of eligible costs up to \$100,000 to assist with the kick-starting of the initiative or feasibility work or a business case if you will, but no more than 75 per cent of the costs of the program up to 100,000.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — The other thing with the targeted sector support, it isn't just a community unto themselves. They have to combine with other communities, whether it's an urban municipality with a rural municipality, an urban municipality with a First Nation, that can be the partnering community. And we've seen that already in some situations.

**Mr. Vermette:** — I'm not going to take a lot more time because I know my colleague will be taking over here shortly. I'm just going to wind up with a, I guess, question or raise some awareness. As I said, northern people, whether it's our leaders, want to have safe roads to travel on. They want to make sure their community's taken care of. They want to feel like they're part of the province. They don't want to feel like the NAD [northern administration district] line's there, and they're not.

And I've heard that for years and years, and you know, myself as the MLA have tried to advocate. And I know there's been many — whether it's petitions, meetings, awareness to government, estimates, whatever, question period — to raise the issues about northern people and the challenges that we're faced.

And I think about Highway 106, the Hanson Lake Road. I think about Highway 102. And I know that people have done . . . Many of the other roads in the North, you know, that have challenges. And industry. And why I bring this up, also I think about cell service and it's about safety.

And I'll leave this with the minister, and you know, maybe some way you can talk to the other ministries to say hey, look there is a serious issue about safety on the Hanson Lake — Highway 106, Hanson Lake Road — with cell service. It would be nice to see SaskTel, you know, start a phase-in of towers for cell service for safety. Leaders, families who've had accidents, who have lost loved ones, and say that if they would've had cell service for emergency, that would be important.

So I leave that with you not to try to attack, but saying in a good way as, you know, the Minister of Northern Affairs, if you could advocate on some of those files. And I know you hear them, but I'm passing that on. Because I've even talked to some of your colleagues who, different times we've had conversations and encouraged them. And they were even going to encourage to say it's important; it's about safety. You know, people travelling Hanson Lake and many northern roads. But I think about Hanson Lake with tourists and everything else.

I share that with you. I share some of the highway issues. And I just want to say, you know, where there's ways to work together for our northern people, you know, we want to work. And it's easy to sit here and can criticize and say, but sometimes . . . I'll leave it to my colleagues if they want to do more of that. Where I'm at, at the end of this process, is to say about the serious issues that are facing our northern people.

And hopefully the minister's office of Northern Affairs and, you know, those individuals working in there can hear where I'm coming from in saying we want to be a part, our North to feel good. We want to feel part of the communities. We want to feel a part of the province. We want to know our government hears us, our issues and the concerns. And I share that with respect, and hopefully you can advocate when it comes to some of the things I've talked about today.

And again we will have our differences some days, but sometimes it's the right thing to do. And I know leaders, I know families have asked and recently just asked me about certain roads, cell service, and the challenges, you know, when we talk about crime and everything else. And I've shared that with you. I don't want to take much more time. I know my colleague has questions. I just want to share that with you, Minister, and hopefully some point, you know, some of those issues can be addressed with your ministry, other ministries to make sure that the concerns have been raised, and that we've done our job — I've done my part; you've done your part — and we'll let the powers to be.

So with that I'll just say thank the committee, thank the Chair for allowing me some time to bring up some of the concerns of northern Saskatchewan.

Oh, the last thing I'd say, if you could later break down . . . And I said the funding that's been allocated to First Nations and Métis — and if it's not done right away for the committee, later — could we make sure that we have the breakdowns of those dollars that are going to the different First Nations and Métis so we can have a good look at it, seeing where the dollars are being utilized? If I could ask you to do that, that would be great.

**Mr. Markewich:** — Thank you for the question. Jeff Markewich, assistant deputy minister. For the 2024-25 budget, we do provide approximately \$255.2 million for targeted program funding primarily for First Nations and Métis organizations. This represents an increase of 6.1 million or 2.4 per cent from prior year. This funding does exclude provincial expenditures that may be accessed by the general public which also provide benefits to First Nations and Métis people.

I'll just kind of go through the list. We have it by other ministries as well here.

So for Advanced Education, \$19.8 million for estimate of funding targeted to First Nations and Métis initiatives and institutions.

For Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, 21.6 million for First Nations on-reserve policing and enhanced policing.

For Education, 5.1 million for Indigenous outcomes, 3.8 million for First Nations and Métis Achievement Fund, 0.2 million for Junior Achievement of Saskatchewan.

For Government Relations: \$91.2 million for gaming agreement payments; 800,000 for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls+ Community Response Fund; 400,000 for First Nations and Métis partnership projects and sponsorships; \$1 million for the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund; 300,000 for treaty land entitlement.

For Health there's \$3.5 million for Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan Inc., \$2.2 million for Valley Hill Youth Treatment Centre.

For Highways, 600,000 for First Nations apprenticeship.

[16:30]

Immigration and Career Training, \$27.6 million for estimate of funding targeted for First Nations and Métis programs, partnerships, initiatives, and institutes to increase Indigenous participation in the workforce.

For the Justice and Attorney General: \$4.3 million for community justice alternative measures program; \$2.8 million for community-based organizations; 1.8 million for northern victim services; 1.3 million for interpersonal violence and abuse programs, transition houses, and northern transportation; 0.6 million for Aboriginal resource officer program; 0.6 million for Aboriginal family violence initiatives; 0.4 million for Aboriginal crime prevention initiatives; 1.3 million for Aboriginal court worker program.

For Parks, Culture and Sport, 0.6 million for the Wanuskewin Heritage Park.

For Social Services: 31 million for First Nations and Métis residential services; 20.1 million for First Nations and Métis preventative supports; 3.7 million for First Nations case management payments programs; 2 million for First Nations-provided service delivery; 1.9 million for First Nations group homes; 1.9 million for Family Finders program; 0.8 million for First Nations and Métis provincial coordination.

For Trade and Export Development, 1.5 million for First Nations resource agreements, and 0.5 million for Sask Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation.

That makes up the \$255.2 million.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — And just further to that, it isn't really broken up kind of north-south. And that was part of your question, is the north-south . . . And it's not really broke up that way.

But I can say that from my recollection when we talk about issues in cabinet or in caucus, we don't tend to talk about, you know, so much for the North and so much for the South. We talk about what is best for the province overall. I don't remember it kind of being broke up that way. And you know, I mean, I think maybe the answer . . .

And I listened to some of the estimates on Highways, and I know the minister was saying we don't have an allotment for the North; we don't have an allotment for the South. It's which roads need the repair, and there's a lot of things that go into it. So it's an issue of infrastructure provincial-wide, not just specifically to one area of the province.

I think some years, you know, there'd be more into the . . . I think at the estimates, of what I remember, there was a couple years ago more in the North than there was last year. But that was because of a couple specific projects that were being undertaken.

So I would say over again that it isn't really divided. And we don't have conversations, so much for the North, so much for the South, because we don't look at it that way. I really believe an effective government would look at it as what's best for the province, all of us together. And that's generally the conversations that we have. What is best for all, taking into consideration some of the uniquenesses in various parts of the

province.

And certainly there is some uniqueness for northern Saskatchewan, as there is when you come to, for example, municipal government in the Southwest where there's very few people living in an RM [rural municipality], and how do you manage an RM? So that would be the uniquenesses of areas, but it's overall a discussion about what's best for the province.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Well I'm actually, I'm going to be done and pass it on here. But the only comment . . . I'll just wind up.

And I know within the NAD line, that means a lot to northern people when they have the NAD line, when we talk about the North or South, because of the resources. I understand it's for . . . We feel like we're putting our part in and the South probably feels the same way, the resources. But the North, the NAD line, especially the challenge we have . . . Again I'll advocate as our northern people do and I'll continue to say the NAD line's important. And it's protected for a reason and there for a reason. It has been put there for a reason, so that a population isn't forgotten about.

So with that, Mr. Minister, I'll thank you and your officials for answering my questions and trying to hear some of the concerns that the people that I represent want me to share. So thank you, mister . . . committee.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Vermette, and thank you for your comments and your questions. We'll now open up the questions for Ms. Nippi-Albright.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the presentation. It was very . . . Lots in there that you guys, you are presenting.

So I'm just cognizant of the time. I'm asking if, I guess the questions that . . . The answers that you provide, too, for my questions, if they're long, if they could be tabled and provided at the end of session. Because I'm just, I have a lot of questions here, and I'm sure that you want to share as much with the work that you're doing within the ministry to provide those. And also if the answers could be as concise as possible, if that's at all possible, just because of the time.

And like my colleague from Cumberland, I'll be asking . . . kind of delving a little bit more into the Northern Affairs piece of it, because I just think the North is very vast, you know, and we have a lot of developing happening in the North. And the questions that I'll probably ask are just related to kind of like the breakdown of, you know, the allocations, but more in particular, the percentage. Like, what is the percentage of the allocation in the 2024 to '25 northern revenue funding amongst northern municipalities?

Because of the uniqueness — and I hear that you're looking at more of what's in the best interest of the province — but often, like my colleague has said, is that sometimes the North feels forgotten. And I just want to know what the percentage is in terms of the revenue funding amongst the northern municipalities.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you for the question, and I'll try

and be as concise as I can possibly be. That isn't all that concise sometimes. So of the municipal revenue sharing program that was allocated and started in 2009-10 I believe — thought of before and worked on before — it follows along with the allotment that was agreed upon by SUMA, SARM, the New North. All the associations worked together in a room trying to determine, if this is the pool of money, how do we properly divide it?

It doesn't just go on population. There are a number of other factors that go in to determining, such as the need, for example, in certain communities. And you know, you'll probably want to identify the North. So in the North, for the northern district it's 25.177 million this year, which is up 14 per cent from last year. So a significant increase.

It accounts for 7.4 per cent of the total revenue sharing pool. And maybe, Sheldon, if you want to just touch on a little bit more on how that 7.4 was determined. Sure.

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. As the minister noted, when the program was being developed in roughly around 2008 and into 2009, the discussions took a look at the overall amount that municipal governments were spending and looked at it in the four pieces of the pie, if you will, of the program. There's northern municipalities, towns and villages, cities, and rural municipalities.

And when it was determined the provincial interest in the spending area for that type of municipality, that's what determined the original amounts that were determined. And the way the program exists today is it's 7.4 per cent, as the minister noted, or the 25.177 million is for northern municipalities. Rural municipalities are at 28.5 per cent, or 96.967 million. Towns and villages are at 16.2 per cent of the pool, for 55.118 million. And cities at 47.9 per cent of the overall annual program budget, and the cities' total is 162.974 million. And that's our total estimated appropriation at 340.2 million for this year.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. Okay. So I just wanted to know, can you tell me just a little bit about your advocacy and coordination on northern issues? How does that . . .

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — That was kind of a broad question, and so I think a lot of what I had answered to MLA Vermette about how we get input from northern Saskatchewan . . . I think you were here and heard that, so I won't go over all of that. But what I will say is, again, any group that wants to come forward and speak to us either directly as a government or through their local MLA or MLA Lemaigre in Athabasca, that then comes back to us, that input comes back to us.

But we have a number of programs that we're just not kind of waiting . . . you know, we're out there in the communities with programs. And Giselle will go over, touched on one of them already, but go over that one and then a few other programs that we have that we think we're trying to hear what the, you know, people in the North are asking for or wanting to see in the future.

**Ms. Marcotte:** — So through northern . . . Giselle Marcotte. Through northern engagement, we work with partners to ensure that government's informed of the challenges and opportunities faced by communities and considers northern perspectives in

government initiatives and policies and programs.

We provide secretariat support and strategic coordination to the Embracing Life initiative, which has a focus on community wellness and in reducing suicides. And it's comprised of a variety of human service agencies, youth, and youth representatives from the North.

It has worked with over 50 youth in the summer of 2023, which facilitated surveys, interviews, and focus groups on questions about youth and their mental health, what they wanted to tell us about it. It hosted the Creating Hope Through Action northern empowerment forum, in which 365 participants attended ranging from a variety of human services fields of community, wellness, and suicide prevention.

[16:45]

The new mobile app or the mobile app that was launched in 2022 along with a website about suicide prevention resources, and every year there are more and more community representatives who join that committee.

Moving along to other actions where we support the government's health and mental health prevention and a variety of strategies, we also contribute to the Canadian uranium workers study to bring information to that about planning, research, and coordinated funding and agreements with researchers. And we're also exploring with our partners how to improve training of apprentices in northern Saskatchewan.

We support engagement and build an understanding of northern industrial developments through the northern Saskatchewan environmental quality committee, and the NSEQC participated in a federal hearing in March on the reclamation of the historic Beaverlodge properties near Uranium City, providing a northern perspective to regulators.

We help fund the delivery of costs of core services — such as the administration, water and sewer operations, transportation, landfills — through the northern municipal revenue sharing, such as Sheldon and the minister just spoke about.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you for that. It would also be really good and very interesting to just have that presented so that we have that list, so when we go out and share with the communities that these are the programs that are already happening. So if that could be tabled, that would be great.

I know you've spoken to a few of the . . . like Embracing Life, but I'm just wondering when you've met with northern municipalities and New North, so what have they identified were the three or four key issues that were raised by them?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So you asked kind of the top three, and that's difficult to say what the top three are because it varies from community to community and community leader to community leader. But definitely, and it's again and I wouldn't say this is specific to northern Saskatchewan, but definitely comes up in northern Saskatchewan is the need for infrastructure. And that takes on a lot of different forms. When we talk about infrastructure we can . . . A lot of times people think it's kind of the water and sewer, but infrastructure is a lot of, you know, it

can be recreation, it can be a lot of different . . . Infrastructure is our highways, you know. And so definitely hear concerns on highways. Definitely hear concerns on housing. Is there enough housing in the area, affordable housing? Keeping the housing stock up, we hear about that.

The other thing that we hear, and you know, it was already brought up by MLA Vermette, is the issue around safety. That's definitely an issue that we hear about. We also hear about the, again the addictions issues, and the mental health issues that kind of run hand in hand often. It's hard to say which is first, whether it's mental health that gets into addictions or addictions that affect mental health, but we hear that.

I could say we hear kind of those in most communities, but for sure in the North. So that's certainly more than three. It's hard to narrow it down to three, but we hear concerns on those various issues.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. Thank you. So there's an affordability crisis occurring throughout Saskatchewan. However it is especially acute in northern Saskatchewan, and it gets worse the further north you go. Like the food prices have escalated by 20 per cent over the last three years, and even more so in the North, causing challenges for families to provide nutritional meals for their children. Has the government considered providing any type of additional assistance for northern families and children in this budget?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you for the question. And certainly we know that cost of living is a major factor across the province, but more acute in the North for sure, just because of the transportation charges and everything else. So it is a bit of a pinch. This will sound like a bit of a stuck record, but from our perspective of what I can answer on your question is the municipal revenue sharing has gone up 14.2, so the communities are getting certainly more revenue to operate their communities. When you get into specifics regarding family, really would be more of a Social Services ministry that you would be asking, is there any help to help families. Also on the housing front, is there any help on the housing front.

That would be . . . There are programs and, you know, we could give the base number but can't give any background as to, you know, what those programs look like because it really would be best asked and answered by the Minister of Social Services. And depending on, you know, how far you want to go on the family piece, there's other ministries that are involved. We're not as much because, you know, we're kind of on the Government Relations side.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you for that. I'm just going to go back on the . . . talking about the roads again, and my colleague has shared extensively about some of the roads. You know, we all know that the North relies heavily on its road system to deal with the distances between the communities. And they're huge, you know. They're huge. So yet in the 2024 budget announced reductions in northern transportation infrastructure funding amount to 16 million, so this will apply to roads, ice roads, airport infrastructure.

What will the impact of these reductions on northern roads infrastructure, the infrastructure in those northern roads, but also

what will be the impact on northern airports? And could you provide details of provincial funding for road construction and maintenance within the northern area district over the last 15 years but more so of what plans do you have in this next five years? Do you have plans going forward in ensuring that roads for the North are happening?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thanks for the question. Again, you know, and it's not that I don't want to answer, and I probably could have a couple of years ago when I was the minister responsible for Highways but I'm not anymore. And so I really don't have a . . . I know that there was a change in the budget and I think, as I said . . . I actually happened to be watching Highways estimates because I don't . . . Maybe the NHL [National Hockey League] playoffs weren't on yet and so I was having a hard time finding some good TV.

So I was watching — and not that that wasn't good TV — I was watching Highways estimates. And I know this came up, and Minister Carr went through kind of the detail of the discrepancy, not the discrepancy, the differences from the previous budget to this budget and where we're going to be.

I do know one thing is that the highways budget is needed throughout the province. I was at a grand opening of a hall in Odessa on Saturday night, and I had a number of people talk to me about 35 Highway, which is a highway that runs right through the middle of my constituency going north-south, and some of the problems that highway has faced. And I'm proud to say that they're doing a small part of it from Qu'Appelle to No. 10, which is good.

I had announced that two years ago in Odessa when I was there that they would be doing that portion, and then we put the money out and the contractor didn't get it done last year. So I was glad there was another event in Odessa on Saturday where I could say, it's getting done this year.

But I really can't kind of get into the detail as to the variations year over year for highways in northern Saskatchewan. I think it was explained quite a bit in that last year more money went because they fixed an airport runway and had a couple of major capital projects. That maybe has dropped off this year, but that doesn't mean it won't be another capital project for next year and the year following.

What I do know though, just really briefly, is how important the gas tax is to funding highways in this province. That is extremely, extremely important. And you know, I don't know exactly what it is but it's well over 500, north of \$500 million annually that goes to fixing highways strictly from the gas tax alone. And we don't have what we could call a dedicated tax, but I do know that every cent that is collected on gas tax goes straight back into highways. None is diverted off.

And many years ago about half to three-quarters of the gas tax went to highways. The other half went to other programs in the government. When we became government we went to 100 per cent-plus of the gas tax goes to fixing roads.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. This is very interesting. I was very intrigued with the issues that northern communities, that they face. And they're very unique. And one of them, I

actually had . . . I was able to drive on one of their winter roads, their ice roads. It's very scary from being down here driving on the roads.

But one of the things that has changed, and I've heard more so in the last several years, about the ice roads . . . We know that climate change is having an impact in all areas of the province. And of course there's drought in the South, but in the North it's a decline in the winter temperatures that's causing problems. So residents of isolated communities in the far North depend on ice roads to get themselves and their supplies in and out. And at present the roads are only lasting two or three months, whereas in the past they were much longer.

[17:00]

So has the ministry or the government begun to explore how you're going to help those communities when there's such a small window to use the ice roads? Is there a plan, or any I guess maybe a coordinated effort with the ministry to liaison to say that this is a challenge our northern community's facing? And what is it that we can do to ensure that we can't . . . You know, the time that they can drive on those ice roads is getting shorter and shorter. Is there a way that we could perhaps help them? Is that something that you will be doing or have done with the highways, to look at those and address those unique challenges people in the north face regarding ice roads?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Again I don't want to, you know, shy away from the questions, but there are certain questions that are better dealt with by other ministries. But we'll take kind of a broader brush at it. You know, when those issues are coming forward, and if they're coming through our ministry, I'd be sure to make sure that the Minister of Highways would know. And you're just touching on ice roads and the impact that that would have.

We deal kind of through the Saskatchewan SPSA. That would kind of be the lead on this in a lot of areas. And I'm maybe going to let Brad talk a little bit about kind of the work that they do to ensure that communities are safe, they have a safe fuel supply, they have safe food supply in light of perhaps a changing season for transportation.

**Mr. Henry:** — Hi. Thanks for the question. This is Brad Henry with northern municipal services. We work pretty closely with the Ministry of Highways and Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency to make sure that the communities in the far North that have direct use of those ice roads, that their needs are met independent of whether those ice roads are in place or not. Like Lake Athabasca, Wollaston Lake for example. They have barge services as well as well as the fly-in services when there's equipment needed and the ice road is unavailable.

Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency takes responsibilities for food security in those communities very seriously, and so they have a good handle on those situations. And like I say, we really liaise with Highways quite regularly on the availability of those services.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. So I'm just going to look at some of the broader questions regarding the northern community. Cumberland House has been facing a shortage of water for the

community and a shortage of water to maintain the Cumberland House river delta. Both are well documented.

With the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project going forward, can you comment on what the impact of that project will be on the amount of water flowing into the delta? And in this budget what dollars are . . . or are there dollars allocated to address the Cumberland House river delta?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Again I don't want to avoid the question, but that really . . . We don't have . . . That would be better handled by the Water Security Agency. I think you've probably heard it come up at SUMA, and I heard our minister answer the question. I am not going to repeat his answer, but we are aware.

And certainly the community of Cumberland House has been in touch with government, but it isn't necessarily . . . It would not come through us as much as it would go directly to the Water Security Agency.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So do you work in close connection with them just to ensure that you're all on the same page on the issues that are impacting those communities?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — What I would say is that the community would be in touch with the Water Security Agency. If I needed to know, I could sit in on a briefing. You know, I could get a briefing note. If the community didn't feel that they were getting maybe the ear of the minister like they wanted, I can certainly help with that. But as far as the specific issue, that would be directly with the minister responsible.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. Okay, I'll move on here. You know, when we look at the continuing increase in the number of acres almost every year that are subject to forest fires, in the North is a continuing issue. And we all saw that last year when we had the smoke coming from the North. And it makes it difficult for individuals, healthy people, to be in that smoke, but it's worse on those that have other health issues. So has there been any financial resources being allocated for that in terms of forest fires here in the province?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Money for individuals that would be . . .

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Communities. Community response, yes.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — If I don't answer quite the way that you think, myself and Brad . . . But we do. We work very closely with the SPSA. Again they need to be the lead on these files. And when it comes to forest fires in the North, they are the lead. We sit in on the meetings. We're briefed on a regular basis as to what's going on and sit in on the meetings.

We do, however though, do some work with communities in advance of, to try and help mitigate. And I'll let Brad talk a little bit about the provincial funding — there is some federal funding — but give an example or two of communities that we've been able to, you know, do whether it's a fire block or whatever around a community. But I'll let Brad kind of get into those details.

**Mr. Henry:** — Sure. We work directly with Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency to deliver funding, to deliver projects funded by the Saskatchewan wildfire risk reduction and community resilience project. And that's funded by the federal government's Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund.

The work that we primarily do is brush clearing and other wildfire mitigation work within municipal boundaries. We've been doing that work since 2019, and we're projected to continue till 2028. The funding that was delivered last year was 855,000, was spent in 2023, and 663,000 of that was funded by the federal government.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. Just more on that. Like last year, as many watched TV, watched the news of some of the communities, some of the municipalities that have burned down in Alberta and BC, it kind of brings it home close to Saskatchewan with the forest fires.

So what happens . . . I guess the question is, what plans are in place in terms of a contingency fund for if a municipality, a community burned down completely? Is there any contingency fund in there to ensure that the northern municipalities, communities, if their community burned down, that there would be something in place for them to rebuild?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So that's a bit of a broad question and quite a hypothetical. But do we, through our ministry, have a fund set up that would replace a village or a community that got burned down? No, we don't. The vast majority of money that goes in goes into prevention. And again, it would be again through SPSA. And also under SPSA is a PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] fund for the disaster relief. If there is disaster relief, that would come through PDAP, which I think has a bit of a federal component too. Does it? I'd have to check that out. I shouldn't commit the federal dollars before we have them.

But certainly the SPSA and PDAP would be the best to answer your question. What I would say though is that we do, you know, put a lot into the prevention, whether it's the water tankers, and there'll be more on that in a coming announcement in the very near future that I won't scoop the poor minister on. But yeah, I think that's the best answer I can give.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay, thank you. So how often do you evaluate the effectiveness of the northern municipal funding that you operate to see if you're giving the right amounts? And I would assume that you would coordinate that with the municipalities on a regular basis to say, hey we need more money. Like how often do you do that?

[17:15]

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'll get Sheldon to answer most of the question, but it is really around funding municipalities and how do we determine if it's enough. And what I would say, I've been the minister for four years. I haven't had a municipality that's told me we give too much. There's none of them that say, oh we don't need any more; we'll give you that back. They all would like more just because of their costs and their infrastructure needs. They'll always have infrastructure needs, and we certainly realize that. So that's kind of a broad overview.

I think it's safe to say that we review the programs on a regular basis, but Sheldon can get into the municipal revenue sharing and what's in regulation a little bit. I do know that we rely, certainly from municipality to municipality, on their input. But we also very much rely on their associations. SUMA has a wide network of, you know, representatives on their board from cities to towns to villages. We rely very heavily on what the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities has to say.

There are I think many that are finding more and more pressure as some of the small villages are being turned over to hamlets and hamlets being absorbed into RMs. So there's all of that going on each and every year, the changing demographic and population numbers.

And then of course we rely also on what we hear from the northern communities as well as the New North. So it's a combination of all of those that get us to where we are on our main program. Kind of the flagship through the ministry is the municipal revenue-sharing program. But with that, I'll just turn it over to Sheldon to go into more detail.

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. It's safe to say that we're constantly monitoring the effectiveness of all the funding programs across the ministry — our administrative effectiveness with it; feedback that we're getting from our client municipalities — and looking to make changes.

A recent example is some increased flexibility that we've added to the northern capital grants program just recently, or the regulations to that program, just to increase the flexibility for communities and how those dollars can be spent.

Under municipal revenue sharing there is, under *The Municipal Grants Regulations* there's a requirement to review the program's percentage breakdowns within the program to each of the pools once every five years.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. Thank you. That's fantastic. That's good. I just wanted to know if there was that. Thank you.

So I'm just going to move . . . I'm just cognizant of the time, so I'm just going to ask some questions and turn it completely over to the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation. No, you don't want that one? I'll give you some questions on that one. One; I'll be gentle.

So Saskatchewan . . . the 75 million of loan guarantees was launched in 2022. I know that Indigenous folks, the folks that are very well versed in this, have shared that hey, it's not enough when Alberta is investing 3 billion and we're only at 2.5 per cent of Alberta's funding. And Minister Harrison and his officials last week have stated that there wasn't a single project that has been approved.

So I'm just wondering, he said there wasn't a project that has been approved. Are we looking at . . . What happened since 2022 because we're in 2024 and not a project has been improved. Are there going to be projects approved?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I would, again, love to answer the question but that just is not in our . . . I don't have any officials, unless any of the officials know, would want to take that. It would



be under the Trade and Export Development for Minister Harrison.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. Well thank you, thank you for that. Okay, so I got that question out of the way. I knew that you may not be able to answer that.

So just moving into the Indigenous area, you know, Indigenous people or the folks in Ile-a-la-Crosse, you know, we've heard about their concerns regarding the province not acknowledging that they ran the Indian residential school out there, and there hasn't been any apologies made or any dollars allocated in that area.

Can you tell me a little bit more what, I guess, the ministry is looking at in terms of the Ile-a-la-Crosse residential school survivors who've asked for an apology and also some dollars for compensation?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'm going to sound like a bit of a stuck record here. I'm sorry but, you know, that really is not in our avenue. Number one, it would be Justice Minister Eyre. And number two, there is litigation around it, so you probably won't hear a lot of . . . any of us speaking about it much because it's in front of the courts.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. Well thank you for that. So okay, let's go to truth and reconciliation.

**The Chair:** — If I could just intervene for one second? If you could please get the questions on line with Government Relations.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Yeah, I will. Yeah.

**The Chair:** — You might be able to get some answers.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Yeah. So hopefully truth and reconciliation is in align with Government Relations. So when you're looking at truth and reconciliation, are there any dollars set aside or allocated for annual evaluation on the effectiveness of reconciliation?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — That one we can answer. That's good. At least can certainly come closer to the answer. And it's a big . . . You know, when you said evaluate, it's a little bit difficult to know like what are you wanting us to evaluate? But I think that we have a few programs that Giselle will go through where money is going that deals with reconciliation. But you know, reconciliation isn't a program; it is a way of being, reconciling. So I'll turn it over to Giselle.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Yeah.

**Ms. Marcotte:** — Thank you. So with reference to the grant programs that we have, the community partnership projects — which are applied to by communities and organizations that want to put on a variety of projects that seek to support reconciliation — a couple of notable ones of recent is the cultural resurgence and reconciliation through ceremony, and the Battlefords Regional Community Coalition for regional anti-racism action plan.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Perfect. Thank you. Thank you for that. It's wonderful to see communities coming together, accessing those funds. And I know that from the work in my past, having to apply for dollars and do our own evaluation, to do the effectiveness.

But my question was simply around how the government, how do you measure your effectiveness in terms . . . Is it dollars spent? Is it that we've actually changed the way we work? Like how do you do that?

And is there dollars set aside to evaluate yourself as a government to say, hey we've changed some of our thinking or ways of doing when it comes to reconciliation? Is there dollars set aside for that?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I think the question was, do you have a budget line? Is there a dollar value set aside for evaluating reconciliation? And no, there isn't. It's a much bigger process because, as I said, it's not just a program; it's a way of being. And whether it's economic reconciliation, whether it's relationship reconciliation, there's just so many variations.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So have you created some kind of outcomes and a plan for that to say, just kind of target measures to say, like in economic reconciliation we have X numbers participating in economic reconciliation? Do you have any kind of a document that says this is what we aim to achieve at the end where we will know that we have achieved reconciliation?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I just don't know, like at the end we've achieved reconciliation; I don't think there is an end date. There is no end date. This is, you know, this will go on for as long as we're around, continual reconciliation.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Yeah.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — There is no end date. And certain targets and metrics, I think what we could do is we can talk about all the areas and avenues and positive examples of reconciliation. We could certainly do that and get into that.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Do you have a document for that where you have . . . and can you share it with us?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — We wouldn't necessarily have a document like that because it crosses all ministries. You know, for example, what is Trade and Export Development doing regarding reconciliation? What is Social Services doing regarding reconciliation?

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So is that something that the government would think about because with Government Relations, your ministry, your department intersects with many of the ministries. And is that something that could be presented down the road to say, hey, where are we all as different ministries in terms of achieving reconciliation? Is that something that you guys as a government would think about?

[17:30]

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So we do have a roll-up from other ministries. I think it's probably exactly what you're looking for.

And we had presented it to opposition before in previous estimates when people had asked. So we can endeavour to get that to you. I think it's 175 pages or 77 pages of what has been done through ministry to ministry on reconciliation.

I forget the . . . I think of the Calls to Action or commitments put out that were directly targeted towards the province, we've filled 30 of 34 Calls to Action; and 17, I believe, that were more general to the federal government that we've been working on ourselves here in the province. So I think, always more work to do, but a pretty good track record over the past number of years.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — That is wonderful. And if you can share those, that . . . Those are very, very helpful. Thank you.

I'm just going to move on to the Métis Development Fund. There's been an increase. What is that increase for?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So this really is targeted around the Clarence Campeau Development Fund, is what this is. And I just kind of, as the minister, want to put out a good word of the great work that the Clarence Campeau Development Fund does.

I've had the opportunity to be involved with the organization over the last four years, and I know of a number of the businesses that have been successful because of it. One I stop at all the time when I'm going out to where I live by Fort Qu'Appelle, in White City there's a great store there that was funded through the Clarence Campeau Development Fund and supplying an amazing service to the community of White City and Emerald Park.

But it's a great success story. And I think I'll get Jeff to talk about the specific numbers of where it was and where we're at this year.

**Mr. Markewich:** — Thank you for the question. So as the minister said, for the Métis Development Fund the funds in there go to the Clarence Campeau Development Fund. For '24-25 the amount is 2.477 million compared to 1.591 from last year. When creating the budget for gaming payments, they're based upon the projected casino profits. So the estimates that were made is kind of what is in alignment with how the formulas work.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. Yes, and they do phenomenal work, the Clarence Campeau foundation. So it's wonderful to see the increase that they have received.

So I'm just going to move on to the MMIW [missing and murdered Indigenous women] and girls and two-spirit. So there's an increase, and you've increased since, I think, the last couple years or so it's been increased.

So out of the dollars that have been put in there, how many cases of missing Indigenous women and girls from Saskatchewan were solved in the 2023-24 by the Saskatchewan police forces and each of the previous years? Or have there been any?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — A couple of things. First of all, I just wanted to go back to the Clarence Campeau Development Fund and just report to the committee that that's an agreement between the Clarence Campeau Development Fund and the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. And the agreement had kind of come to an end, but there has been a new agreement struck, which is really good

news for all that, you know, some security into the future for the CCDF [Clarence Campeau Development Fund]. Very good. As far as the government and MNS [Métis Nation of Saskatchewan], it would be between government and MNS, right.

As far as the question on murdered and missing Indigenous women, that would again be better talked to through Justice — we wouldn't have that — or through Corrections and Policing. But what we have is an extra \$400,000 that is going to a program that was in place for communities and groups to access these funds to put on programs or educate community as to the issue.

And you know, if you want to get further into depth, I know Giselle has examples of where that money has gone over the last couple years, and the fact that we've increased it by 400,000 moving forward is a positive.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Yes, that's good. There's no need. It actually is very interesting that the folks that I work with that keep me apprised of the activities that are happening. I just wanted to know, in some of the funding streams that you have for that, is there any — I guess, in the requirements that you have — any indicators in there that say that the situation is improving for Indigenous women in the dollars that you allocate?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I think your question was more, still again around measurement, was it? Evaluation?

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Well my question has been around, in your funding allocation and criteria, is there anything in there that asks about indicators to say the situation is improving? That MMIW doesn't need any more money because no women and girls are going missing. Is there anything in there that you have?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — No, not really. The programs are there to build support and resiliency in the community, that type of thing.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — And I guess we could ask is the program successful, in that the communities that have been successful in their grants have been very appreciative? We haven't had any trouble using the allotment of dollars that we've had. Now we're increasing the allotment, and I don't think there'll be any problem using the full allotment, so obviously there's good uptake. The communities and/or organizations feel like it's been effective, and we are just kind of taking their word as I'm, kind of, going back and evaluating what they did as much as the fact that they've built support and resiliency. But I'll turn it over to Giselle.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. I'm just cognizant of the time and I'm trying to get through some of my questions here. I just want to go to the gaming agreement. I know that this year it's down by over 2 million. And I just want to know what the impact of that decrease will be, and if there's any changes to that gaming agreement being discussed at the present time, and if there are any proposed changes.

**Mr. Markewich:** — I can answer that question. So the difference for the First Nations gaming agreements, once again, is based upon the gaming profits for casino profits for the SIGA

[Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority Inc.] casinos on that one. And the difference is 88.694 million this year for '24-25 compared to 90.818 million from the prior year. So the difference from the forecast from the one year to the next is primarily the online gaming casino profits. So it's a little less than it was in the previous year.

To your second part of the question, has there been any changes to the gaming framework agreement, it was last reviewed in 2022. It was updated actually in 2023, so it will be reviewed again within the five-year time frame. So I believe it's 2027 is the next time that it will be looked at again.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay, thank you. I just want to move now to kind of the treaty land entitlement. I know you spoke and gave an update on the dollars and also the new TLE framework agreements that have been signed. I know some of the . . . When Nations are looking to purchase land, there is a 90-day, supposed to be a 90-day turnaround to . . . And I could be mucking this up but I'll try my best to say, if a Nation wants to purchase land, they have to notify the government, saying we're interested in X area here and this is how many acres we want. And in the agreement that's what you have to do, and then there's a 90-day turnaround that's supposed to be happening.

So why is there a delay past the 90 days when the agreement says okay, the government says okay, we got your notice that you want to buy these lands. So is there a rationale for why we're having delays? Is that . . .

[17:45]

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I'll just give you kind of a broad overview, and then if you want to get into details, the ministry can probably help me on that. So if there is a TLE claim, for example, and they have 90 days, government has 90 days to respond, in that 90 days a lot of consultation has to happen. It has to happen with other First Nations. It has to happen with Métis communities. It has to happen with municipalities. All of that within that 90 days, you know, that you can take all the stakeholders and consult. If it's delayed, that's generally because of the consultation process that's slowing it down.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. Thank you for answering that. I was curious about that. So I'm sure you're wondering, what's her next question? She's going to ask that question, so I will ask it.

Duty-to-consult. So we know that the duty stems from the honour of the Crown and is derived from section 35 of Canada's *Constitution Act* of 1982, which recognizes and affirms Aboriginal treaty rights.

You know, a few years ago or when I became elected, we talked about the sale of Crown lands and leases, and last year the government halted the sale of Crown lands and leases. And inherent and treaty rights holders have had . . . that was their issue that they had was, you guys weren't consulting, right, in a meaningful way. Then you guys came and said, okay, we're going to halt the sale of Crown lands.

And what I've been hearing more and more lately is, it's the challenge around duty-to-consult is also in other ministries. It's

not just in agriculture; it's not just in . . . It's now going in forestry; it's going into the environment. And I often ask, okay, like you have to understand there's different ministries.

And one of the questions they often ask is, how is the minister liaising with the different ministries that there's challenges around duty-to-consult? And yeah, so that's one of the questions they ask and I'm like . . . because it's also not just . . . Forestry's coming up, you know, and inherent and treaty rights holders have not felt engaged in the development of the 20-year forestry plans. So those are questions that are now, like, they're just seeping into these other areas.

So I guess, what advice would you share with me to take back to those inherent and treaty rights holders around their perception of lack of meaningful consultation when it comes to forestry and now environment?

**Ms. Caderma:** — Hello. My name is Sherelyn Caderma and I'm the director of the Aboriginal consultation unit. So there are a number of things that our ministry does to support ministries to implement duty-to-consult. So for example, we provide advice as requested on the duty-to-consult process and what that looks like. We do training, so with the revised policy we've trained around 300 officials so that they would know how to do the new policy. So we do whatever we can to help ministries understand the duty-to-consult process and what that looks like.

A new aspect of a revised policy is the importance of relationship building, so our team supports relationship building. So if a community official wants us to be in the community, we'll reach out and do that. But also ministry officials, if they want us to support them in relationship building, we'll do that as well.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. So would you have . . . Thank you for that because that is precisely what I'm looking for. If you're able to provide that in like perhaps a one-pager and present it, then I could ensure that the Nations get that. So thank you for that answer and I'd be happy to take that to the communities as well going forward. But I'm just cognizant of the time.

So the consultation fund has increased to 600,000 which now totals a million dollars, which is great. It's wonderful that there's an increase to the consultation fund. So what portion of the \$600,000 will be used to evaluate the impact of the funding?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Can you just repeat that one more time?

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. \$600,000. You've increased it to \$600,000. Of that \$600,000, how much of that would be used to evaluate the impact of those dollars regarding duty-to-consult?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So in total it's a million-dollar fund, increased to a million-dollar fund. None of it is used to evaluate the impact. It's all used for communities to help build capacity, to bring on capacity, or help build capacity so that they can go through this process properly. We're not taking anything out to evaluate. We want all that money to go out to communities when the duty-to-consult has been triggered.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So have you and will you be looking at, okay, we've given a million dollars in this year. We want to know

of that million dollars that we're giving out, are we actually as a government effective, doing an effective job other than giving a million dollars out for consultation. Are we effective? Do you evaluate yourselves?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — As I mentioned, the fund is up to a million dollars, and if there are more requests over and above that, we've committed to funding that. We always have, in the past, when the fund was lower. We say right in the new duty-to-consult framework policy that it isn't kind of set in stone for 10 years. There'll be improvements if they're put forward.

In other words, continual improvement, not wait 10 years and then make a bunch of changes. It's going to be if we have input from organizations or individuals on how to improve the framework policy and we think it will be an improvement, we're certainly willing to do that. So it's not static or status quo like it was in the past.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Just, I have one more question here. In the past the government prepared annually a full listing of government expenditures for Indigenous people from the past year and then budgeted in the present year of 2024 to 2025.

Would you be able to provide a copy of that document before the session ends?

**Mr. Markewich:** — So just to answer the question, I believe that's the record that I read into the record here this afternoon already. And it is online actually.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Would you be able to . . . I have a visual disability, so often accessing documents for me online is a challenge. Is that something that you could present? Yeah? Perfect. Thank you. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Having reached the prior agreed-upon time for consideration of the Government Relations, we'll adjourn the consideration of these estimates. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Just I'd like to thank the committee for being here to allow us to go through our estimates. And also like to thank Hansard for the on and off of the light switches, thank you, and the opposition questions. But especially all the officials that are here. They're all chomping at the bit, wanting to have a question answered of them. No, they're not. But anyway I'd just like to thank . . . Some are. I'd just like to thank them all for being here, and we're going to see a lot of each other over the next 24 hours.

[18:00]

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

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — I just want to say thank you to the minister and the officials for answering questions and for all of those cutting into your supper break here and taking the time to be here. And also Hansard, thank you again for always doing your job here in the House. And thank you for both of you sitting here and also my colleague for sharing this time with me and asking questions. So thank you so much for answering the

questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. I would like to thank Minister McMorris and also his staff and all the . . . And Mr. Vermette and Ms. Albright for being here tonight, this evening. Mr. Vermette, do you have any closing comments?

**Mr. Vermette:** — Well if you're going to give me a chance, Mr. Chair, why not? Just more . . . I was here supporting my colleague in estimates and I'll ask the minister if you could ask her to please pay for my supper.

But no, on a serious note, I just again want to thank everyone for being here and again just trying to bring some of the issues that northern people face and hope, you know, we can one day deal with some of the issues that they take serious. So with that, I'll just ask your officials, the minister, and everyone else that's been here, thank you very much for your time and consideration of our questions and concerns.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. That concludes our time. We'll now recess till 7 p.m.

[The committee recessed from 18:01 until 18:58.]

**The Chair:** — Good evening. I'd like to welcome committee members back. Joining us now is Ms. Nicole Sarauer; and Mr. Matt Love, in for Erika Ritchie; and Mr. Daryl Harrison, in for Blaine McLeod.

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

#### **Subvote (CP01)**

**The Chair:** — Next on our agenda is the consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2, vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, central management and services, subvote (CP01). Minister Merriman is here with his officials. I will remind the officials to identify themselves and please do not touch the microphones. Hansard will do that.

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

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to introduce the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety's budget for this fiscal year, and I look forward to answering the committee's questions. This year's budget focuses on how we will continue to support Saskatchewan's Growth Plan by investing in safe communities, safe facilities, and supporting our workforce to deliver on the government's goals.

[19:00]

I'm joined today by deputy minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety, Dale Larsen. Also I have in the room this evening are Wanda Lamberti, acting assistant deputy minister of corporate services; Corey Zaharuk, assistant deputy minister, policing and community safety services; Scott Harron, assistant deputy minister of custody service; Josh Freistadt, assistant deputy minister of supervision and rehabilitation services. I have

Marlo Pritchard, the president of the SPSA; and I have Murray Cowan is the assistant commissioner of the firearms office. Now I'll ask the remaining officials to introduce themselves if they come up to the microphone.

This budget aligns with our government's record of investment in Saskatchewan's communities. In total we are investing approximately \$719 million in corrections, policing and community safety services for Saskatchewan residents. The investment of the '24-25 budget will address policing, community safety, and correction facilities, including offender programs and services and also support front-line staff.

The Government of Saskatchewan will enhance public safety and bolster law enforcement across the province through several initiatives this year. In particular I will comment on the funding provided by the government for the purposes of the RCMP operations, First Nation policing, municipal police, and Saskatchewan marshals services.

One of the largest areas of investment for us is the \$228 million in funding that we provide for RCMP operations in the province through the provincial police service agreement. Saskatchewan also provides a significant amount of additional funding to specialized RCMP units, such as the crime reduction, Saskatchewan traffic response, warrant enforcement and suppression teams.

Over the past year these policing teams have made critical public safety contributions in our communities by engaging important policing initiatives to respond to a range of concerning crime trends. For example, they have made significant illicit drug seizures, engaged in a range of trafficking investigations, and apprehended many offenders wanted on outstanding arrest warrants.

We are also dedicating \$21.7 million to the First Nation Indigenous policing program to provide funding for First Nation community safety officers, the RCMP, and a self-administered First Nation policing. The government would also support First Nations renegotiating their community tripartite agreements by increasing awareness and efficacy of federally funded but provincially administered community consultive groups.

For a municipal police service, the police is allocating \$23 million in funding towards 160 municipal police positions, including 17 combined traffic service positions and additional public safety initiatives through the municipal police grants program. This program funds initiatives such as the police and crisis team, the crime reduction teams, the Saskatchewan traffic response team, and the internet child exploitation team.

The Saskatchewan marshals service, or the SMS [Saskatchewan marshals service], as I will refer to, will commence operations in 2026. Seven million dollars of funding is provided in this year's budget to continue the operationalization of the service and prepare it for its launch. The SMS will provide an enhanced police presence throughout Saskatchewan, with a particular focus on areas experiencing high-risk and high-impact crimes. In addition the SMS will conduct a proactive investigation targeting organized crime groups and gangs to combat drugs and illegal weapons, provide support to the RCMP, First Nations, and municipal policing service in their efforts to prevent and reduce

crime.

The SMS mandate includes the following activities: detecting, disrupting, and deterring criminal activity across Saskatchewan, with a focus on higher crime locations throughout the province; enforcement of provincial and federal statutes, including the Criminal Code and *The Traffic Safety Act*; locating and apprehending high-risk and prolific offenders, along with individuals wanted on arrest warrants. Once fully staffed, the SMS will comprise 70 police officers and approximately 28 to 30 support staff.

This year the Government of Saskatchewan is investing in a variety of programs and service focused on community safety needs that extend beyond traditional policing, and proactive services. We will provide 1.06 million in this year to extend the First Nations community safety officer pilot program, currently operating in 11 First Nation communities. This investment will help stabilize the pilot program and allow more accurate evaluation of its effectiveness in addressing public safety needs in these communities.

We're also pleased to allocate 197,000 to the Saskatchewan Highway Patrol to establish a new Saskatchewan Highway Patrol canine unit. This unit will focus on the detection and seizure of contraband, such as unstamped tobacco and uncontrolled substances. It will also assist with roadside inspections and other investigations by the Saskatchewan Highway Patrol to address illegal trafficking in our province.

The '24-25 budget also represents significant investment in our provincial corrections facilities and services. The government will make a \$37 million investment to fund continued programs on the construction of the provincial remand centre in Saskatoon. This centre will help safely manage offenders and accused within the corrections system and is scheduled to be completed in 2025. We will also invest in initiatives to improve programming and services within facilities, which include moving treatment for opioid addictions to a standardized provider.

As part of our efforts to reduce violent reoffending, we are expanding the community-based stop abuse for everyone program to the Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert correctional centres. We will also continue to work with our partners and stakeholders to ensure successful reintegration of offenders back into the community. As an example, we will continue our partnership with the Saskatoon Tribal Council on the — and give me a minute here, Mr. Chair — *ikwēskīcik iskwēwak* program, which is our old Back to Basics program, which will help female offenders with safe, successful integration service.

The Back to Basics program is one of the first Indigenous-led and delivered reintegration programs in the province. This program has a strong focus on gender and culturally responsive approaches to reintegration and provides up to 18 months of intensive support to female offenders who are reincarcerated for minor offences.

We will also offer enhanced cultural programming and reintegration services delivered by and for First Nations people at the Saskatoon correction centre Urban Camp. The Urban Camp offers a culturally supported reintegration program to help break cycles of incarceration. This program was officially named

the *sītoskawātowin*, which means “supporting one another.” Last week the ministry was approved to sign a three-year \$805,000 agreement with the Saskatoon Tribal Council to deliver and develop culturally supported programs at Urban Camp.

This year’s budget will also maintain commitment to reduce repeat offenders and associated violence by helping gang-affiliated individuals exit that life and successfully establish autonomy through programming and community supports such as our community intervention model partnership with Str8 Up.

To ensure a safe and supportive work environment in our front-line staff, the ministry will use targeted recruitment, training, and wellness initiatives to support employee engagement. The ministry has implemented mental health training for front-line corrections staff. This training is now an integrated part of our induction training program for all new correctional officer recruits to help emphasize the importance of mental health and reduce the stigma of mental health and first responder setting.

Our talent acquisition and workforce planning pilot, a partnership between our ministry and the Public Service Commission, aims to triple the number of correction officers recruited . . . we attract and train in ’24-25 to help us adapt to evolving workforce challenges in the public safety sector. The ministry will set these new recruits up for success and help ensure civilian and enforcement staff are confident in the safety of their workplace through the delivery of the effective training.

The ministry will also develop middle management training that focuses on enhancing leadership skills in such areas as employee coaching to improve our ability to engage and support staff.

As you know the integrated justice services, or IJS, was a separate vote that provided integrated services in both JAG [Justice and Attorney General] and CPPS [Corrections, Policing and Public Safety]. As a result of the dissolution, IJS staff were reassigned to either ministry, resulting in 48.5 FTEs restated from the IJS to CPPS. Additionally 142.3 million was restated. This includes 92.9 million for capital acquisitions, 38.2 for accommodations and operating, 6.5 million for transfers or grants, and 4.7 million for salaries. As part of the dissolution, third-party funding for community safety programs was split between the ministries based on both the nature of the initiative’s delivery and the corresponding legislative authorities.

CPPS is responsible for offender reintegration program, employment and education program, the gang-violence reduction strategy community intervention model partnership with Str8 Up, training and community innovation and restorative pathways program, and bail supervision.

As highlighted in my comments, the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety continues to prioritize policing and community safety services for Saskatchewan residents. Funding for the ’24-25 fiscal year will ensure that Saskatchewan remains a safe, secure province for our citizens to live, work, and raise a family.

I’ll now be pleased to answer any questions of the committee. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister Merriman. I will now open

it up for questions. Ms. Sarauer.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. I first want to ask about the announcement of the potential for additional funding to the RCMP over and above the budget, stated in the letter you presented to SUMA. You said:

To illustrate our commitment to the RCMP, the Minister of Finance has provided Assistant Commissioner Blackmore with a letter outlining our commitment for additional funding for front-line police officers. Should RCMP “F” Division be able to provide more front-line police officers to Saskatchewan, our government would immediately fund them.

Could you provide to the committee just some detail as to how this arrangement is going to work and where the additional funding will be coming from?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you for the questions, Ms. Sarauer. As I was recently appointed into this position as of the fall of last year, one of the main things that I was made aware of was that the RCMP were not fully funded for positions that they had in Saskatchewan, and there was a gap between what the RCMP could request from Ottawa in their recruitment and what we could provide in funding.

I had several meetings with Assistant Commissioner Blackmore here and at RCMP “F” Division to be able to discuss opportunities. I also had a meeting with the National Police Federation, which I believe is the RCMP union — and excuse me if I got the name wrong; I think that’s it — to be able to discuss options on how we can support RCMP officers in the province.

Out of those multiple meetings, there was a gap between . . . We couldn’t provide funding for positions that were not located in Saskatchewan, and Assistant Commissioner Blackmore could not request more recruits if she did not have provincial funding. So we were stuck in a grey area, or as Assistant Commissioner Blackmore said, in a loop, that neither one of us were moving on this.

In a discussion with the Minister of Finance and my colleagues it was, can we provide a letter to Assistant Commissioner Blackmore — copying the Minister of Public Safety, Minister LeBlanc in Ottawa — can we provide a letter that would say that if you brought more RCMP officers into this province, we would find the funding either through supplemental estimates or budgetary into next year. So it was a compromise as to how we could provide this funding.

So we provided a letter to Assistant Commissioner Blackmore, laid out the dollar amounts that she had requested for a specific amount of officers to be able to support her in going to Ottawa. She subsequently sent that around to her commanding officers around the province. From what I’m being told it was extremely well received. And I could read in some of her quotes, but it was a game changer for her to be able to have this letter.

She’s the only one in the country that has a supporting letter from not just myself, but this came from the Minister of Finance and our Deputy Premier to Rhonda Blackmore, copying Minister

LeBlanc and the union, which outlines specific dollars that we would be set up to pay — if there was 50 RCMP officers, we would pay this much.

[19:15]

And I can, I'd certainly be more than happy to read the letter into the record if the committee will allow me.

Dear Rhonda Blackmore:

The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to addressing crime and building and protecting safe communities for all citizens in the province.

The Government of Saskatchewan will continue to work with you to help address the gaps in recruiting and retaining RCMP officers in Saskatchewan. We are committing to your recruiting efforts by authorizing funding for newly hired regular member police officers in Saskatchewan. As more regular members police officers are recruited and hired in "F" Division, up to the authorized annex of the provincial police service, our province will fund them.

Our government remains firmly committed to prioritizing placements within the uniformed front-line roles of "F" Division. We would like to see a strong push towards filling these provincially sponsored specialty team fenced positions, and I would also like to express my strong support for "F" Division's efforts to recruit Indigenous people into their ranks in Saskatchewan.

I'm confident that the RCMP "F" Division staffing efforts and our related funding commitments will ensure vacancies are filled throughout Saskatchewan. As more regular members are recruited and hired in "F" Division, up to the authorized annex, I want to assure you that our government will fund them.

The following table . . . [provides you with outlines of] our government's financial commitment to the authorized regular member annex of the RCMP "F" Division.

Number of members police could . . . police officers added: 50 would be \$7.75 million; 100 would be \$15.5 million; 150 would be \$23.25 million; 180 would be \$27.9 million.

The estimated costs above are reflective of current salary costs and do not include future negotiated salary increases, inflation on goods and services, or start-up costs.

By way of this letter, I want to ensure our government's continued financial commitment under the . . . Police Services Agreement results in recruiting, staffing, and retention.

Thank you for being a committed partner dedicated to public safety in Saskatchewan. I look forward to . . . [our] continued relationship.

. . . [Signed] Donna Harpauer, Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance.

And that was dated March 28th of this year. And I could table this for the committee if . . .

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sure. Thank you. Appreciate that.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Sure.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And just to reiterate what you've already said, Minister, your commitment is that the additional dollars that may be needed will be found in either supplemental estimates or worked into next year's budget. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — That's correct, pending . . . and it's not a hard 50, that 50 have to be hired. It's up to that number and we would have whatever. If there's 45 that are brought in, then we would have that number brought in, and we would go back to supplemental estimates as it's not a line item within our budget.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Appreciate that. Minister, you had mentioned the money committed to expanding or solidifying the First Nations community safety officer pilot program in your opening remarks. Could you provide to the committee a list of which First Nations are currently involved in that pilot program?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — We're going to compile that list. We're just pulling it up right now, and I don't want to waste the committee's time. So as soon as we have that information, I'll present it in one of my answers.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I appreciate that. Thank you. I'm wondering if you can provide to the committee the total cost last budget for the legislative district security unit.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Just for clarification, that'd be the '23-24 budget?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Correct. Just while you're going, I'm also going to ask what the budget is for this year. So total cost last year, budgeted amount for this year.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — For the legislative district security unit, '23-24 budget was \$1.64 million, and this current . . . the actual cost. Sorry, that was the actual cost, 1.64. And the budget is 1.74 for this current fiscal year.

I do also have the First Nations that are participating: English River, Pelican Lake, Waterhen Lake, Lac La Ronge, Whitecap, Flying Dust, George Gordon, Muskoday, Poundmaker, Big River, and Little Pine. Eleven total.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So let's just go back to First Nations for a second. Is the plan to have that number expanded through this budget?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. I'm just going to read through, just bear with me for a second here.

We did increase the budget by 1.06 million this year. There are eight First Nations who are operating in the CSO [community safety officer] program, and there are three First Nations that are under the pilot program.

We're continuing to work with the First Nations to see — and the

federal government obviously on this because they have a stake in this as well — to see if there are other opportunities to either expand that out. But we would want to have those discussions with the federal government and the First Nations.

I know they've been very successful. I just talked with Chief Darcy Bear from Whitecap Dakota last week, was telling me very supportive of this and looking at other options that they could do to be able to strengthen their CSOs. But in general, the program has been very successful.

But we have to look at what the First Nation is requesting, what the federal government is allocating, and what we're able to do within our budget. So a few moving parts there to be able to solidify more positions. I'd be supportive of it, but there's a few partners that we have to work with.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What about . . .

**The Chair:** — Committee, we have a document in front of us that was tabled: IAJ 20-29, Ministry of Finance: Correspondence re: financial commitment to RCMP, dated March 28th, '24.

Are members okay with not receiving a paper copy? The document will be posted on the Assembly website within 10 minutes of the access. Everybody's agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Thank you.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What about any movement toward self-administered police forces, expanding that in the province? Does the ministry have any budget allocation or plans for doing that work?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Because this is involving First Nations and the federal government, I would just say, stay tuned. There's going to be something probably within the next week or so that will be announced with the three partners on your specific question, but I don't want to scoop the federal government on it.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Back to LDSU [legislative district security unit] now, the two numbers that you provided, thank you for that. Can you break both of those two numbers down into how much was for equipment, uniforms, and then how much is for salaries?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Just for clarification, you want capital, uniform, salaries, like any operating and capital and then salaries kind of?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — If that's the easiest way of providing it. Whatever's easiest I would appreciate.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. I'll give you last year and this year. '23-24 for the LDSU, costs were \$809,000 for salaries, and operations were 832,000. For '24-25 budgeted salaries are \$904,000, and operations are \$843,000.

[19:30]

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you for that. Moving on to the marshals service, I understand that a lease has now been signed for a

building in Prince Albert for the headquarters. Could you provide what the cost of the lease will be?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Last year in our '23-24 budget we had accommodation costs of \$63,000. And for the lease, I don't have the specifics of that as that's done through SaskBuilds. They negotiate the lease for us, so I don't have the exact specifics on that. But I'll certainly touch base with the minister of builds and see if he has some dollars that he can provide to the committee, and time frames.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I appreciate that. If possible, if the lease agreement can be tabled with the committee, that would be appreciated.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. Absolutely.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. What other expenditures occurred with respect to the marshals in the last year?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. And I just want to make the committee aware that these are all upfront costs. A lot of them are one-time costs, like such as furniture. But I'll go through the list of what our operating costs were. Again these were for '23-24. The accommodations was 63,000 as I had previously identified. Furniture was 155,000; law enforcement equipment and supplies, which are firearms, uniforms, etc., would have been 921,795; and other costs, which would have been quads, trailers, and various other pieces of equipment, \$357,487.

And on the overall budget for the marshals, which was budgeted for \$7 million, our total expenses came to \$2,853,629. We had a surplus of \$4,146,371 that was returned to the general revenue.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What is the annual salary for the chief marshal?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — \$201,000.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — How many total FTEs have been hired?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Six.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What is the total cost of those six FTEs?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Salaries for the chief and all the other positions that were hired were \$406,816.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. And what positions have been hired?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Yes. There was a chief obviously that was hired and appointed January 1, human resources, curriculum design, procurement, technology, and admin support. So those would be the staff that have been hired. And again the Chief Firearms Officer was just appointed January 1st of this year, so we're just . . .

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Chief marshal?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Chief marshal, sorry. Chief marshal was . . . So it's only been about four months so we're still in that building stage.



**Ms. Sarauer:** — Has there been a decision as to what the salary range will be for the marshals themselves? And if so, what is it?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — We did have the deputy chief classified and posted just as recently as last week. Those positions have to go through a process with the public service to be able to make sure that they're in line with other positions, and we're still waiting for that to be fleshed out.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Any idea when those positions will be posted?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — I don't have a timeline, but my preference would be sooner so we can get busy with the hiring process. But I guess we've had a lot of interest from this from outside the province. But I don't want to rush the public service process because this is something that, it's important for them to make sure that they get this right on the first go. And as it is a new position, we want to make sure that it's lining up with our other front-line officers as well.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Will all of the marshals be posted out of this leased office space in Prince Albert?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — That's a good question. The chief marshal will decide where the postings need to be based on where the high activity of crime is within our province. Now that would be where their base of posting is; that's not necessarily their only area. They would be provincially mandated.

But if they were looking at specific positions across the province as to where we have higher crime rates, I would leave that decision to the chief marshal with his area of expertise to be determined where we need to have a permanent presence in some communities and other communities that we just have to have a lesser presence in because the crime rate is not quite as high as in some specific communities.

So I really rely on his expertise to decide that. That won't be decided out of my office. That expertise has to come with somebody like the chief marshal, who has 25-plus years experience in policing. I would leave that decision to him.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. So can we anticipate potentially more upfront costs in terms of more space which will need to be leased in other communities — more furniture, that sort of thing?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — We would look at partnering as much as we possibly can with any other agencies that are in that area. Again I don't know the area, so I won't know the costs. There may be some initial costs. That's why we did budget \$7 million this year and used under three of that. We want to make sure that we have enough dollars so if we do need to go out and lease some space, that we have those dollars ready for the chief marshal to be able to allocate them out for wherever that he sees fit that are going to be the high crime areas that marshals need a presence in.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. How will the ministry ensure that the mandate of the marshals service as described will not directly overlap with what the RCMP's SIRT [serious incident response team] team is already doing?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — With a lot of our policing forces that

we have throughout the province, such as the RCMP, the First Nation, municipal, and now into the marshals, there's always going to be overlap of services from Regina out to the RCMP.

What the chief marshal is very much looking at is how we can integrate and support the existing and supplement a lot of those police forces. So there always is overlap of services, but everybody has to work together to be able to suppress the crime in a specific area. They'll work in conjunction with each other, not in competition with each other.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Now forgive me if I don't get all the details in this accurate, but I understand there was a contract award notice back in March for the supply and delivery of Glock pistols, parts, and accessories for the marshals. I believe that, as has been said in the synopsis, that there was an intention to contract with Rampart International Corporation on the basis that they are the only supplier able to provide the Glock pistols, parts, and accessories that meet CPPS's requirements for this procurement.

First question: are the requirements for Glocks the same as is provided for other policing services in Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you for the question. Each police force is a little different in their specifics on what they have as far as firearms or non-lethal equipment that they carry, but there is a common standard under the provincial legislation, *The Police Act*. The minimum standard is set out by the police commission, and all police forces in the province must adhere to that minimum standard. In specifics for each police force there is some different nuances, but they do have to have that baseline standard under *The Police Act*.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Could you provide to the committee the reasoning why these Glock pistols in particular were chosen for the marshals?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. I would assume that that decision was made by the chief marshal. I'm not sure of the reasoning behind it, but we can certainly find out and submit some information to the committee. But I'm not sure, and I don't want to speak on his behalf on why the decision was made for that specific firearm.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is that official here today? Can he provide that information now, or will it have to be tabled later?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — It'll have to be tabled later, but I'll make sure it's tabled as quick as possible.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Moving on to 911 fees, can you provide to the committee what the charge will be for municipalities this year for 911 fees, for the use of the 911 service?

[19:45]

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Ms. Sarauer, if I could maybe get a point of clarification. Are you looking for the municipal side of the cost of this or the provincial cost?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I understand that — and correct me if I'm wrong — I understand the municipalities are now going to, are

being charged for the use of the 911 service. So I'm asking what that charge is this budget.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Okay, right. Yes, and what . . . I can give you a high level and then Marlo can certainly give the specifics. This was brought up at SUMA as a discussion item. There has been a change mandated by the CRTC [Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission] that next-gen 911 is now going to be the standard across the country. That is going to make some changes to the municipalities that everybody has to upgrade, as I understand it, to this next piece of technology.

The SPSA has offered municipalities that if they want to . . . There's a few options. One is they can go do it on their own. They have to upgrade to the CRT standard, and they can maintain their own system and do it on their own. And that's their prerogative. This isn't something that the provincial government is mandating. This is something that the CRTC has changed, and as a layman it was explained to me like, everybody's got to upgrade their phone to the next one so they can now be up on the system.

The SPSA has offered that if the municipality does not want to pay for that upgrade and get all of their system upgraded, that the SPSA would cover the capital costs on the upgrade and the operating, and they could come in to the SPSA, and then there would be a usage fee that would be charged back to the municipalities on that. But all of the capital costs are going to be covered in that scenario by the SPSA.

And again I can't . . . This is something that we are responding to as a province and across the country. I understand why the CRTC did this, but there is a cost, so the municipalities are going to . . . You know, there's going to be a cost no matter which way it goes, whether it's a fee for using the SPSA system or their own.

When the CRTC made this decision, they knew in full well that this this cost was going to be downloaded to either the province, the municipality, whoever was using this. But maybe I'll get Marlo to go into it a little bit further. That's my kind of 10,000-foot summary of it.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Thank you, Ms. Sarauer. Marlo Pritchard, president of SPSA. The Sask911 fee, which everyone sees on their phone bills or cell phones, are going up to about \$2.14 per month as of August. That is what comes into the Sask911 fund which allows us to build the infrastructure for SPSA or the 911 service and dispatch services.

SPSA currently dispatches for about 86 per cent of the fire departments in the province with a fee-for-service which the municipalities pay for. And we dispatch for P.A. [Prince Albert] police. We dispatch for different entities within government. We also have, you know, enforcement, CSO programs including First Nations. As the minister said, we supply the capital fee structure, I guess. The infrastructure is paid for by SPSA or the government through the Sask911 fund.

And now that they're moving on to the next-gen 911 which will be coming into effect probably around March of 2025, end of March 2025, the requirements for those that do not come onto the provincial system must change their infrastructure to allow for the shift from an analog system to the next-gen ability to take

texts, video, as it moves on into the next technology.

That responsibility has always been on the municipality, like whether it's a phone line or the new technology. Currently we are, you know, again looking at economy of scale. So again the more we dispatch for, utilizing the infrastructure, we believe we can drive the prices down for that dispatch service across the province.

But for those services, bigger services like Regina and Saskatoon that have a bigger population . . . And they are also a provincial dispatch centre for us for the 911 system. But for other police services that want to go about it on their own, they'd still have to change their technology base so that allows for them to take the 911 calls that the province gets for their constituents.

So that is not a new cost. Their costs right now are still resource costs and the infrastructure costs, but now they have to upgrade. If they come to us, we will look after the capital costs. And then the costs going forward would be resource costs, those that are answering the phone and dispatching. So that cost does not change.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you for that. I'm still at a loss as to what exactly the fees for the municipality will be. I think you mentioned that they will be the resource costs moving forward if they enter into the . . . if they work through your system. What is that cost?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — That would be a combination of call volume and how many resources, individuals that they need to answer the phones in dispatch. So it varies through municipality to municipality, and of course it also ties in with the CBA [collective bargaining agreement] salary agreement for those that are answering the phones. So I don't have those exact costs, nor could I give you those exact costs, because it depends on a contract with that municipality if they come on with us.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — But I'm assuming municipalities have been provided these numbers as they're making their decision whether or not they're going to just continue on their own or work under SPSA. Is that correct?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — We meet with the municipalities. We give them a range based on our estimates of their values, and then it'll be up to their council to make a decision whether they come on with us.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Another topic that came up at SUMA, and it's also something that I've heard while speaking with stakeholders throughout the province, is the desire for an expansion of the PACT [police and crisis team] teams that many detachments now have. Why was there no provision in the budget to expand PACT teams in the province?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thanks. And maybe just for the committee's knowledge, I'll give a little history of where the PACT teams are located. They are located in P.A., Saskatoon, North Battleford, Yorkton, Regina, Moose Jaw, and Estevan. We have three in Saskatoon, three in Regina, two in Moose Jaw, one in P.A., one in Estevan, Yorkton, and Battleford each. We provide \$1.8 million for the PACT team. We're also providing \$400,000 for four PACT mental health workers. For the

committee's knowledge, this is where a mental worker would go out with a police officer to be able to have an intervention of an individual that might be experiencing some challenges.

We haven't had any of the municipalities approach us — not since I've been appointed into this position — on expansion of the PACT teams. If there is municipalities out there that would like to expand their current allotment or if they would like to look at PACT teams, it's certainly something that we can consider. But I haven't had any requests from any of the municipalities to expand out since I've been sitting in this position. But we would be open to it because I think everybody in this room knows that the PACT teams have been extremely successful in that intervention when somebody is in a crisis moment and does need to have police there for safety reasons, but want to make sure that that individual is being treated not necessarily always as a criminal, but as somebody that's having some challenges.

So if there is expansion, it's certainly something that we would look at as it has been successful. But to my knowledge we haven't received any requests as of yet to expand the current PACT teams.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I'll be sure to point the folks I've spoken to your way, make sure they speak with your ministry. Glad to hear that the ministry is open to expanding that because as you have said, it has proven very successful and the police that I speak with speak very highly of it and want to see more of it.

Moving on, I'm just curious to know if the ministry can provide an update as to their responses to the jury recommendations from the James Smith Cree Nation inquest. There were some recommendations for the ministry in particular.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. And just on the record, my condolences to the families of James Smith Cree Nation and Weldon. I've talked to a lot of the family members and just an absolute tragedy that happened out there.

A lot of the recommendations were focused in on RCMP, which I know Assistant Commissioner Blackmore is working on. She's mentioned it to me that there are some things that . . . there was also a lot of recommendations on the parole side of things.

One of the recommendations from my notes here was directed to the Saskatoon Police Service to consider establishing a dedicated team tasked with arresting individuals who are subject to outstanding warrants for their arrest. This is something that we've brought forward in our warrant enforcement and suppression team, or WEST team, and also recently our warrant intelligence team that just went through this House earlier this year to be able to provide . . . The intelligence team would provide the information to either the First Nation policing, the RCMP, municipal policing. And when the marshal services would be up and running, they would provide that information team so they could go out and execute that warrant for those.

Again we're supportive of the recommendations that did come out of James Smith, but most of them were focused not on provincial issues, more focused on the custody side of things with the federal and also with the RCMP. And I know there was also some recommendations that were brought forward for the First Nation, James Smith, on some of the things that they could do to

be able to help assist police when there were some challenges or if there is some challenges in their community.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is there any reason why James Smith — to your knowledge — why James Smith Cree Nation is not involved with the provincial government's CSO program that we had spoken about earlier?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — It's a very good question. It's something that we will be, as I alluded to in a very vague way, that we're working on with P.A. Grand Council and the federal government in an upcoming announcement that will hopefully address some of that question that you're bringing forward, Ms. Sarauer.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I have some more policing questions, but I'm cognizant of the time. So I'm going to move to some corrections questions that I have, and then I might move back to policing if I have the time.

[20:00]

Now I understand that there are female offenders who are typically held at Pine Grove currently being held at Sask Hospital North Battleford. Can you provide some background to the committee in terms of when this started and what the total number of female offenders are currently at Sask Hospital North Battleford that would be typically held at Pine Grove?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. It commenced . . . From the information I've got, it was on December 6th. We transferred some female offenders out to Sask Hospital North Battleford. As of today there are 19 individuals that are at Sask Hospital North Battleford.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — How many in total have gone through Sask Hospital North Battleford since December that are Pine Grove inmates?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — There have been 43 that have gone through. Actually just last week I had the opportunity to go up to Pine Grove to be able to tour through the facility to meet with Keri and her staff and tour the facility and went through every building. Spent about an hour and a half, two hours talking to management, talking to offenders in various different areas, communicating about some of the concerns, talking to staff. Had a very informative meeting, and we certainly are looking at options to be able to support them up there, as we know that they are very full.

I saw, talked to a lot of the individuals that were in the dorm style of units, and they were very blunt with me, which was nice and refreshing for them to be able to tell me what was going on in their facility, unfiltered, which I very much appreciated. And we were able to see . . . or I was able to see it with my chief of staff first-hand on some of the challenges that they have up there but also some of the opportunities that we are looking at to be able to support some of the pressure capacities that we see there.

One of them would also be, you know, the remand centre that we're building that does have the option to segregate males from females in there as well. But did see the pressures first-hand, and we're sitting down with our team, working on some options to be

able to support them up there and be able to create some space opportunities, not just for the offenders, but also for the administration and the guard staff so they are supported properly as well.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. That's good to hear. They've been operating well over capacity for quite a while now, and I do commend you, Minister, for going to tour the facility and speak with the staff and the inmates there.

What sort of opportunities are you looking into to help reduce the pressures at Pine Grove currently?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — I think initially is maximizing some of the . . . It is — and I know you've toured it as well — there is a lot of space out there, and we're looking at how we can maximize some of the existing facilities. Are there upgrades that we can do within certain areas? Do we need to look at . . . I actually toured the cultural centre, and there was a few requests for some bathroom facilities in that cultural centre. And I want to . . . I think the gentleman's name was George on that. He was very adamant about that.

But just some opportunities not just on the space for the beds but also space outside of the cells and outside of . . . The new areas that were built in there did have very good lighting and had lots of space, common areas. I was certainly impressed on how they were working to make sure that when they are out in those common areas that they have people that are compatible with each other out in those areas and people that aren't compatible that come out at a different time. And they seem to have it very well organized.

Like I said, some of the offenders that were in there were talking about some of the concerns that they did have, and I took note of that. And we're looking at some things that we need to action, is that going to come up immediately, and what can we do in the interim until next budget. There's a few opportunities. Like I said, we were just up there so this is kind of fresh on some options and working with . . .

And we don't want to make those decisions out of Regina. We want to work with Keri and her team so they have some input on what works best for them, because I always feel that local input would have the best results as to the functionality of it.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. So just to synthesize what we're talking about. I believe, and correct me if I'm wrong, these women are being housed at Sask Hospital North Battleford to alleviate some space pressures right now at Pine Grove. Correct me if I'm wrong. And my question is, what sort of programming are those women able to access while they're at Sask Hospital North Battleford?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — It's a very good question. And we want to make sure that we're continuing whatever programming that they might have been receiving at Pine Grove. And I can go through what some of the . . . what the programming is.

There's case management supports for relapse prevention and discharge planning; Elizabeth Fry visits in person once a month; Courage to Change, sentence offenders; a teacher therapist for adult 12 education; self-study workbooks on anxiety, drug

awareness, grief and loss, social skills.

Cultural supports include an Aboriginal storyteller once a week, beading, puzzles, colouring work and artwork, access to a cultural coordinator in smudging.

On the health supports we would have general medical practitioner; visual care consultants; a nurse would be on site daily; access to optical, lab work, dental supports; medication prescriptions as required; fitness equipment on unit; and access to outdoor courtyards would be the supports that they are currently receiving.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And just to reiterate, these are all supports that are available for the women at Sask Hospital North Battleford?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Yes. That's correct.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. How many offenders died in custody in 2023?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Unfortunately we had five individuals that passed during the fiscal year of 2023-24.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Can you break that down by facility, please?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Two Pine Grove, one at SCC [Saskatoon Correctional Centre], one at RCC [Regina Correctional Centre], and one at SCC reintegration unit that, like I said, unfortunately passed in last fiscal year.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Could you please provide the cause of death, if you have that?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. The cause of death hasn't . . . because the inquest has not been finished by the coroners. Any time that there is a death in custody there's an investigation by the police and the Saskatchewan Coroners Service.

To my knowledge, and as I'm being informed, they have not determined cause of death in any of those right now, but as soon as the coroner does file that information then we'll be able to have that. Right now I don't have anything because the coroner hasn't completed the investigation yet.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. What is the current naloxone or Narcan policy in the facilities?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Across the system? Okay.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Correct. Yeah.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. I'll go through the facilities here. RCC is 59; SCC, 61; PACC [Prince Albert Correctional Centre] is 13; PGCC [Pine Grove Correctional Centre] is 31; WBRU [White Birch Remand Unit] has 9; and CC has 2, which is 175 total. On our youth side we have 3, for 178 total across the system.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sorry. Were you giving me the number of naloxone equipment.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I was asking about the policy. So that's the actual equipment that's accessible?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — That's the actual equipment that's on site. Yes.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. What is the policy for usage?

[20:15]

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — I'll just read through it here:

Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety provides emergency response to inmates and youth who show signs of suspected opioid overdoses. CPPS has a policy to administer naloxone or Narcan nasal sprays to inmates, youth in custody who show signs of opioid overdose.

Most correctional officers and facility nurses respond to incidents of suspected overdoses. Correctional officers have access to Narcan, and facility nurses have access to the injectable naloxone.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Could you provide to the committee the current wait-list numbers to access the DSATU [dedicated substance abuse treatment unit] program in all facilities where it's currently available, as well as the number of inmates who went through each facility's program in the last fiscal calendar?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — The capacity is 20 participants per program cohort. We have a current wait-list of 118 inmates, and I could go through how many people went through it in the last three years, if the committee would like that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — That's okay. I think we could probably run that number through committee. Time . . .

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Oh sorry, sorry, that was just RCC.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay, yeah. I was going to ask that.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Sorry. Yeah. And then PGCC is 12 participants per cohort and the wait-list is 11 inmates; PACC is 13 participants per cohort and 42 inmates on the wait-list; and SCC has 25 participants per program and nobody is on the wait-list.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. And now — correct me if I'm wrong — that program is funded through the federal government; is that correct?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — At RCC it is funded by the provincial government. And the GVRS [gang-violence reduction strategy] funds \$381,000 for PGC, PACC, and SCC, and that is funded by the federal government entirely.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Why were there no provisions to expand this program in this fiscal budget cycle?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — As I touched on in my opening comments, we're investing in initiatives to improve programming service with facilities which include moving

treatment for opioid addiction to a standardized provider. As I understand, we're in the assessment process and this is something that we're considering for the future.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. That didn't quite answer my question about DSATU though. Why aren't we expanding DSATU this budget cycle?

**Mr. Freistadt:** — Thanks for the question. Joshua Freistadt, ADM [assistant deputy minister], supervision and rehabilitation services. So what we're looking at right now with the DSATU program, instead of expansion and adding additional dollars, is there's currently some downtime between cohorts, and we're trying to figure out how we can get efficiencies there before we would expand further.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Oh, what would you need to do to have some efficiencies in that downtime?

**Mr. Freistadt:** — Right now we have about a two-week turnaround between cohorts, and it's just a matter of finding some efficiency in timing those intakes into the program.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So are you thinking about diminishing the time between cohorts so you can add another cohort to the calendar year? Is that the plan?

**Mr. Freistadt:** — That is a more articulate way of saying what I was trying to say. Thank you.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. Thank you. Appreciate that. Now as the minister had just been mentioning, I understand there was an RFP [request for proposal] posted for physician services to provide opioid agonist therapy. I believe that's what you were talking about in my earlier question, Minister. Can you tell me about this pilot project?

**Mr. Freistadt:** — Josh Freistadt, ADM, supervision and rehabilitation services. So currently we're evaluating the proposals on the RFP, and the intent there is to come up with a standardized provider so that we have a consistent form of medication being used and a consistent fee structure.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Is this addressing a challenge that currently exists within corrections? And if so, what is it?

**Mr. Freistadt:** — The challenge it's addressing is getting consistencies across. Right now we're successfully offering OAT, opioid agonist therapy, across the major correctional facilities, but the providers have different approaches to doing it and we're trying to find the way that might be most efficient.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — So what is currently being offered for OAT?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Maybe while Josh is finding that, I'll touch on maybe a higher strategy as we are working with Mental Health and Addictions and Minister McLeod and his ministry that have a lot of expertise in this area and including them in the consultation process. So we're drawing on those experts within the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] and within the Ministry of Health to be able to assist us in that.

And I'll get Josh to answer the more detailed question.

**Mr. Freistadt:** — Can I get you to repeat the question one time just so I can ensure that I answer it?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yeah. I was asking what is currently being offered for OAT in facilities across the province.

**Mr. Freistadt:** — So across all facilities, if you're currently on OAT in the community, we'll continue your subscription. Different facilities offer different forms of the drug, so there may be an injectable form or an oral form. And the point with the provincial approach is to get everybody on the same mode of delivering the medication.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I note in this RFP that there is an estimated number of people in each facility currently using OAT. If I'm correct, it's stated that there are more people accessing OAT in Regina than in Saskatoon. Do you know why this is?

**Mr. Freistadt:** — The primary driver behind your question is that there's a higher inmate population in Regina. The offender composition is a bit different as well.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — If an inmate comes into the facility not currently on the OAT program, can they access it once they are in the facility?

[20:30]

**Mr. Freistadt:** — Yes, every facility has an arrangement right now where we can get you prescribed upon request.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. How does the ministry's use of OAT jive with the Government of Saskatchewan's position that there is no such thing as safe supply?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Well I think the answer is, there's a difference between safe supply of illicit drugs and safe supply of methadone.

But I also want to . . . We're not just working on when people come into our correction facilities and whether they're on OAT. We're also working with Str8 Up and other organizations when if somebody is on therapy, that they continue that therapy seamlessly once they transition out of the facility, that their prescription is ready. Because there is a gap right now that has been identified to me by members of Str8 Up that when individuals come out of the facility, that they don't have their medication, it doesn't follow them, and that there's a chance for relapse in that time.

So we're working with them and Health to see if those prescriptions can travel outside the facility now and follow the individual versus stopping at the wall or the gate, so to speak, in our facilities. So again we want to make sure that the offender has that continuum of care from when they come in, that we're trying to stabilize and continue that treatment, and then once they are released, that they have that opportunity to continue that treatment as well.

I think we're talking about . . . I think safe supply and methadone are two different topics. Safe supply is a very generalized term. It can be any illicit drugs, whereas this is something that is generally accepted by physicians and by addicts as a potential

treatment for reducing their need for illicit drugs versus continuing their need for illicit drugs.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Good to hear, Minister, that you're addressing that gap from when offenders are in facility versus when they leave facility.

I have a few questions about the Saskatoon Tribal Council's reintegration program. Could you provide some data for the committee? I'm looking specifically to what the cost was last budget, budgeted for this year, and how many women have made it through that program thus far.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Just on the female offender side? Because there's the Urban Camp and the other . . .

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yeah, sorry, just the female offender, the house that . . .

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Okay, thank you. There's a bit of information just to go through here, and I'll try to go through it as quickly as possible: 118 intakes; 52 accepted clients; 18 closed clients, anyone not receiving services anymore, completed, or left; 25 active clients. This would be at . . . Sorry, just for the committee's knowledge, this is as of February 29th. Nine clients accepted pending release approval but waiting for release date to date.

And also I'll just go through some of the improvements that we've made in the last year is partnering with income assistance to ensure direct link to income assistance workers. And as I touched on, we want to make sure that it's again not just seamless on their health and their medical needs, but on their income assistance side of things so there isn't a gap of 10 or 20 days until they can apply for income assistance, that it is seamless.

And as I've stated, that we need to prepare any offenders that are transitioning out well before, that they are transitioning so we can start that social assistance process if need be, whether it's attachment to housing . . . Because we don't want that individual to come out, not have their medication, not have any dollars in their pocket for income assistance because then there is a very high likely of reoffending to meet their immediate needs. So we want to make sure that we're giving them every opportunity to be successful when they do come out.

And again ensuring women are on reintegration leave, have access to income assistance, providing a dedicated child and family services caseworker through Social Services to promote family reunification when possible; reducing the number of previous custody involvements from five to three, including women with minor assault crimes, to expand eligibility; and increasing the STC [Saskatoon Tribal Council] workers' presence in Pine Grove from two times to four times per week. Pine Grove has also provided them with office space, internet access, allow them to train, etc., to be able to become part of the reintegration team.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you for that. What is the average length of stay for women in the home?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — As I understand, it's up to STC to determine whether their transition . . . We haven't had anybody

that's gone through the full system, as I've been informed that STC has that information — we don't have it — as they're kind of the keepers of this program.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Sorry, you don't have the information of the success of the women entering the . . . going through the system?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — I do have some success stories. Certainly I do. I'll give three here that I have just in front of me. The participant referred to the program as being completed and is now attending school. She's also re-engaging custody of her children, currently transitioning from the residence to supported family housing so they can be together. And there are two other participants that are attending full-time school as well. So we do have some success stories, and we'll continue to build on them.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — What is the budgeted amount for this program for this fiscal year?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — CPPS is supplying \$1 million for this and the Ministry of Health is providing \$250,000 to support us.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — I'm looking for point-in-time counts now for all facilities, adult and youth, including Sask Hospital North Battleford, the non-Pine Grove custody side, I suppose, plus the utilization percentages. Thank you so much.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Sorry. The last one was utilization?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Utilization percentages.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. I'll run through them. Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford, 45; occupational capacity is 72, so we're at 62.5 per cent of utilization. Whitespruce Provincial Training Centre, total count 17; operational capacity of 39, which is a 43.6 per cent utilization rate.

Regina Correctional Centre, 765 total count, 782 individuals is the operational capacity; and that's a 97.8 per cent utilization rate. Besnard Lake is a total count of 20; operational capacity of 25, at 80 per cent utilization rate.

Do you want the impaired driving treatment program?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yes, please.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Twenty-six is total count; 30 is capacity, which gives 86.7 per cent of utilization rate. White Birch remand centre, total count of 17; operational capacity of 16, 106 per cent utilization. Saskatoon Correctional Centre, we have a total count of 563 individuals; capacity is 507, we are at 111 per cent. Pine Grove Correctional Centre, we have a total count of 247; operational capacity is 166, we are at 148 per cent. And P.A. Correctional Centre is total count of 606; operational capacity of 496, and we're at 122 per cent.

So overall total count for the system is 2,306; operational capacity is 2,133. We are at just over 108 per cent capacity.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Minister. Just briefly, Saskatoon remand centre you mentioned — correct me if I'm wrong — that it's planned to be operational 2025. How many beds will there

be? And you mentioned that there will be the potential for there to be segregation between men and women. So if you know the numbers of how many potential male offender beds versus female offender beds, that would be appreciated too. Also I'm curious to know how many FTEs you plan to hire for the centre.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. We're building that Saskatoon remand centre for 312 beds. For the FTEs that we will be phasing in over three years, we will budget for this year 45 individuals in the '24-25 fiscal year; '25-26 we will be phasing in 71 individuals; '26-27 there will be 13 individuals hired, for a grand total of 130 FTEs.

[20:45]

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I'm not sure if you have this number available, but if not hopefully you can provide it to the committee at a later date: total across Corrections for correctional officers, staff usage of sick time as well as overtime, as well as number of OH & S [occupational health and safety] complaints.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Sorry, just for clarification. It was sick, it was OH & S . . .

**Ms. Sarauer:** — And overtime.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — And OT [overtime].

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yeah.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you. Well, we'll have to do a little digging on the sick and the overtime, but I do have OH & S. Oh, hold on — breaking news — I'll do the OH & S first. And do you want the total?

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yes.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Okay. Total, which is 644. And we had near misses, that were classified as near misses of 117. No fatalities. And sorry, for sick leave, correctional officers, the average is 119 hours. Youth workers, it's 90. And for nurses, it is 75. That's the average.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — And we'll endeavour to get the overtime.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. I appreciate that.

Being cognizant of the time, I'm going to move on quickly to some SPSA questions. How much money was spent on fire suppression and mitigation last year? And how much is budgeted for this year?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — We do have our base funding of \$12.5 million. Last year, year-to-date actuals were \$87,495,245. And just if I can, I just want to put a plug in for the SPSA and all the people up in the North that were able to do this. We had our type 1, type 2, type 3 firefighters out there. This is why we made the decision this year to go to our water bombers and buy four planes over the next four years to be able to supplement our firefighting force in the North.

And I will also just put a very quick plug in for *Guardians of the North* which certainly was eye-opening for me. If there's an opportunity for committee members or anybody watching at home that's not watching the hockey games, it's a great time to meet the people that do protect our North. So I'll leave it with that.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. How much is budgeted for this year?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Again, the \$12.5 million for this year. And yeah, that's a placeholder of our base budget funding for our human resources because we do have a lot of people that are up there permanently. These are permanent type 1 firefighters that are full-time employees of the SPSA.

And then we also have anything that we need . . . As we discussed in supplemental estimates, if we have to come back and if we have a busy firefighting season, then we have to come back for supplemental estimates on that. As we don't know, we can't budget for what the fire season is going to be within a range, that's why we always leave that up with the Minister of Finance so that we can come back for supplemental estimates to be able to pay for that. But we always do make sure that those costs are covered for the SPSA.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. As you have mentioned and we've discussed before, you just said as well that if there is the need for more expenditure on this line item, you will spend it. It will be in supplemental estimates. That will not stop your ministry from ensuring that the fire mitigation and suppression work is done.

My question to you is, understanding that over the last several years that number expended has been much higher than what the budgeted number was, why isn't there a decision within the ministry to budget for a higher amount than has been done in years previous?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Well I think our main focus when we're talking about firefighting up in the North is making sure that we're protecting the communities and the people that are up there. They've never had an issue with access to dollars if they needed it, coming from the northern . . . And again this just doesn't cover the firefighting. This also covers the evacuation. This covers a lot of things, and it's come under the SPSA to be able to get those costs.

Yes, the cost is consistently higher than what we have budgeted in the past, but that doesn't hamper our firefighting activities up in the North, that if they do need excess dollars to hire more individuals or be able to purchase more equipment, we've always been able to supply that with supplemental estimates. As far as the firefighters and the SPSA is concerned, they just need to provide us with actual costs, and we will go back and get those costs and discuss them at supplemental estimates like we have throughout the year.

But we want to make sure that our core funding of that 12.5 million for our type 1 firefighters and our base of operations throughout the year is covered. And that's what we're budgeting for, is that core dollars out there versus what could happen.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Okay. What is the status of the provincial

firefighting training program out of Parkland College? Suncrest, my apologies.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — It's okay. We knew what you were talking about.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yeah, thanks.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — At Northlands, I thought that might have been the Ministry of Advanced Education.

**Mr. Pritchard:** — Marlo Pritchard, SPSA. We've partnered with Advanced Ed to support the Suncrest College in regards to fire training and expanding into emergency management and other aspects of training our first responders, especially around fire and fire suppression.

Along with SPSA, we partnered and supplied approximately \$1.2 million in capital. That supported equipment such as fire trucks and other equipment and is not just for the college. That is also for SPSA in regards to response when there is not a training class going on.

We also have \$77,000 funded for a . . . I guess it would be an advisor. That is an SPSA employee that works with the college and helps bring training and coordinate the training. And currently, right now there is 14 recruits. That class started in beginning of April. So they just are recently started.

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Yeah, maybe if I could add to that. We also pulled our firefighters in for early training this year. We brought them in earlier just because of some of the challenges that we saw last year in the very early fire season.

So we brought them back a few weeks early to make sure that they are trained up and ready to go if we do have an early fire season in our province. So we backed things up about four weeks to make sure everybody's prepped.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you. Now forgive my ignorance. Is this training also available to municipalities who have volunteer fire forces?

**Mr. Pritchard:** — So again, just to clarify the question. Is this training available for volunteer firefighters? Yes, it is. Individuals can take the 1001, or the basic firefighting training, on their own or they can come and sign up and take it at the college. There is a fee, of course.

There is also the Saskatchewan Volunteer Fire Fighters Association that trains to a competency level, and the province, through SPSA, does recognize that training. So there's a tiered training process to ensure that there is adequate training for our first responders to make sure that their safety, and of course the safety of their patients or individuals that are in danger, is transferable.

So it's a dangerous occupation, so we want to make sure that there's the skills and the training available across the province.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Pritchard. I appreciate that. One final question I'm going to ask for the firearms commission office. What is the status of the ballistics lab and the work that's



being done there?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Just in the essence of time here, we will be having an event in the first two weeks of May to be able to do kind of a tour and a grand opening and all of that. And yes, Ms. Sarauer, if you would like to be invited we would certainly extend an invitation to you as well. It will be in Saskatoon, but we will make sure that we accommodate MLA schedules. So there will be an opportunity to attend and inform people of what we're doing with the SFO [Saskatchewan firearms office] and the lab.

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Seeing that we have reached the agreed-upon time for consideration of Corrections, Policing, Public Safety estimates, we will adjourn the consideration of these estimates.

Minister Merriman, do you have any closing comments?

**Hon. Mr. Merriman:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just thank Ms. Sarauer for her time and Mr. Love for attending as well and the staff. Thank you to the committee, my officials for all of their support in educating me in a new file, and very much appreciate the committee's time to be able to explain the great work that we're doing in CPPS for this coming fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**Ms. Sarauer:** — Yeah. Thank you to you, Mr. Chair, and the members of the committee as well as my colleague here for joining us this evening.

Thank you, Minister, sincerely for answering my questions. And to your officials just a heartfelt thank you for, first of all, being here this evening. I really appreciate all the answers you've provided me tonight. And in addition just thank you to you and all of the staff that you represent within the ministry for all that you do in serving the province each and every day. I do very much appreciate it.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. I too would like to thank the minister and the opposition, Mr. Love and Ms. Sarauer, and the committee members. And the staff too as well in committee and also Hansard and staff members here for a great job tonight. And thank you for coming out this evening.

That completes our committee's business for tonight. I'd ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Goudy has moved. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until Tuesday, April 23rd, 2024 at 3:30. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 21:00.]