

Legislative
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of Ontario



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de l'Ontario

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY OFFICE

(Section 3.03, 2003 Annual Report of the Provincial Auditor)

1st Session, 38th Parliament
53 Elizabeth II

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



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de l'Ontario

The Honourable Alvin Curling, M.P.P.,
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Sir,

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts has the honour to present its Report
and commends it to the House.

Norman Sterling, M.P.P.,
Chair.

Queen's Park
July 2004

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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PREAMBLE

The Provincial Auditor audited the Family Responsibility Office in the Ministry of Community and Social Services (formerly the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services) and reported on this topic in Section 3.03 of the *2003 Annual Report*.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts (the Committee) held hearings on this report on February 11, 2004 with representation from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (the Ministry). The Committee endorsed the Provincial Auditor's 2003 audit report on the Family Responsibility Office, and recommended the implementation of the Auditor's recommendations by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. This report constitutes the Committee's findings and recommendations.

The Committee held a second hearing with the Deputy Minister on April 15, 2004 to follow-up on various matters, some of which were introduced at the February 2004 hearing. This meeting was held *in camera*; therefore, the Committee has decided to address the topics discussed in general terms only. The areas include the following:

- the RFP vendor selection process for the proposed case management model;
- components of the new model (e.g., integrated information management system);
- comparative information on other systems (e.g., case volumes, budgets, payment and collection procedures opt-in/out options, and the regional office approach); and
- FRO staffing requirements prior to and following the implementation of the new system.

The Ministry provided supplementary information dated May 11, 2004, following the *in camera* session. This document included responses to matters raised by the Committee with respect to the operation of the Family Responsibility Office and British Columbia's system, specifically:

- a description of payment methods, including the advantages and disadvantages of each;
- a comparison of staffing levels;
- the allocation of new staff at FRO;
- compliance rates; and
- the status of FRO collections and arrears.

The Committee would like to take this opportunity to extend its appreciation to the Ministry officials for their participation in these hearings. Also, the Committee would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the Office of the Provincial Auditor (the Auditor), the Clerk of the Committee, and the Ontario

Legislative Library's Research and Information Services Branch during these hearings.

This Committee report includes introductory information in each section based on the Auditor's report, followed by an overview of the hearings, and Committee recommendations.

Ministry Response to Committee Report

The Committee has prepared supplementary recommendations in this report, based on its findings during the hearings. *The Committee requests that the Ministry of Community and Social Services provide the Committee Clerk with a comprehensive written response within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling with the Speaker, Legislative Assembly of Ontario, unless another timeframe is specified for a given recommendation.*

1. AUDIT OBJECTIVES/SCOPE AND OVERVIEW

1.1. Audit Objectives and Scope

The audit objectives were to assess whether adequate policies and procedures were in place to ensure that:

- support orders were enforced effectively and receipts were accurately accounted for and distributed to support recipients on a timely basis; and
- services were delivered with due regard to economy and efficiency and the effectiveness of the services provided was monitored and reported on.

The audit work was primarily conducted during the period of October 2002 to March 2003, with emphasis on program policies and procedures in place during the 2002/03 fiscal year.

1.2. Audit Overview¹

Under the authority of the *Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996*, the Family Responsibility Office (FRO/the Office) administers and enforces all court-ordered child and spousal support in Ontario, as well as court-ordered support in many other jurisdictions where the payers are resident in Ontario. The Office also enforces private separation agreements that are voluntarily registered with a court and filed with the Office. At the time of the audit, the Office was administering approximately 180,600 family-support cases.

During the 2002/03 fiscal year, the Office collected approximately \$561 million from support payers and forwarded a similar amount to support recipients. However, as of the end of that same year, payment arrears totalled approximately \$1.3 billion, which represented an 8% increase since the 1999 audit. The Auditor

also noted that approximately 23,000 support recipients, whose cases were in arrears totalling over \$200 million, were receiving provincial social assistance.

It is the Provincial Auditor's view that unless the Office takes aggressive enforcement action, supported by effective case management and significantly improved information technology and communications systems, it is in grave danger of failing to meet its mandated responsibilities. The Auditor's specific findings included the following:

- Since 1994, the number of caseworkers has declined by 20%, whereas the number of cases has increased from 126,000 to 180,000, with the result that the average number of cases per caseworker has steadily increased. For example, the average number of cases with outstanding work items assigned to senior caseworkers has been ranging from 600 to more than 1,300, averaging 890 cases per caseworker.
- The Office's practice of commencing enforcement action only after being notified by recipients of non-payment resulted in unreasonable delays in enforcement. On average, seven months elapsed between the time support fell into arrears and the time the Office initiated the first enforcement action.
- More than half the cases in arrears the Auditor reviewed had inordinately long gaps—often as long as two years—between enforcement actions.

Staff efforts to enforce support obligations and to provide responsive client services continued to be significantly hampered by the Office's inability to develop and implement the necessary improvements to its computer system. Although the Office indicated as far back as 1994 that the current computer system must be replaced, the same computer system continued to be used even though it cannot provide timely and appropriate information to facilitate client service or management of the program.

The Auditor also found that almost 90% of telephone calls made from outside the Greater Toronto Area to the Office's call centre were blocked and therefore not answered. As a result, clients had to call repeatedly in order to get through.

Committee Hearings

Committee's General Conclusion

On the basis of the audit report and the Committee's hearings in 2004, the Committee has concluded that the Ministry has taken appropriate action in several areas of concern to the Provincial Auditor. Since the completion of the audit, FRO has addressed several of the recommendations, for example, implementing a new document management system, a new trace-and-locate initiative, and a strategy to increase aggressive enforcement action.² The Minister's announcement in February 2004 outlined a commitment to additional service improvements.³

The Ministry's general response to the audit report also indicated a commitment to take the necessary actions to address the Auditor's recommendations.⁴ For example, the Office prepared a business case outlining many of the current problems and proposed corrective actions, to which the government responded in

2004 with new commitments. FRO cannot meet many of the audit recommendations without significant change to its business model and systems technology. An improved service-delivery model and supporting technology will enable the Office to realize significant improvements in both enforcement and customer service in response to the concerns outlined by the Provincial Auditor.⁵

Several of the measures undertaken by the Ministry were addressed in detail during the hearings. This report provides a brief overview of these and related undertakings. In certain instances, the Committee has requested supplementary information to the hearings, which has been taken into account. The Committee has prepared recommendations on some matters for the Ministry's consideration.

Ministry's Remedial Measures

During the hearings, the Ministry pointed out numerous organizational improvements it has undertaken. Essentially these changes were designed to address weaknesses in the system through the following: immediate improvements to customer service; laying the foundation for significant long-term changes in the way FRO works; and launching a series of consultations across the province with FRO clients to get their input on further measures to improve the system.⁶ At the time of the hearings, FRO was undertaking a review and redesign of its filing package, which consists of the initial package of documents provided to new clients on information requirements.⁷

The initiatives taken following the audit, many of which are addressed in this report, cover such matters as the monitoring of staff performance, document scanning to meet its business needs, the monitoring of policies and procedures, staff training to ensure that the responses provided and enforcement actions are consistent, and continuing to work with the collection agencies on enforcement. The Auditor noted that positive aspects of FRO's operations, specifically, case registration and collection action, accounting controls over support payments received and disbursed, and the time frame for the distribution of support payments.⁸

The Ministry described the nature and breadth of the Office's business with current statistics in such areas as the number of active cases, processing times, collections, etc.:⁹

- Currently FRO handles in excess of 184,000 active cases in Ontario, including more than 12,000 cases from other jurisdictions, and 1,200 to 1,400 new cases each month. The Office has reciprocal agreements with more than 85 jurisdictions across the world.
- In 2002-03, FRO collected \$561.1 million in court-ordered support payments, of which 95% are processed within 24 to 48 hours.
- FRO answers approximately 1,900 calls each day; and the automated 24/7 client information line answers 17,000 calls each weekday and 11,000 calls on the weekend.

Every MPP's office is assigned a designated client service associate to respond to FRO-related client inquiries, and FRO handles approximately 1,300 of these each month.¹⁰

DETAILED AUDIT OBSERVATIONS

This report addresses the Provincial Auditor's audit observations on several matters in the following general audit areas: enforcement of support obligations, staff resources, and performance measures.

2. ENFORCING SUPPORT OBLIGATIONS AND RELATED MATTERS

At the time of the audit, approximately one-third of all payers were in full compliance with their support obligations, one-third were in partial compliance – defined as meeting at least 85% of their current monthly obligations, and one-third were in non-compliance.¹¹

2.1. Case Management Model

The Office manages its caseload on an “issue management” basis. Under this system, all caseworkers are eligible to answer inquiries on any given file and perform basic tasks, and those that require in-depth knowledge of the case and potential follow-up would need a senior caseworker.

The Auditor expressed concern with the level of accountability under this system and recommended that to help ensure effective and timely enforcement actions, the Office should review its case management practices and consider assigning responsibility for each case to an individual caseworker. In response to the audit, the Office has developed a proposal to implement a comprehensive case management model – Integrated Service Delivery Model – that includes integrated teams for providing client service. The Ministry reviewed the proposal for this model, and indicated in 2003 that it would be before Cabinet in the near future.

Committee Hearings

The Ministry acknowledged that the current service delivery model has limited the Office in responding to certain audit recommendations.¹² The new technology would provide support for the implementation of a case management model.¹³ The Office has concluded that the case management model would permit enforcement officers to focus on enforcement.¹⁴ This system would be complimented with a small call centre to manage general inquiries.¹⁵

The software for the new case management model, which is to be acquired through a two-stage competitive procurement process, was launched in February 2004.¹⁶ A draft Request for a Proposal (RFP) for the new technology has been initiated.¹⁷ The objective is to implement a model that would promote accountability and efficiency, by tracking accounts for enforcement actions, and

following a proactive management approach, rather than waiting on clients to identify problems.¹⁸

Nevertheless, either model could be hampered by the enforcement approach applied. For example, in many cases FRO does not have full control over gathering the information required to enforce and register support obligations in a timely manner.¹⁹ This is due to the fact that it relies on various sources to provide information, such as the courts.²⁰ The Ministry explained that it would be consulting with partner ministries to determine which databases can be shared.²¹ FRO has committed to continue to work with stakeholders through workshops and information sessions to inform these offices of its requirements.²²

Committee Recommendation

Follow-up Procedures

The Committee concluded that the new case management model is the main component in promoting accountability within the FRO's enforcement system. To ensure effectiveness and efficiency, follow-up procedures will be required to verify that client inquiries and enforcement actions are properly managed by caseworkers.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

1. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the follow-up procedures adopted by the Family Responsibility Office to ensure that client inquiries are addressed on a timely and consistent basis and that enforcement actions are properly managed by individual caseworkers on a case-by-case basis.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

2.2. Caseloads

The high number of caseloads was a concern in the 1999 audit, and the average number of cases per caseworker has since almost doubled. The workload for senior caseworkers has been substantial without accompanying improvements in business processes or information technology. The Auditor pointed out the importance of a manageable caseload for caseworkers to administer family support cases adequately.

The Auditor recommended that to help improve the administration of family support cases in a timely and effective manner, the Office should establish criteria and standards for manageable caseloads and staff accordingly, to ensure that the

standards are met. In its response to the audit, the Ministry recognized that it must move to a case management system with supporting technology, replacing the issue management system. This move is pending the Ministry's decision on the options provided by the Office. Under the proposed case management system, enforcement officers would have cases assigned to them and be directly responsible for those cases over the long term.

Committee Hearings

The Committee noted the demands of the existing caseload and the need to achieve a reasonable distribution of the workload, given that there are 1,200 to 1,400 new cases each month. This growth is in addition to the caseload increase of approximately 40,000 since 1994.²³ In addition, the province has reciprocal agreements with other jurisdictions under which almost 13,000 cases are FRO's responsibility. These cases include out-of-province and international residents.²⁴

The Auditor drew attention to the need to improve family support case administration through the establishment of criteria and standards for manageable caseloads and staffing.²⁵ FRO has endorsed the case management system with supporting technology.²⁶ In addition to the distribution factor, the Committee is cognizant that case accountability is necessary to enhance service delivery.

Committee Recommendation

Caseload Management

The implementation of the proposed case management model and supporting technology is pending. As part of this initiative, FRO is to develop appropriate criteria and standards for manageable caseloads. The Office indicated that the proposed system would help to realign resources and create manageable caseloads.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

2. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the impact of the proposed case management model and supporting technology on the realignment of resources and the caseload, indicating the number of cases per case worker. In addition, this report should assess the impact of FRO's new criteria and standards for caseloads management.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

2.3. Support Enforcement Action

At the end of 2002, approximately 136,000 or three-quarters of all active cases registered with the Office were in arrears, representing approximately \$1.3 billion, an 8% increase over the 1999 audit. Although enforcement requires timely action, following a series of progressive steps, this protocol was often not applied on a timely or effective basis.

The Auditor recommended that to help ensure the effectiveness of its enforcement actions in collecting support arrears, the Office should identify accounts in arrears on a more timely basis and initiate contact with the defaulting payer as soon as possible; adhere to the established timetable for the prescribed enforcement steps in a timely manner; and ensure supervisory staff monitor case files for compliance with the prescribed steps and established timetable, and where necessary take corrective action.

In response to the audit report, the Ministry explained that FRO has policies and procedures to ensure the effectiveness of enforcement actions. However, consistent and timely follow-up of enforcement and compliance has been compromised by the current issue management business model and the absence of the appropriate supporting technology. A strategy has been implemented to increase aggressive enforcement action; for example, supervisors regularly monitor cases to ensure timely enforcement, and the Enhanced Collection Agency Project addresses the age of arrears.

Committee Hearings

The Committee enquired about innovations to improve enforcement, and how a new system will move more quickly to address non-compliance.²⁷ Specifically, given recent initiatives and the decision to obtain new technology, the Committee is interested in measurable change for individuals pursuing support payments.²⁸ The Ministry acknowledged that several steps remain to be taken in the following areas:

- building a better working relationship with FRO clients (e.g., promoting accessibility, and returning phone calls);
- improving client outreach to inform FRO clientele about the system; and
- educating clients – the bench and the bar-through additional workshops.²⁹

The Committee addressed various facets of the enforcement process, including the nature of enforcement. FRO's approach has been described as reactive as involvement is triggered by non-payment.³⁰ The passive steps apply in terms of the enforcement tools to get people to fulfil their obligations, entering into a payment schedule with the payer, and as necessary applying various means to ensure payment, for example, a support deduction order.³¹ There are other options, which would require legislative amendments to assume a more assertive position. FRO has explored various other enforcement measures.³²

Enforcement Measures

The Committee was interested in the effectiveness of collection generally, and the application of the various enforcement means available to the Office.³³ FRO's enforcement policies and procedures have been compromised by the existing technology.³⁴

FRO has pursued various measures including the garnishment of payers' income tax refunds, collections from lottery winnings, and the issuance of support deduction notices to the federal government (e.g., income tax refunds). The Ministry provided supplementary information on enforcement actions, which included various statistics for the period April 1, 2003 - January 31, 2004, including for example, bank account garnishments (1,104), and federal licence suspensions including passports (555). Provincial driver's licence suspensions covered the period April - December 2003 (3,287).³⁵ It was pointed out by the Ministry that the new technology is required to provide accurate statistics and performance management reports.

The Committee was concerned about the level of progress on collections, particularly on cases with \$50,000 owing.³⁶ In November 2002 there were 1,500 cases not assigned to a client services associate and about \$127 million outstanding.³⁷

During the hearings, the Office provided background on a number of initiatives to enhance collections, for example:

- **Employers' Responsibilities** - The Ministry will inform employers of their obligations through new information on the FRO web site, for example, employers' role and responsibilities in submitting support payments on behalf of employees.³⁸
- **Outreach Program** - FRO plans an outreach program to inform clients about the program components, and problem areas such as the reasons for payment delays.³⁹
- **Notification Letters** - FRO will be issuing notification letters to parents in arrears on support payments of more than 60 days.⁴⁰ These letters will request payment within 15 days with failure to comply being reported to the credit bureau.⁴¹ Therefore, individuals will not be reported to credit bureaus without prior notification.
- **Client Services Associates/Enforcement Strategy** - The letters to delinquent payers in arrears, a monthly report listing accounts overdue, and a special enforcement team of client services associates to initiate enforcement were in use in 2001. Also, the Office has introduced a strategy of aggressive enforcement, whereby arrears over \$50,000 are assigned to an individual client services associate, and monitored until such cases are in compliance.
- **Trace and Locate Unit** - The Unit focuses on tracking down non-compliant parents through returned mail.⁴² Also, the new "trace-and-locate initiative" will assist the Office in following up on outdated client contact information.⁴³ This Unit depends on access to databases across the province, for example, the

Ministry of Transportation's data.⁴⁴ Negotiations are ongoing with other ministry partners to broaden FRO's access to more databases with addresses to locate individuals.⁴⁵ The Unit will conduct an extensive search of 2,500 pieces of mail returned each month.⁴⁶

Virtual Files

The Committee is supportive of an "integrated information management system," or virtual files with various features comprised of document management, and an audit function with links to other data bases to facilitate tracking and storage. An electronic "virtual" filing system would provide staff with shared information on each file on a timely basis within a case management format. According to the Ministry, the new system will permit a proactive management style that will enhance accountability.

Accommodation Arrangements

The Committee noted that intervening financial arrangements and personal circumstances may result in an accommodation between estranged spouses. It is possible that a percentage of the files may have been accommodated or agreed upon between former spouses. In such cases, certain payments may not need to be paid through FRO because of financial settlements. In other cases, it may be impossible for individuals to make payments due to employment issues, and they may have not returned to court to adjust the terms of the court order.⁴⁷

In summary, in the case of an accommodation, such payments may cover circumstances related to how much is to be paid, how it is to be paid (a gift or a cash payment) or other arrangements in lieu of a payment that are not recorded within the FRO system.⁴⁸

Committee Recommendation

Enforcement Strategy

The focus in the audit report was on timely enforcement action, specifically relying on a timetable for prescribed enforcement steps. During the hearings, the Ministry identified a number of steps taken to enhance compliance, and addressed the development of a strategy to enhance enforcement.

The underlying enforcement issue in these hearings relates to the current management system and the absence of the appropriate supporting technology, which has compromised the Office's efforts. In addition, the Ministry acknowledged that other areas require attention; namely, improving client relations, enhanced outreach to inform FRO clientele about the system; and education of clients, the bench and the bar.⁴⁹

The Committee therefore recommends that:

3. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the impact of the

Family Responsibility Office's enforcement strategy. The Committee strongly encourages the Office to aggressively pursue enforcement in a proactive regime, utilizing an integrated information management system.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

2.4. Customer Service – Call Centre

FRO operates a toll-free call centre that is the primary means for clients to communicate with the Office, in addition to written correspondence. The Auditor recommended that FRO should review its call centre operations and take the steps necessary to ensure that all calls are answered or responded to within a reasonable period of time.

FRO acknowledged the problems affecting the operation of the call centre in its response to the audit report. The contributing factors include the increasing caseload, the need for a new service-delivery model and supporting technology, and the need to provide clients with direct access to assigned caseworkers.

Committee Hearings

System Modifications and Plans

The Committee expressed concern with the number of blocked phone calls, particularly the percentage outside of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). FRO explained that this is due to the fact that there are more calls than staff, and that the majority of all calls are from the GTA.⁵⁰ Enhanced accessibility is a Ministry priority, and the Office has taken initiatives to improve service, contingent upon technological upgrades.⁵¹ The Ministry provided supplementary information indicating that it has looked into increasing the current allocation of lines to the call centre, but that improvements on call wait times is dependent on additional staff to answer calls.⁵² Clients are encouraged to use the automated phone system.⁵³ Also, the Ministry is not considering a decentralized service model, although it may consider outreach programs to enhance relations with its client base.

New Customer Service Unit

A call centre coordinator was hired to enhance accessibility. Approximately 1,600 calls are being diverted from the call centre to the new customer service unit.⁵⁴ The objective is to free staff resources to focus on enforcing court orders and support payments, enabling the enforcement office to answer up to 1,600 additional calls per day.⁵⁵ The dedicated customer service unit of 26 staff diverts routine administrative calls, such as address changes, away from the enforcement staff.⁵⁶ In addition to hiring the call centre coordinator, FRO has a call monitoring

process, a dedicated customer service unit, and is offering monitoring and coaching workshops.

There are 17,000 calls daily to the automated voice line checking case status. The call centre receives 1,900 calls a day from people wanting to talk to staff to discuss information such as an address change, court action etc.⁵⁷ A smaller call centre is in the longer term plans.⁵⁸

Finally, a monthly report, which is to be combined with frequent performance meetings, will include a review of complaints received and the tracking system. The proposal for an integrated service delivery model includes assigning each case to an individual staff member with support from integrated teams delivering client services.⁵⁹

Committee Recommendation

Customer Service Functions

Improvements have been made to the customer service function through the new customer service unit and the call centre. The Committee acknowledges that these steps are important in enhancing overall accessibility; however, it was noted that additional improvements are dependent upon the proposed technological improvements. The Ministry provided supplementary information indicating that the solution lies in a new answering model, which would require legislative and policy amendments.

As the technology upgrades will not be available in the immediate future, it will be necessary to assess customer service on an ongoing basis to determine whether additional intermediate adjustments in service levels are required.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

4. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should assess its customer service function on a regular basis to identify shortcomings and to implement remedial measures in the interim prior to the implementation of the improved service-delivery model and supporting technology. Staff resources should be available to effectively manage the call centre and to measure its impact by tracking telephone calls and developing baseline data on the centre's overall operation. The Family Responsibility Office should report to the Ministry of Community and Social Services on its findings from these regular reviews and its remedial action.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

2.5. Call Centre Alternatives

FRO clients can access limited information about their accounts through the automated telephone system, or they can obtain general program information and download various program forms from the Office's web site. The automated telephone line and the Web site are limited in their usefulness because they are not interactive, so clients cannot report information changes related to their cases.

The Auditor recommended that to help alleviate the demand for information and services through the Office's call centre, the Office should consider expanding access to detailed account information and the range of services available through the automated telephone line and web site. At the time of the audit, the Ministry explained that more information would be provided through a protected automated-voice information line.

Committee Hearings

Personal Identification Number System

At the time of the hearings, FRO was in the process of implementing a personal identification number (PIN) function in its system with protected access for clients using the automated voice information line.⁶⁰ It will permit clients to access an expanded range of case information on the automated voice response telephone system.⁶¹ The Ministry implemented phase one of this project on March 31, 2004 with secure access to expanded case-specific information.⁶² Clients can now enter online, and file a complaint form, which will alleviate the pressure on the call centre.⁶³

Direct Line Contact

In the future, the FRO's focus will be on the payer and the enforcement officer through a direct line contact.⁶⁴ The Ministry summarized the innovations as follows:⁶⁵

- teams comprised of enforcement officers and appropriate client service clerks with access to financial and legal resources, and a reconfiguration from nine to 14 teams and changes to the skill sets;
- improvements to the mail/documentation intake area through streamlining with a team focus (e.g., better technology such as printers and fax machines for each team to ensure accessibility);
- the new system and technology will provide essential features (e.g., the bring-forward systems); and
- a small call centre will be maintained for general inquiries.

On the payee side of the equation, the individual will have access to the smaller call centre, included in the team system so that staff are not working in isolation of each other, which has been the case.⁶⁶

The Committee enquired about the circumstances that prevented enhanced outreach from occurring. The Ministry explained that limited resources were a factor, although there had been a successful project in Thunder Bay.⁶⁷

2.6. FRO Computer System (Case Management Model)

The Family Responsibility Office indicated at the time of the audit that it needed to replace its computer system with a new service-delivery model supported by new technology. It undertook a business planning review and feasibility study of systems requirements for a management model. The Auditor had urged that the process of implementing a new system be accelerated. At the time of the audit, the submission was under review, pending approval and funding.

Committee Hearings

New Service Delivery Model

The Office has operated on an issue management system since 1996. The new model will be based on a case management approach.⁶⁸ The redesign of the Office's organizational structure will affect both the technology and management.⁶⁹ The Ministry is of the opinion that the new system will enhance the compliance rate given the improved familiarity that staff would have with the respective cases.⁷⁰

The Cabinet approved the decision to proceed with the new service delivery model in December 2003.⁷¹ Management Board approved the purchase of a software solution, rather than building a new system or enhancing the existing system.⁷²

Request for Proposals

The Committee addressed the RFP process at the hearings in February and again at the *in camera* session held in April 2004. The Committee has summarized the Ministry's commentary on this process to clarify the steps to be followed from the pre-RFP stage through to and including implementation.

The Ministry is using a pre-RFP procedure. The pre-release process provides the Ministry with an understanding of the extent to which there are interested vendors, and it will provide feedback from potential vendors.⁷³

The Ministry will be considering various options in reaching a decision, which include buying an existing model, building a new version or enhancing its existing model. According to the Ministry, there are several models in existence in North American jurisdictions worthy of consideration; however, the vendor will have to address specific FRO requirements, which are not always available in other jurisdictions. The formal RFP stage will ensure that all requirements are fully documented.⁷⁴

The time frame for the Phase 1 pre- or draft RFP's pre-release is four weeks, followed by a report-back on the outcome of the draft RFP process; and Phase 2 –

the final RFP is out for 12 weeks.⁷⁵ The proposal would be forwarded to Management Board between Phases 1 and 2.⁷⁶ Following the RFP stage is the selection of a vendor and consideration of a prototype; testing as the application is being developed, and the definition of a strategy; and finally the testing of a new document imaging system.⁷⁷

It is expected that it could take approximately two years to introduce a new computer system, with a cost in the order of \$10 to \$40 million.⁷⁸ The pre-release RFP closed in February 2004, and the RFP is to proceed in August 2004 and close in October 2004 with final negotiations and contract signing. The implementation timeframe is 18-24 months (2006) for the business model and technology. The data conversion will occur over 12-14 months.

The Ministry has retained a Fairness Commissioner for the procurement process, to ensure an open and transparent approach, within the context of Management Board Directives and Guidelines. Also, it is expected that the Ministry's internal audit staff would be involved.⁷⁹

Vendor Consultation

The pre-release entails a vendor consultation process to identify firms and consider their qualifications. The Committee stressed the importance of developing a solid business case with a defined corporate vision with objectives and operational requirements. Also, the Committee pointed to the importance of having adequate staffing, providing individual services in conjunction with the current focus on technological solutions. The Committee was given assurance that FRO has addressed business planning and policy requirements as the initial step.

The Ministry has had a favourable response from potential vendors on the draft RFP list. FRO developed approximately eight hundred business model requirements in the RFP, with 95% of these in the case management and supporting technology areas. The Ministry expects a 70%-80% fit between its requirements and the technology selected.

Management Board instructed the Ministry to revisit the pre-release stage to obtain additional feedback from vendors. The objective was to ensure due diligence and compliance with procedures in an open and fair process. The Ministry is to report to Management Board before proceeding with the RFP.

Return-on-Investment (2004-09)

The Committee enquired about the return-on-investment in dollar terms and the timeframe.⁸⁰ The Ministry indicated that this is viewed as a very strong project with a strong return on investment.⁸¹ Significant savings are expected by moving to new technology, with a return on investment beginning in 2006-07, a year after implementation.⁸² Assuming a 2004-06 implementation period, the payback starts in 2006-07, and it is expected that benefits will start to materialize at that time, with full payback three years later in 2008-09.⁸³ The Ministry described the projected financial benefits as follows:

The \$210 million that is owed to government is a cumulative cost...we can see a 20% increase in recoveries to government. Last year we collected about \$34 million back to government. We know that we can probably increase that by \$6 million to \$8 million every year. We used to have teams that were just specifically focused on recoveries to government and social assistance dollars returned, but because we are kind of stretched to the limit we've had to move away from that. So we know we're not collecting as much as we could or should be; we're hoping in the model that we will.

Research in Other Jurisdictions and the Partnering Option

The Committee enquired about developing software in partnership with other jurisdictions, improved data interchange, shared cost options, and automated solutions in use in other jurisdictions.⁸⁴ The Ministry's preferred approach is to look at existing systems with proven technology.⁸⁵ Most enforcement programs employ a variation of the case management mode and benefit from shared information in their systems.⁸⁶ FRO's position on partnering has yet to be determined, as it will depend on the vendor selected and the system proposed, and the extent of any similarities with other jurisdictions.⁸⁷ The Committee noted that there are jurisdictions worthy of consideration such as British Columbia's model.⁸⁸

B.C. Feasibility Study

In 2001, the Ministry retained Themis Program Management and Consulting Ltd. to undertake a study (the *2001 FRO Feasibility Study Report*) of FRO's computer requirements, and enforcement models in other provinces.⁸⁹ The Ministry wanted to identify compatible software/technology solutions, and business model solutions in other jurisdictions that could fit Ontario's business needs.⁹⁰ The Ministry noted that British Columbia (B.C.) is considered an enforcement leader in Canada.⁹¹

The [feasibility] study we were doing was against BC's model. We [Ministry] were looking at BC's model, both structurally and through their technology, as to whether or not that type of solution, that type of model, could fit our [Ontario's] business needs.

They said it met 80% of our requirements and would require 20% modification.⁹²

The B.C. model, which uses the case management methodology, has been in place for 15 years. According the Ministry, there are two main considerations in adopting the B.C. model. The Ontario environment is understandably different

from B.C.'s and their system would have been developed to connect with their particular provincial systems and computer architecture. Also, the Ministry is required by Management Board to follow an RFP system rather than a sole-source application.⁹³ Other related issues noted by the Committee include:

- scalability – whether the existing software is capable of being scaled up from British Columbia's to Ontario's population;
- technology – compatibility of the B.C. platform and software with Ontario's; and
- ministry/legislation - compatibility with the specific and unique aspects of Ontario's social services and relevant legislation.⁹⁴

In Ontario the 65% compliance rate represents full and partial compliance.⁹⁵ B.C., which has been referred to as an exemplary model, has 40% full compliance, 52% partial compliance, for a total of 92% compliance.⁹⁶

Current Status

This feasibility study was the only study conducted for the province, although the Ministry is relying on the experience of other provinces.⁹⁷ As far as working in co-operation with other similar jurisdictions, the Ministry is pursuing this avenue through various steps:

- development of national strategies (e.g., working committee on technology) under a federal/provincial/territorial initiative; and
- a working committee recognizing the importance of common platforms, given the working relationship among the various jurisdictions (e.g., transfer funds electronically).⁹⁸

Also, the Ministry has defined its business requirements, for example, business process mapping, and staffing requirements.⁹⁹

Opt-In/Opt-Out Options

Ontario tracks individuals who have opted out of the program, but not those who opt back into the program. According to the Ministry, approximately two thirds return to the program.¹⁰⁰ The total number of individuals who have opted out of the program as of December 2003 was 38,872.¹⁰¹

Most programs in Canada and the United States are mandatory or universal. According to the Ministry, each model has pros and cons:

The voluntary opt-in program gives people a choice. It says, "Do you wish to come into this program?" But that's all it does. Everything else is the same, but it does give you that choice. We [Ministry] have a mandatory program where

people can agree to leave the program if they so desire. I think some of the experiences that other programs have had, which is why they've actually moved away from voluntary opt-in, are that sometimes your most vulnerable individuals are not aware of the program and therefore don't have the benefit of an enforcement program. . . . A voluntary program puts the onus on you to come into the program.¹⁰²

The concern was expressed that FRO's approach may result in files being opened unnecessarily and resulting in numerous dormant files on the system. The Committee considered various arguments on the merits of voluntary versus compulsory participation:

- **Most Complex Cases/Poor Compliance Rate** - a voluntary opt-in model may result in the system having only the most complex cases, due to the fact that when a case is received it could be substantially in arrears, after an agreement fails. This could contribute to bad compliance rates.¹⁰³
- **System Avoidance** - if FRO had a solid track record for ensuring compliance in a "voluntary opt-in system," this would have a positive impact in society. Therefore, the very presence of FRO positively affects compliance.¹⁰⁴
- **Reduced Caseload** - the opt-in mechanism could save resources, with a reduced caseload.¹⁰⁵ The Committee pursued the argument that it may not be necessary to retain compliant files in a mandatory system, as these cases burden the system. It was suggested in Committee that FRO could eliminate the unnecessary caseload and assume only those who really need the FRO assistance.¹⁰⁶ The Ministry explained that because these cases are in full compliance, a limited amount of time is spent on them. However, some may want to stay in the program for the security provided over the long term, while others may exercise the opt-out option.¹⁰⁷
- **Most Disadvantaged Groups** - the Ministry explained that the mandatory approach has an advantage for the most disadvantaged groups, while still providing an opportunity to opt-out.¹⁰⁸ One position proposed was to restrict the system to those with a defined need, and where assistance has been requested and not received.¹⁰⁹ In response, the Ministry pointed out that compliance rate averages are about 32%, but that this is not a static number, given that individuals are in and out of compliance over time.¹¹⁰

Committee Observations and Conclusions

The Committee concluded that certain matters should be explored as part of the RFP process to ensure that the end product addresses the concerns identified by the Provincial Auditor in the 2003 and previous audit reports. The Committee expressed concern in several areas, as follows:

- **Technical Oversight** - the Committee concluded that oversight is essential in the consideration and purchase of technology systems, given that a high percentage of such acquisitions encounter problems. The Committee is of the opinion that every effort should be made to ensure a high probability of successful deployment, including a high calibre team to scrutinize all aspects of the project, beginning with the RFP stage. The thorough scrutiny of the agreement by Management Board is necessary, combined with other professionals in the IT field to ensure complete transparency and a thorough review process, followed by regular assessments prior to and after implementation. The Ministry explained that an RFP evaluation team will include FRO IT staff and personnel from the human services IT cluster.¹¹¹ In addition, FRO's business and IT staff will be involved in the evaluation, and the Fairness Commissioner would help to facilitate the process. Also, FRO legal staff will serve in an oversight role.¹¹²
- **RFP Timeframe** - the Committee was concerned about the long two-year time frame before the new case management model is operational.¹¹³
- **Cost-sharing/System Integration** – the Committee noted the merits of system integration with other jurisdictions incorporating such features as best practices, and cost-sharing.¹¹⁴
- **Selection of the Service-Delivery Model/ Supporting Technology** - the Committee is of the opinion that the selection of a new service-delivery model and supporting technology is a substantial commitment of Ministry resources, and that every effort must be made to ensure the compatibility of the new system over the long term. For example, the view was expressed by some Members that FRO needs to reconsider its mandate to determine whether it is focusing on those people in society that require this service. For example, the merits of the opt in/out provision may require further consideration at this time, given the changes anticipated in the new delivery model.

Committee Recommendations

Cost and Benefits

As part of the discussion on the return-on-investment, the Committee noted that there will be increased costs with the implementation of the new case management model.¹¹⁵ Also, the Ministry expects increased payments, and possibly increased savings on the social assistance program.¹¹⁶ The Committee noted that the Ministry would be tracking these costs and benefits, and pointed to the need to address improvements in the overall cost of providing these services.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

5. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the increased costs and benefits attributed to FRO's new service-delivery model and supporting technology when implemented.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

Information Request – Post RFP

The Committee pointed out that with 400 staff and a budget of \$30 million, the annual collection is approximately \$560 million a year.¹¹⁷ The Committee was interested in the impact of the proposed system improvements, for example, in relation to the collection costs in the future.¹¹⁸

The Ministry indicated that it would prefer to provide this information following the RFP, when there will be a better sense of the costs.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the Ministry indicated that it would be able to provide the related outcome measures at that time for a determination of whether the Ministry has achieved its objectives in this area.¹²⁰

The Committee therefore recommends that:

6. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the impact of the new computer system. Specifically, the Committee is interested in system and program delivery improvements of a qualitative and quantitative nature, for example, in the area of collections. This report should include information on the technological requirements addressed in the new system, the project costs, implementation timelines, and an explanation of Ministry outcome measures or performance indicators.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

3. STAFF RESOURCES

The availability of adequate resources to fulfil the FRO's mandate was a central issue during the hearings. The availability of the necessary personnel was an important part of that discussion, given that staffing has a direct impact on the general operation of the Office, and on program delivery. Consequently, the Committee has decided to address personnel as a separate item in this report.

Committee Hearings

The Ministry indicated that it is realigning business processes by changing its team structure.¹²¹ For example, FRO is redesigning job descriptions, which entails

discussing staffing levels and associated options.¹²² The Ministry confirmed that since 1994, FRO has approximately 40 fewer staff performing casework or acting in a caseworker capacity, which includes related responsibilities such as enforcement.¹²³

The Committee noted this staff reduction, and the fact that there are 40,000 more cases.¹²⁴ As noted in this report, the average number of files/cases with outstanding work items assigned to senior caseworkers has ranged from 600 to more than 1,300, averaging 890 cases per caseworker. The workload or ratio of the optimum number of files will vary across the province, but the average is between 700 to 900.¹²⁵ In response to this situation, the staff adjustments mean that when clients call today they have the option of providing information through the customer service unit, which is more accessible, and will alleviate some of the calls through the call centre.¹²⁶ FRO has provided the following staff adjustments:¹²⁷

- a new customer service unit with 15 staff dealing with more general inquiries;
- 16 staff in the customer service unit;
- five staff focused on the trace-and-locate initiative addressing returned mail; and
- five employees contacting people when their court order is registered with the FRO.¹²⁸

Personnel Planning

The Committee suggested that unless additional staff is hired, service delivery may be compromised.¹²⁹ The Ministry indicated at the time of the hearing that it was in the process of preparing its annual budget for 2004-05, and that it would be considering various options, including staffing.¹³⁰ The Ministry requires the proper staff levels to enhance its enforcement responsibilities over the long term and to address outstanding issues prior to the introduction of a new system. FRO received approval for 52 new staff, 26 last fiscal year and the remainder next year. FRO indicated that it needs to review all options before it can definitively establish its future requirements.¹³¹ The Committee pointed to the need to evaluate the impact of the new staff and also expressed concern in the event that the current allocation is not realized.

The Ministry has plans to bring options on program financing forward for consideration for the next two years.¹³² The Ministry expects to have a sense of the budget in early spring 2004 for such expenditures.¹³³ The Committee enquired about the budget options and whether an increase in the number of caseworkers was under consideration, to which the Deputy replied in the affirmative.¹³⁴

Committee Recommendation

Staff Complement Planning

The Committee noted the fluctuations in staff levels and caseloads. Although the Ministry has taken steps recently to address staff levels, the Committee has concluded that the Ministry will require a comprehensive review of its staff

complement to provide the necessary support for the anticipated changes in program delivery with the implementation of the new service delivery model and supporting technology. Also, given that the caseload situation is not static, it will be necessary to review the staff complement regularly as system demands continue to fluctuate over time.¹³⁵

At the April 2004 hearings, the Committee stressed the importance of assessing staff levels during the interim period 2004-06 to determine the effectiveness of daily operations. The Ministry acknowledged the need for resources, but it was not able to elaborate immediately prior to the 2004 provincial budget.

This recommendation was made with the knowledge that the Ministry has committed to undertake a review of staffing before it is in a position to define future requirements at FRO.¹³⁶ The Committee concluded that FRO's staff complement requires monitoring to identify weaknesses and to ensure that adequate resources are available in the interim, pending the Ministry review.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

7. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts supports the Ministry of Community and Social Services' commitment to undertake a study of future staffing requirements. In the interim, FRO should monitor its personnel complement to ensure that the Office is not under staffed. The report on the staff review should address such matters as the anticipated staffing implications at the Family Responsibility Office resulting from the implementation of the proposed service-delivery model and supporting technology. Also, the Ministry should assess the impact of the 26 new staff members.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

4. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

4.1. Reporting Program Effectiveness

The FRO's mandate is to ensure compliance with all registered family-support obligations and where necessary to take appropriate enforcement action while treating both payers and recipients fairly. The Office prepares monthly and quarterly internal management reports, as well as a quarterly report that is submitted to the Management Board Secretariat. The statistical information collected provides a general idea of the type and volume of activity undertaken by the Office. It does not address the overall effectiveness and areas for

improvement. The only publicly disclosed performance measure is the number of accounts in full or partial compliance with their support obligations.

The Auditor recommended that to help ensure and be able to assess whether family-support obligations are effectively enforced and that areas in need of improvement are identified, the Office should measure and report on additional results indicators. These would include: the number of cases with significant arrears not assigned to a caseworker, and therefore not actively enforced; the timeliness of enforcement actions taken on assigned accounts; the number of telephone calls to the call centre that were blocked, and therefore not answered; the aging of support arrears and an assessment of their collectibility; and the nature and number of complaints received.

The Ministry's response to the audit report was that the FRO is in agreement with the recommendation, but that it is limited in its ability to address these issues with the current system and information technology. The new system is required for generating management reports for timely responses.

FRO reported that with other jurisdictions, it has developed an "Operational Policies and Goals" document to provide for standardized communications processes and co-operative principles across jurisdictions as related to enforcement guidelines and actions. In 2003 these jurisdictions were setting out baseline data to identify performance measures for the development of guidelines and standards.

Committee Hearings

External and Internal Measures

As noted, the only performance measure reported is the number of accounts in full or partial compliance with their support obligations. In the past, the Office collected additional statistics on other measures, but they were no longer requested.¹³⁷ Also, FRO explained that it had additional public performance measures, but that its ability to meet those targets or measures was difficult.¹³⁸ In addition, FRO staff have internal performance targets that they are required to meet in terms of quantity of enforcement actions, and calls answered, for example.

Measures in the New System

The Ministry confirmed that the new FRO system would be able to identify all cases, provide status reports on payments, track FRO actions, etc.¹³⁹ As part of this new technology, FRO will be considering its overall operations in relation to performance measures.¹⁴⁰

Performance Expectations and Proposed Benchmarks

The Committee expressed interest in how FRO will measure the efficacy or lack of efficacy of the new computer system, and comparisons of FRO's performance in 2003 with that after implementation of the new technology.¹⁴¹ The Office provided a list of performance expectations covering such measures as call waiting times, calls answered, statistics on arrears, and collections and

enforcement actions. FRO plans to use comparatives on features such as the following:

- call centre's busy signal to drop by 40%;
- the compliance rate from 65% to 70% within the first full year after implementation;
- collections from \$561 million in 2003-04 with the objective that they will increase by over \$50 million per year;
- increase in social assistance recoveries;
- improved effectiveness in providing more information to clients;
- case continuity for clients phoning the call centre (a performance expectation under the new model is that each case will have a designated staff person familiar with clients and their case); and
- a more proactive case management system will target approximately a 25% reduction in default hearings with fewer complaints (currently 14,000 hearings a year with the case follow-up method, system notification system, and lack of timeliness).¹⁴²

The Ministry explained to the Committee that the RFP, which is to include such measures, will be dependent on discussions on outcomes, costs, and expected benefits with the Minister, Management Board and Cabinet.¹⁴³

Committee Recommendation

Performance Measures

The Committee endorsed the role of benchmarks in enhancing accountability, and determining program effectiveness.¹⁴⁴ It concluded that FRO requires a comprehensive package of performance measures covering all aspects of its mandate, including for example, internal administrative targets as it considers a new system.

A review is required to identify current practices and procedures and appropriate performance measures for inclusion in the RFP. It will be necessary for the Ministry and Management Board to consult other jurisdictions in setting out baseline data to identify performance measures for the development of guidelines and standards for future reporting on FRO. A survey of best practices from other jurisdictions, including British Columbia, Alberta and Australia, would be of assistance. The Office's plans to conduct a client service survey with the results being used as benchmarks for future reporting are dealt with below.

The Committee concluded that a review is necessary to determine the overall performance of the current system, and the new system when installed.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

8. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should undertake a review of the current FRO system as soon as possible, and the proposed system at the end of the first year of operation to determine the level of overall effectiveness and efficiency of each based on established performance measures.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

4.2. Assessment of Client Satisfaction

The province's common service standards require regular collection of customer feedback (e.g., client satisfaction survey); however, the last client satisfaction survey was in the spring of 1999. Problems identified at that time were reported again in the 2003 audit. The Auditor recommended that to aid in the assessment of both customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of services provided, the Office should regularly conduct client satisfaction surveys to identify areas that are working well and those that are in need of improvement.

On completion of the audit, FRO indicted its commitment to conduct a client service survey in the fall of 2003, and to use the results as a benchmark for reporting on improvements to client satisfaction.¹⁴⁵ The first survey is to be conducted before the implementation of the new case management model. Customer feedback is to be collected regularly through client satisfaction surveys as a part of the business plan.¹⁴⁶

Committee Hearings

The FRO confirmed at the hearings that it plans to conduct a client service survey and that the results would be used as benchmarks for future-year reporting.¹⁴⁷ Also, the Office has committed to collect customer feedback to improve services and increase client satisfaction.¹⁴⁸

Committee Recommendation

Client Service Survey

The Committee is encouraged by the Ministry's restatement of its commitment to conduct a client satisfaction survey and to use the results for future planning purposes. The Committee noted that the survey was to have been conducted in the fall 2003.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

9. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on its findings from its client service survey. This report should explain how the results of this survey have been used to improve service delivery and client

satisfaction, and the role of this information as benchmark data for future-year reporting.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature.

5. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to the following recommendations within one hundred and twenty calendar days of the date of tabling this report in the Legislature, unless otherwise indicated in the recommendation.

1. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the follow-up procedures adopted by the Family Responsibility Office to ensure that client inquiries are addressed on a timely and consistent basis and that enforcement actions are properly managed by individual caseworkers on a case-by-case basis.

2. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the impact of the proposed case management model and supporting technology on the realignment of resources and the caseload, indicating the number of cases per case worker. In addition, this report should assess the impact of FRO's new criteria and standards for caseloads management.

3. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the impact of the Family Responsibility Office's enforcement strategy. The Committee strongly encourages the Office to aggressively pursue enforcement in a proactive regime, utilizing an integrated information management system.

4. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should assess its customer service function on a regular basis to identify shortcomings and to implement remedial measures in the interim prior to the implementation of the improved service-delivery model and supporting technology. Staff resources should be available to effectively manage the call centre and to measure its impact by tracking telephone calls and developing baseline data on the centre's overall operation. The Family Responsibility Office should report to the Ministry of Community and Social Services on its findings from these regular reviews and its remedial action.

5. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the increased costs and benefits

attributed to FRO's new service-delivery model and supporting technology when implemented.

6. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the impact of the new computer system. Specifically, the Committee is interested in system and program delivery improvements of a qualitative and quantitative nature, for example, in the area of collections. This report should include information on the technological requirements addressed in the new system, the project costs, implementation timelines, and an explanation of Ministry outcome measures or performance indicators.

7. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts supports the Ministry of Community and Social Services' commitment to undertake a study of future staffing requirements. In the interim, FRO should monitor its personnel complement to ensure that the Office is not under staffed. The report on the staff review should address such matters as the anticipated staffing implications at the Family Responsibility Office resulting from the implementation of the proposed service-delivery model and supporting technology. Also, the Ministry should assess the impact of the 26 new staff members.

8. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should undertake a review of the current FRO system as soon as possible, and the proposed system at the end of the first year of operation to determine the level of overall effectiveness and efficiency of each based on established performance measures.

9. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on its findings from its client service survey. This report should explain how the results of this survey have been used to improve service delivery and client satisfaction, and the role of this information as benchmark data for future-year reporting.

NOTES

¹ Ontario, *2003 Annual Report*, Office of the Provincial Auditor (The Office, 2003), p. 8. This section is a direct quote from the Provincial Auditor's *2003 Annual Report*, with minor stylistic changes for integration with this Committee report.

² Ontario, Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, First Session, 38th Parliament (11 February 2004): P-64.

³ *Ibid.*, P-67.

⁴ *2003 Annual Report*, p.72.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ontario, Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, First Session, 38th Parliament (11 February 2004): P-65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, P-64.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, P- 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, P-63 and P-64.

¹¹ The definition of partial compliance has changed since the time of the last audit by the Provincial Auditor; therefore, a comparison of compliance rates is not meaningful.

¹² Ontario, Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, First Session, 38th Parliament (11 February 2004): P-64

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, P-66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, P-64.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, P-66.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, P-82.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, P-83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, P-64.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, P-74.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, P-69 and P-84.

³¹ *Ibid.*, P-84.

³² *Ibid.*, P-84 and P-85.

³³ *Ibid.*, P-91.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, P-65 and P-91.

³⁵ Supplementary information provided to the Committee Clerk, in a letter from the Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services, dated March 17, 2004.

³⁶ Ontario, Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, First Session, 38th Parliament (11 February 2004): P-81.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, P--66.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, P-84.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, P-64.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, P-66.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, P-75.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, P-84.

⁴⁷ Ibid., P-70.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., P-74.

⁵⁰ Ibid., P-85.

⁵¹ Ibid., P-65.

⁵² Supplementary information provided to the Committee Clerk, in a letter from the Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services, dated March 17, 2004.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ontario, Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, First Session, 38th Parliament (11 February 2004): P-82.

⁵⁵ Ibid., P-65 and P-66.

⁵⁶ Ibid., P-64.

⁵⁷ Ibid., P-82 and P-83.

⁵⁸ Ibid., P-82.

⁵⁹ Ibid., P-64.

⁶⁰ Ibid., P-65 and P- 86.

⁶¹ Ibid., P-66.

⁶² Ibid., P-65.

⁶³ Ibid., P-86.

⁶⁴ Ibid., P-74.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., P-75.

⁶⁸ Ibid., P-64 and P-69.

⁶⁹ Ibid., P-67.

⁷⁰ Ibid., P-69.

⁷¹ Ibid., P-67.

⁷² Ibid., P-78.

⁷³ Ibid., P-68.

⁷⁴ Ibid., P-67.

⁷⁵ Ibid., P-68.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., P-79.

⁷⁸ Ibid., P-67 and P-72.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., P-73.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., P-80.

⁸⁴ Ibid., P-79.

⁸⁵ Ibid., P-67 and P-79.

⁸⁶ Ibid., P-78.

⁸⁷ Ibid., P-79.

⁸⁸ Ibid., P-78.

⁸⁹ Ibid., P-71.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., P-78.

⁹³ Ibid., P-81.

⁹⁴ Ibid., P-80.

⁹⁵ Ibid., P-69.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., P-72, and P-73.

⁹⁸ Ibid., P-79.

⁹⁹ Ibid., P-72.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., P-91.

¹⁰¹ Supplementary information provided to the Committee Clerk, in a letter from the Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services, dated March 17, 2004

¹⁰² Ontario, Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, First Session, 38th Parliament (11 February 2004): P-76.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, P-76 and P-77.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, P-76.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, P-77.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, P-76.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, P-77.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, P-76.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, P-78.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, P-83.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, P-80.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, P-70.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, P-92.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, P-82.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, P-91.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, P-92.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, P-86.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, P-82.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, P-83.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, P-92.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, P-82.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, P-82 and P-92.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, P-93.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, P-88.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, P-85.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, P-88.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, P-89.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, P-70.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, P-89.

¹⁴⁵ *2003 Annual Report*, p. 93.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Ontario, Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, First Session, 38th Parliament (11 February 2004): P-65.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*