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Wednesday 3 November 2004

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(Hansard)**

Mercredi 3 novembre 2004

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Ministry of Children
and Youth Services

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Services à l'enfance
et à la jeunesse

Chair: Cameron Jackson
Clerk: Trevor Day

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Wednesday 3 November 2004

Mercredi 3 novembre 2004

The committee met at 1552 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

The Vice-Chair (Mr John O'Toole): The standing committee on estimates is now in session. At this point in time there are three hours and 59 minutes left for the ministry. We're going to recognize first of all that we do have quorum and that there's 20 minutes for the government side to raise questions.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): Welcome, Minister. It's good to have you back. It's great to be back after a bit of a break.

There seems to be some confusion with the early childhood development agreement figures and how much funding we actually have available. First, if you could for me, how does the funding work? Secondly, what programs are currently being funded with this money? And if we said that we would spend the money on child care, why haven't we?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you. I'm happy to answer this question. I wasn't in the Legislature yesterday when it came up in a different form.

Since 2000, the federal government has been providing funding under the early childhood development agreement. The goal was to improve and expand the services and programs they provide for children under six and their families. There were four key areas for action. They agreed to invest in any or all of the following areas according to their own priorities: promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; improve parenting and family supports; strengthen early childhood development, learning and care; and strengthen community supports.

In opposition, we believed that more of this ECD funding should go to regulated, licensed daycare, and obviously the former government disagreed. The government allocated this funding, for their own reasons, to a list of programming that members of this committee I think have now. When I became minister, during my briefings I was informed that all of the available ECD money had been allocated, and to worthwhile programs. Then again, since becoming minister in April, I've asked our ministry to review these programs and their funding. In fact, the ministry is currently completing a review of

all of these programs, including the Ontario Early Years centres.

I have to be really careful—and I've said this in the Legislature many times. I don't want to do anything impulsive when it comes to children. Although the reviews are not complete, I have visited many of these programs, and they're worthwhile programs in many areas. I don't want to blindly and ideologically stop all the programs and put the money in any one area—at least not yet. Some of the programs provide much-needed services, but I'm continuing to review them, particularly in the context of the Best Start strategy, and that will be revealed soon.

I think you have the numbers as well, and I think you have the list of programs. They range from children with autism to CTCs to Healthy Babies—I don't have the list in front of me. I think you have them. If you have specific questions on any of them—Early Years centres, as I said, which was probably the most contentious one politically, program effectiveness measurements, support for at-risk pregnant women, infant hearing, Healthy Babies, pre- and post-natal, nurse practitioners.

You can see that once I was briefed as minister, I saw that these were potentially and probably very good programs and that we needed at the very least to review them before we made any transfers to child care, or anywhere else, for that matter.

In these reviews, if I find that some of the programs are not effective, I will indeed transfer those monies over. If they are, we will find other sources of money. But at present, they are under review. Again, I want to be very careful with this, and that's quite frankly more important to me than partisan politics.

Mr Arthurs: Thank you, Minister. That clarification is very helpful.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): Minister, at the session we had last Thursday, I believe it was, Mr Jackson asked some specific questions about funding for children's mental health and indicated from it that your proposed spending for 2004-05 is in fact less than the interim actuals for last year. And yet in conversations with foster parents in my community they seem to have a sense that children's mental health services are more available. Are we in fact spending less money on children's mental health?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I want to make it very clear—and I apologize if it wasn't clear last week—that the budget for children's mental health has not been

reduced. In fact, our government has demonstrated our commitment to children's health by increasing funding in this sector by \$25 million, as announced in our first budget in the province. This funding will grow to \$38 million and will address priority mental health issues.

We have included a 3% increase to agencies to stabilize the sector. This will help them increase staff salaries and wages in order to assist them to recruit and retain staff. We discussed at length on all sides of the table here how it's difficult to retain staff.

In addition, the ministry will increase service capacity by investing in new or enhanced services by funding innovative, results-based, multi-year community-based services in child and youth mental health. I think this was probably the point that was not as clear, and I apologize for that, because I had not seen any of the proposals. I knew they were coming. There may have been an impression that this was only planning and not services, but indeed it is services, and I have an example of one.

Here we go. I won't indicate the jurisdiction, because they have not been confirmed yet. I'll just tell you an example of a proposal we received from one jurisdiction. It's a range of services for early intervention, such as outreach workers in schools located in high-risk areas, respite services to keep parents energized to continue to meet the needs of their challenging children and youth, innovative staff training models to build a capacity to serve children and youth with complex mental health issues, and investing in proven programs that have demonstrated good outcomes.

If a community is doing very good work—I mean, this money is meant to have more innovative and better integrated programs to service more children, but we don't want them to discard what has been working as well. So this proposal had it all, had some new programs that they had not in the past invested in with provincial and federal dollars, as well as some of the ones that had been working.

Again, this is just an example. We're at the beginning of this process, but the monies should flow very soon because we are receiving very creative and well-integrated proposals.

Mr Parsons: That's the sense I get back in the community.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Again, I apologize if I wasn't clear last week.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): Minister, at the last meeting you talked about community planning tables and how they will be deciding on how the \$13 million in children's mental health will be spent and how this will translate into more services.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: That's what I just attempted to explain, but I can go further if you want.

Mr Rinaldi: If you can.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: It's part of the \$25 million. Of course, this money is not one-shot money. This \$13 million is money that will grow and continue. So whatever services—and I gave an example just now—are funded in a certain jurisdiction and across the province,

those services will continue and grow. I've only read one. I'm looking for more proposals. I know they're in, but I haven't personally seen them. That is what I meant last week.

1600

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Thank you, Minister. I'm interested in talking to you about children's treatment centres, but I think I'd be remiss on this day, when you've just come back from Ottawa, if I didn't ask you about your trip to Ottawa and the meetings that went on there. I think all members of the committee would be interested in knowing—well, to start at the beginning, what was sort of the overall agenda going in and what are the outcomes and next steps?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Well, as I said in the Legislature, it was actually a very positive meeting. We have provinces and territories from all different political parties, and to come to an agreement on the principles relatively quickly was mind-boggling, because I've been to a couple of these things and you have a general communiqué at the end, but here there were very specific grounds. We agreed on the principles, the QUAD principles: quality, universality, accessibility and developmental appropriateness for the children.

We also agreed, regardless of political party, that every province is unique, that every province is starting at a different position; for example, Manitoba is ahead of us with respect to child care, Quebec is ahead and Ontario is not. We have catching up to do. So we will not have the same targets as Quebec and Manitoba. That was understood, that to expect us to have, for argument's sake, 80% of all children in regulated child care by the same year that Manitoba and Quebec should was not a realistic expectation. That was acceptable.

The other thing that was extremely gratifying was that, despite the philosophical differences between the provinces, generally speaking, given their political differences, on this issue we were incredibly united about that flexibility. Not one province—not one—insisted that these monies should go only for not-for-profit. In fact, every province said that wouldn't be a good thing, that in fact in most provinces that would result in loss of spaces. It was quality that was important, as long as it was regulated and quality. Those were the important indicators across the country.

We decided to get back together in January and talk about how the money will flow. The federal minister told us he would be presenting the \$5 billion—\$1 billion a year over five years—as part of the February budget and that the money, if the budget passes federally, should flow in April. No specific amounts were talked about in any province. I went up there with the hope not that I'd come back with a cheque, but that I'd come back with at least an amount. We, of course, told them that we are expecting \$400 million, that that was based on per capita formulas. Formulas were bounced around, and we did decide to keep the formula pretty standard, the way provinces have been funded in the past. So that bodes well for Ontario.

We discussed the aboriginal children's situation as well. On that area we will continue discussions in January. There was some talk about whether those monies should be included in those, but the provinces thought that those are big enough problems and challenges across the country that that should be a separate budget item. Minister Dryden didn't say no; he just said that we will continue talks on that in January. So what would that mean for Ontario? That might mean \$20 million. So it might be \$380 million rather than \$400 million. Again, none of these were on paper; these were just expectations that were discussed.

It was an amazingly collegial meeting. I guess that's not all that popular in politics, but that's certainly my bias, and I think a lot had to do with the openness of a very new minister. Minister Dryden was very open to listening. He obviously has the support of the Prime Minister on this. We all know how these things work, and if he didn't, he wouldn't be able to have the communiqué that he did.

Quebec was there as an observer. As you know, they have, on many fronts, different types of deals with the federal government. They were there basically just to tell us how their program, which is one of the leading programs in the country, and indeed in the world—the ups and downs of implementing that program. They're very forthright and honest. Their situation was that they were there as observers and to help. They were not there as part of the agreement. On many fronts, Quebec has a different relationship with the federal government. But we appreciated their presence, and they did not form, in any way, any kind of obstacle for the rest of us. They were quite supportive and in agreement. It was excellent.

Mr Milloy: What are going to be the next steps in Ontario between now and January? Taking a look at the January meeting and beyond, how do you see things unfolding?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I got back last night and then saw the American election until about 3 in the morning, so I haven't had a chance yet to talk to my staff and my ministry. But we will have talks very soon about what this means to our plan: the timing of our plan and any modifications to our Best Start plan.

Our goal hasn't changed. It was always to introduce the plan before Christmas, and at the latest in the new year, and that goal still remains.

Mr Milloy: The purpose of the January meeting is obviously to carry on the talks, but is there specifically an agenda?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: The goal of the January meeting is also to spend more money on the amounts and confirm how monies will flow.

As well, there will be accountability measures which, by the way, I welcomed publicly to the press. I think that if the federal government gives us a fair amount of money—\$400 million or thereabouts—we need to show them that we are using this money wisely. Quebec has a different opinion on that, but again, they have a child

care system that we can envy and they have a different relationship with the federal government.

I welcome that accountability. I think those will be hammered out in January. I'm not worried about that. There has already been an understanding that each province is at a different stage, and therefore the accountability measures won't be the same from province to province. They might be the same qualitatively, but quantitative targets will be different, depending on how we're starting out.

Mr Milloy: Do we have an idea, in a general sense, of what the accountability targets will look like or what sort of categories there will be?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I think one may be the number of spaces, quite frankly, but not confined to the number of spaces. One of the problems we have in the child care sector, which used to be my profession, is retention of staff. They are the lowest-paid of all professionals. When you think of the important work they do—they're with our children, those of us who choose to have our children with child care workers and ECEs, during the most important times of their lives. As far as setting a strong base and complementing the base that is formed in the home with the parents, they have the second most important role, other than parents and family. And yet a lot of them are making minimum wage, not just in Ontario but across the country.

So part of it would be training and wages for these professionals, but with that also comes accountability and credibility for them. We've already talked about having a college of early childhood educators—and it will be part of our Best Start plan—so that the public is protected and credibility is given to the profession.

Maybe one of the targets might be, what are your training targets and how will you prove to us that you're reaching them? In Ontario, we have two-tier ECEs—we have degrees, and we have diplomas—not unlike a lot of professions before they became regulated. Regulation takes time, so we would have to have targets for that. Also, we would have to have targets for training and wages.

So there's a lot of work to be done. I'm not going to pretend for a moment that it's done. I think the principles were agreed upon, the fact the money is coming was agreed upon and the flexibility was agreed upon.

1610

The Vice-Chair: Mr Parsons.

Mr Parsons: I'm quite a quick thinker as long as I'm given lots of time to do it. I'm going to come back to my question, and maybe Mr Jackson can help me with it. If we look at the estimate for children's mental health, it shows \$336 million for 2003-04 versus \$350 million for the interim actuals. Am I right, Mr Jackson, that your question was about whether Thistletown would have reduced funding?

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): Thistletown was one.

Mr Parsons: One of several you mentioned.

Mr Jackson: Yes.

Mr Parsons: It looks like you're spending less, but you've indicated increased services, so I'm wondering what the numbers mean.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'm going to turn that over to my CAO, who I know can guide you through the printed estimates on this.

Mr Bohodar Rubashewsky: The subtotal line in the estimates constitutes our direct operating expenditures, primarily in our two children's facilities, Thistleton and the Child and Parent Resource Institute or CPRI. I would like to clarify that there has been no reduction in funding to those facilities and to the ministry's direct operating expenditures in this area.

This budget, which totals \$37.8 million for 2004-05, is the same as the budget that was in place in 2003-04. In that year, however, we did spend approximately \$2 million more than was budgeted at the beginning of the fiscal year. These expenditures were primarily for one-time costs that were not anticipated at the beginning of the fiscal year. These were primarily related to infrastructure upgrades in both centres: air conditioning and generating units, ramps for disabled access, some telephone and other upgrades. As a result, we did have these one-time expenditures. They were incurred. They're not expected to recur this fiscal year.

As a result, the budget is as it is. Again, there has been no reduction in the operating budgets for those two facilities.

Mr Parsons: The agencies that received funding will not have any cuts?

Mr Rubashewsky: That's right.

Mr Parsons: OK.

The Vice-Chair: In this remaining minute, does anybody—Minister?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Thank you for the questions. Do you have anything to say?

Mr Parsons: Not in a minute. That's the problem. Tack it on to the next round, Chair.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: OK. I guess, if I have 30 seconds, I should probably talk a little more about Ottawa on the aboriginal children's front. We did, in fact, press the minister that that should be money over and above the \$5 billion. I didn't want you to think we gave in on that. I gave you the \$380-million estimate just in case, but we are pressing on with that, and there was acknowledgement on the federal minister's part that it is a serious problem. There was a representative there from Nunavut, who told us some pretty tragic stories.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you. I recognize the official opposition. Mr Jackson.

Mr Jackson: Minister, I would like to revisit the Ontario Association of Residences Treating Youth and concerns that I raised with you earlier, both in the House and in this committee. I left you with a couple of questions expressing concern about the fact that we're making a distinction here about the quality of the contribution of men and women who are providing services for high-risk children, yet we're not recognizing, as we have for some programs in the past, making sure they are funded at a

rate that will allow their sector to continue to provide high-quality service that is, as we know, regulated and fully responsible for the safety of these children.

I'm at a loss to understand why you have dismissed out of hand this group of service providers in our province, given the fact that there is ample precedent in the province—this government and past governments—not to discriminate against the worker based on the location in which they're providing their services.

Perhaps you could explain to me why you specifically singled them out for exclusion at a time when they're being called upon to take increasingly more complex and challenging cases, which, frankly, are putting their staff at risk. In my lifetime in this Legislature, I had to share the embarrassment of a staff person who was murdered in a facility, which brought to light a whole series of questions about the level of security to protect these young women who are providing service to these children.

So perhaps you could respond to that because, as I've said on the record, you do regulate this sector, you do determine their rate of pay for outside placement accommodation, you set those rates and, on many occasions—and I checked with my CAS—there are many times when the government contracts directly on behalf of crown wards to provide those services. So by your own standard, you're violating those principles by simply saying that you have no direct relationship with these agencies when in fact you do.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: We had a tough budget, as you know. I was one of the fortunate ones that received an increase in my budget, but it wasn't an infinite increase; it's not an infinite budget. So I made some choices, and they were difficult choices. We chose for this first budget to give an increase to the direct transfer paying agencies, those that we directly fund.

I have met with the sector you talk about and I'm in no way opposed to the per diem operators. They are—you're right—our agencies, indirectly. My ministry will be reviewing some of the practices. There is a vast range of rates out there, which also concerns me, from centres that charge a couple of hundred dollars to much more for what could or could not be a different service, but we'll see after this review.

I'm not averse to increased funding for anyone who has to deal with children, but we had to make some difficult choices and we thought that, rather than haphazardly fund, we would fund in a focused way, and we funded those that were directly transfer agencies. I can ask my deputy to add more about the per diem rates or anything she thinks might help out here.

Ms Jessica Hill: I think, as the minister has indicated, we do see the need to do a review of the residential service system in the province. They do support a number of our sectors: child welfare, children's mental health, youth justice. It is accurate, Mr Jackson, that we do set the rates. However, we have also, because of the need in child welfare, created or licensed new group homes and so we have a very differential field right now. That is one of the reasons we see the need to review the

whole sector. I believe my ADM can add a bit more detail to our current arrangements.

Mr Jackson: I'm interested in determining why you cancelled rate review across the board for this sector. They've been told that there is no rate review process any longer within the ministry. If you can contradict that, which would be wonderful news, when are you planning your first meeting to do rate review with this group?

Ms Hill: I think perhaps what I can do is describe our current process to you and we will begin with that.

Mr Jackson: Well, let's cut to the chase: Do you have a provision now in your process that allows for rate review for them to come forward and say, "We cannot continue on this basis unless we get a regular increase"?

Ms Hill: We have a process for creating rates for new homes.

Mr Jackson: I'm talking about the existing thousands of spaces out there being provided by not-for-profit, charitable organizations, well-intended, good people—

Ms Hill: There is a process in place for that now and, if you'd like, the ADM can describe it.

Mr Jackson: I just want to know when they can apply, and when's the last time they applied?

Ms Hill: They can apply under certain conditions. That's what I thought would be useful for the members.

Mr Jackson: What are the conditions, then?

1620

Ms Trinela Cane: Perhaps I could speak to it and clarify, Mr Jackson.

The rate reviews, as Mr Jackson noted, are undertaken by the regional offices of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. There is no freeze on rate reviews at this point in time, nor is one planned.

My understanding is that per diem operators are able to submit a proposal for a rate review. Rate reviews are based on significant program changes and enhancements that are proposed to be taking place. That is one of the key criteria for what determines that an agency is eligible for a rate review. There is a process that involves the review of the proposal itself against the criteria related to program enhancement.

I know that component, the enhancement of programs, has been a source of some frustration for this sector as the primary basis for review, but the regional office will entertain the proposals that come forward as they come forward and, against the various criteria that have been established, undertake that review.

Mr Jackson: Thank you, Trinela. I understand the subtle difference between an enhancement and a rate review. A rate review is to give bump funding for salaries. What is included? Are rate increases on your list of so-called enhancements they can apply for?

Ms Cane: My understanding is that rate increases related to specific program enhancements are eligible.

Mr Jackson: Describe a program enhancement, then, so I can get the difference. I want to argue the point that these people are getting screwed just by simply doing the work they're doing and providing more of it with more complex care. I want to get on the record exactly what

your ministry will actually look at, because I'm led to believe that "enhancements" does not include wage increases. There may be other factors, and if you could tell me—I'm talking about existing programs, not new.

Ms Cane: My understanding is that the enhancements refer to new program components coming on-stream that perhaps deal with different target populations to be served or very specific program interventions that are different from what is currently being provided.

Mr Jackson: Let me ask it a different way, then. Can you give me an example of an organization that has received enhancement dollars, whatever they are, in the last year?

Ms Cane: I do not have that information at my disposal, but I can undertake to determine if we can make it available.

Mr Jackson: If we could have the details of that. My understanding is it does not include salary enhancements. If you need staff increases at the existing pay rate, that's a different issue.

We're going to get into this whole issue of the fact we've gone from 1,700 kids in secure custody down to 436—and we all know that's year-to-date; I've just realized that. But literally, those kids are still out there. They're just not in custody or open custody, they're in these kinds of homes because they're unmanageable in school and unmanageable in the home setting.

So we've got more kids going into these programs, and I want to make sure we've covered off the staff. It's a standard we should be holding in terms of fairness and equity for mostly women workers who are grossly underpaid. These facilities are constantly used as training facilities. The average pay is \$25,000 to \$28,000. They get trained, they do extraordinary work, they're invaluable, and then they go out the front door and are picked up on the street by agencies that you've just given an increase to for a \$40,000 starting salary. The system is weakened when that happens, and we've actually embraced public policy that encourages it, not discourages it.

I know the member understands the importance of not having low-paid workers marginalized any further. This is why I can't understand why this decision was made. So if you could get back to me on that front, I would very much appreciate it.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Can I just add something? We'll certainly get back to the detail, but I don't want to underestimate the fact that, although not enough at this point, our investment of \$25 million, growing to \$38 million next year, is a tenfold increase from what your government gave, Mr Jackson, to the whole field. So I understand your question, but it was a totally underfunded system. We made a choice to fund the transfer agencies significantly. It's not enough; I admit it's not enough. I would have loved to give them \$50 million this year. It's going to grow to \$38 million.

We are working with these associations that you are also advocating for, and I'm confident that we will help them in the future. But this is one detail, when there's so much more that we're doing in this sector. It was a sector

that was starved. We had to give it. We had to give money because, as you so eloquently put it yourself last week, sir, we were losing people to the school system from our transfer agencies.

You can't do everything in one budget, but it was a very good start.

Mr Jackson: Minister, let's not be confusing as to who we're talking about. Let's not confuse what we were talking about here. I'm talking about those agencies—

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'm not confused at all.

Mr Jackson: I know you're not.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I know what you're talking about, and I have the monies here of what you gave.

The Vice-Chair: Mr Jackson, just one at a time, please.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: You gave \$2.2 million in 2000 and \$3.3 million in 2001 for the whole sector, both transfer agencies and not. We gave \$25 million, yes, just to the transfer agencies, and that will grow to \$38 million next year. That's a significant difference, and I would not even have brought this comparison up if you had not belaboured this. We've got your point, and we're working with these associations. They do valuable work.

Mr Jackson: Minister, you're discriminating. You're the Minister of Citizenship, responsible for the Human Rights Act, and you're discriminating.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Actually, the Attorney General is responsible for the Human Rights Act. That changed.

Mr Jackson: That moved, did it? Well, I have the floor, Mr Chair.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: But I believe in human rights, obviously.

The Vice-Chair: Just pose the question, and when you do, please give the minister time to respond.

Mr Jackson: Staff will get back to me in terms of the enhancement, access to enhancement. Minister, will you answer the mail from this organization? They've written you two letters that have not been responded to.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Actually, they've written me many letters and I signed them last night on the way back from the airport, so they should be in the mail today. They actually wrote me many more than two.

Mr Jackson: I only have two, but they're about four or five months old. But that's fine.

The other part of the question I raised, when you were to get back to me, was, what guarantees are you providing that the children will be protected in these environments, given that you're short-funding on the staff salaries, there are higher staff turnovers and greater pressures on the system? People received their pay equity money from our government in the past. They have been subjected to the social contract and therefore had funding removed. They seem to always have the rules stacked against them when it involves wage enhancements. How are we assured that these environments are safe for children when you put these kinds of pressures on them?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: First, they did get pay equity. It was small, but they did get pay equity, and we'll find out exactly how much that was.

Mr Jackson: It was 2.5%. I have the notes.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: OK, so they did get pay equity. They weren't the only ones that were victims of the social contract—you know that—but they too were victims of the social contract. Actually, most of us who weren't politicians then and who weren't in business were victims of the social contract. So I understand your point and I respect your advocacy of this sector, and we are going to work with them.

We do have to look at what they are doing, though, and the prices that they charge, because they are also driving up the cost of our child welfare sector, where two different group homes—at least without reviewing them objectively, just looking at them from the outside in, without going in yet to review—seem to be charging totally different amounts of money for what children's aid societies are telling us are similar services. Perhaps there could be an explanation for that. I'm not going to be judgmental at this point, but we have to look at the costs as well and the differences between the costs.

Mr Jackson: I asked you a question, Minister, about child protection and you talk to me about budgets. You don't have an answer for—

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Actually, Mr Jackson, you actually asked me about the wage—

Interjection.

Mr Jackson: I have the floor, Mr Chairman.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: No, you asked me about the wages of these people—

Mr Jackson: I asked you about child protection and you chose not to answer.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: No, don't twist the words. You can look at Hansard.

Mr Jackson: You're talking about the social contract.

The Vice-Chair: Excuse me. May I just—

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: You asked me about how these people—and in your words, not mine—were screwed, and I tried—

The Vice-Chair: Yes, Mr Jackson and Minister, the civilization will survive if one speaks at a time and Hansard can record what's actually being said.

1630

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: There's only so much even a civilized person can take, and he's being very rude. And he's being rude to my staff, and they work very hard.

The Vice-Chair: I'm not making any judgments on that, really. I'm just saying let's be civilized.

Mr Jackson: Her temper is well known.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Oh, yeah.

The Vice-Chair: Mr Jackson, you still have the floor.

Mr Jackson: So we're going to have no—

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I am actually going to ask my ADM to address that question as well.

Mr Jackson: I will ask the questions. I appreciate all the assistance that you're trying to provide, but I have a

limited amount of time to get a series of questions in. Most of the questions I asked in this committee have not been responded to, so you'll forgive me if I think there's an unfairness if we asked for questions a week ago—simple ones—and we don't have answers. We're going to give staff a second time to respond.

I'd like to move on to some other issues, especially in this area of child protection. What I would like to ask staff is, I indicated to you that 95% of the referrals to these residential treatment centres do not come from children's aid societies; they come from other agencies referring. That's the information that's been shared with me. So my question to you is, who is making these referrals, and out of whose budget is it coming that the minister finds so expensive?

Ms Deborah Newman: The reason I came up, Mr Jackson, was to respond to your earlier question about security provisions for staff. Would you care to have me respond to that question?

The Vice-Chair: Could we have your name for the record, please?

Ms Newman: I'm Deborah Newman, assistant deputy minister, youth justice.

Mr Jackson: Deborah, I'm aware of the protocols when that woman lost her life. I understand we improved that. My concern is with respect to the levels of funding for the staff in order to retain them, and I'm concerned that we have a monitoring system in terms of the security and safety of the children. There are staff concerns, but it was how we monitor facilities for the safety of the children as opposed to just the safety of the staff.

But I would like to move on. How much time do I have?

The Vice-Chair: There is exactly one moment left. If you want a response to that, we could sort of wrap it up there and give them the time to respond.

Mr Jackson: I'll yield to my colleague, then, and move the rotation along.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I apologize. I was speaking in the House, so thank you, Mr Jackson and committee members, for making a change.

I wanted to talk about children's mental health and I wanted to start at the place where Mr Jackson left off. He had started talking about some of the recommendations that had been made by the public accounts committee in our report last year, particularly regarding wait lists. I can tell you there was a lot of concern expressed by all members of the committee, not just the opposition members, about the fact that it didn't seem that the ministry was keeping lists or had any access to waiting lists, either for community-based mental health services for children or for children who would need a placement in a residential service. I could be wrong, but—one of the staff was starting to respond to Mr Jackson—I think I heard that in fact there weren't waiting lists in place, or no mechanism to look at waiting lists now, or still.

I'm just wondering if I can get a clarification on that and, if that is the case, if we could have a discussion about what we are going to do to resolve that. It was

quite a significant issue that was dealt with by the public accounts committee.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'm going to ask my ADM, Trinela Cane, to address this.

Ms Cane: Perhaps I could clarify that at this point in time you are correct that there is no ministry-level process for tracking and monitoring waiting lists. There is no standardized approach to waiting lists across the province, both specifically to children's mental health as well as to the host of other services that have come together under the new roof of children and youth services.

The waiting list issue, as all committee members are aware, is a difficult issue to address. Children can be on multiple waiting lists. We are also concerned about a number of children who are not on waiting lists at all.

It is the responsibility of the various service providers across the province to track waiting lists, to keep waiting lists and to manage waiting lists for the clients who are awaiting service, and to determine the appropriate priorities for service in the context of those waiting lists.

I should mention that exercises like the one the minister referred to earlier relating to regional planning tables that had taken place did provide some opportunity, as various proposals are being considered, to look at gaps in services and priorities that come from the various waiting lists kept by the agencies themselves.

As I mentioned, we have implemented some standardized tools for both intake and assessment, and case management. These are very early days in terms of their implementation. They do not track waiting lists at this point in time, but there is the potential for individual clients to track waiting time, and to prepare aggregate data, which is a piece of work that's currently underway at the provincial level. But the member is correct that we do not capture these lists.

Ms Martel: I'd like to pursue this further, because I think it's fair to say that the public accounts committee was concerned about this issue—all members, not just the opposition members. We were concerned from the perspective that if you looked at the auditor's reports, across a number of regions there would be a great variation in waiting lists. We couldn't tell whether that was a function of more children needing treatment in that area or whether children were on a number of lists in an area, and no one could confirm that for us.

There were also significant concerns about residential placements and how many children really needed a residential placement and how we can determine that. Our concern came from the context that if you're going to spend public money transferring money to agencies, you want to make sure that you're getting the best value for money in terms of responding to the most acute needs. We don't seem to be in a position as a government to actually sort that out.

You can continue to put money out to communities. You may be making a difference; you may not. One of the functions of getting at that is to have a standardized waiting list, to have—I don't want to use the word "registry" because that has some different connotations, but

certainly a mechanism developed by the ministry that has the ministry keeping those lists, because you're the funding agency. If you don't know where the needs are, then you just keep putting money out year after year and you may not be addressing the needs.

I'd like to have a better sense of what you are planning to do to respond to what I think were legitimate concerns of all members, who said, "We may not be doing the right thing in the right communities, and how are we going to start ensuring that we're doing the right thing in the right communities?"

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Actually, when we first started pulling the ministry together, I was appalled at this as well. I was appalled at a lot of things that were going on over the last 10 years, especially from the social services part of my new ministry.

When I was the chief psychologist, we had a very tight system of wait lists and knowing when the kids were seen, a tight time between when they were seen and when they were reported to the parents, how long they're on a wait list and how long it would even be appropriate to be on a wait list. In fact, that's why I went into politics, because the wait lists were so unwieldy that I was just apologizing to parents as chief psychologist in the 1990s. So it's something that I am also very committed to looking at.

It is a new ministry. We didn't get the budget till April. We are a year old now, though. We have to start the serious work of gathering that kind of data. I'm very results-oriented. I need to know what we're doing wrong and what we're doing right. I don't like to hide what we're doing wrong. This is one of the things that we definitely need to grapple with, and my ministry is aware of that.

Ms Martel: You mentioned there was something coming from the planning tables. I'm assuming that's just identifying gaps in service in a particular region, not gaps in service system-wide. What is happening either at the planning table level or in the ministry to set a process in place where this can be resolved in a timely fashion?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: First, for the child welfare secretariat, as an example—and I know it's a little different than what you're asking—we are definitely going to be keeping demographics and data. Because I was appalled at that too, that, as a province, we don't know which kids are successful from our child welfare secretariat. We don't even know it, necessarily, regionally as well. Maybe the individual children's aid societies know, but as a province, we don't know where the kids we invest in and try to help are right now.

With respect to the children's mental health, we definitely have to look at that. It's a very challenging task, as you may know, Ms Martel, because there are so many agencies dealing with our children. But we need to grapple with it. I don't pretend to have the answer today, but my ministry will definitely work on it.

1640

Ms Martel: Can I just go back to the wage increases, the \$13 million? You may have answered this, and I

apologize if you have. Can I ask what was the percentage increase then—can you calculate that?—across the sector? What did that represent? You told us previously that \$13 million went to wages out of the \$25 million that had been allocated this year.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Actually, \$12 million went to wages and \$13 million went to services, these community planning tables.

Ms Martel: I thought it was the other way, that it was \$12 million for planning tables and \$13 million for wages. All right, I'm going to switch that.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Am I wrong, Bohodar? What is it?

Mr Rubashewsky: The \$12.2 million has been provided as part of the 3% increase to a variety of sectors, including children's mental health, and the \$13 million is for enhancement to the sector.

Ms Martel: In your discussions with agencies—and I don't know how comprehensive these have been—what did the 3% achieve? Did it stop the loss of staff out of those agencies or is the gap that has to be made up still so high that the sector next year is going to be in the same position of needing to access a lot of those new funds just to retain current staff or current services?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I spoke to the sector—when was it?—three weeks ago and they certainly welcomed the 3%, but it was a long time coming. They didn't have an increase in a long time, so I'm not going to pretend that was enough. During the campaign, they had asked for about double what we gave in this budget. Again, as I said earlier before you came in today, I wish I could have given \$50 million. I didn't; I gave \$25 million for this first budget, but we are aware of the stresses. Now, this \$25 million, as you may know, grows to \$38 million next year and then continues to grow.

Ms Martel: For the \$38 million then, do you perceive that there will be a similar breakdown in terms of a significant portion of that money actually going to wages and salaries to retain staff versus a significant amount of money going into new services to deal with waiting lists? I see two different issues there. Do you have some sense in terms of the allocation for next year? Will you have a similar breakdown that will essentially be targeted for wages and salaries just to retain staff in the sector?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'll let my DM answer this.

Ms Hill: Currently, the planning tables are looking at how to spend the \$13 million growing to \$25 million, and the expectation is that that's for new services or for service gaps. As you know, there isn't a standard set of salaries in agencies and they vary considerably. So the impact of the 3%—it was left to the agency's discretion how best to invest that and stabilize their service.

Ms Martel: I understand that, but I would assume as a sector that, because you targeted money this year for wage increases, it was because across the sector there was a recognition that this was a serious problem. Do you think that is going to be a similar situation that you face when we head into the next fiscal year, that in fact across all of those agencies, a good portion of the money that's

coming is still going to have to be used just to try and retain the staff they have and try and retain that expertise and that experience?

Ms Hill: As the minister has indicated, we recognize that there is more room, but we also need to ensure that we're responding at the same time to the need for increased services. The 3% was in a sense an event that was given to us as an opportunity by the government to do a bit of catch-up, but it is not going to be continued on a year-over-year basis at this point in time.

Ms Martel: Are these staff subject to receipt of proxy pay equity?

Mr Rubashewsky: I believe they are, yes.

Ms Hill: Let us check.

Mr Rubashewsky: They are subject to receipt, and children's mental health agencies were captured under the memorandum of settlement on pay equity.

Ms Martel: OK. So they have another allocation coming in 2005-06?

Mr Rubashewsky: That's right. That will be the final—

Ms Martel: That will be the final. Can I just move from that then to the government's preschool speech and language program? I want to identify a problem that has come to me from a woman whose name is Shirley Olney, who lives in Ilderton, Ontario. She is a constituent of Mr Wilkinson and has written the same letter to him, but I told her I would try and raise it here on her behalf. Her child has autism—I won't deal with that part of it—but her child also requires speech and language services. Her daughter is now no longer eligible for speech and language services because, as parents, they made a decision not to enrol her in senior kindergarten this year. They made the decision not to enrol her in senior kindergarten for a number of reasons, and I'll just quote what she said:

Her daughter "is eligible for senior kindergarten, but we chose not to enrol her in senior kindergarten because we felt, after consulting with her doctors and the lab school director"—which is the lab school that she is in—"that it would be detrimental to her development given her autism, IQ level, developmental delay and not being toilet-trained. She is currently attending a preschool program at the university laboratory preschool located at the University of Western Ontario. There are no speech and language ... programs available for her at this school."

So the situation she finds herself in is because, as parents, they have made a choice not to enrol her in senior kindergarten, which is not mandatory in the province. She is now not eligible to receive speech and language because that same speech and language service, because she is of senior kindergarten age, would be provided at school.

I should have been, and wasn't, aware of the situation, but I thought that it spoke to a really serious gap that I would appreciate you taking a look at. It is true that senior kindergarten is not mandatory. So they have the choice. As parents, they made what was probably a difficult choice to keep her where she was, at the lab school, because she's not ready to go to school yet. But, in effect,

she has lost her speech and language service because she's being told by the community agencies, "You have to get that at school now. That's where it's available; that's where you have to get it. If you don't choose to enrol your child in senior kindergarten, then you're not getting any service at all." That's the situation she now finds herself in, with no service at all, either through the community or through the school.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Thank you once again. You brought something else to my attention last week, and we hopefully addressed it early enough.

Is this the rule, that if you don't go to senior kindergarten, you get cut off?

We can certainly revisit that, but I do want to know myself. So this is good. This is why I wanted to be on estimates, because it was taking me a while to find out the rules. Go ahead.

Ms Cane: I'm actually unaware of this situation, both the specifics of it and in general terms, but I think it's exactly the type of thing, as we bring these services together in one new ministry, that perturbs us greatly, partly because I think one of the reasons for creating the new ministry was to look at some of the key transition points in children's lives. You've certainly raised an issue that I would like to look into and get back to you, both around the specifics of a case as well as the general issue. I'd be happy to do that.

Ms Martel: I would appreciate that. As I say, she sent this to me mid-October. We told her we'd be in estimates. She gave me permission to give the information to you. I'd appreciate it if you could. As I say, it has not ever been brought to my attention. So I was unaware, but it certainly appears from the letter that she has made a number of contacts with her own MPP's office and others, and this is what she is being told. So if it's not true and someone is misleading her, then I'd like to get to the bottom of that. But if it is true and this is a gap, I think it's significant. I don't know what numbers of children would be affected, but it does certainly point out a gap if you make a decision not to send your child to kindergarten.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: We will look into that specific case, which probably is on its way to me anyway, if Mr Wilkinson has it. But we will look at it from a systems point of view as well.

Now, this is one of the programs I inherited. There are waiting lists, and it hasn't received an increase in a while. So we are looking at those pressures as well under the Best Start plan, because again, Best Start isn't going to be just child care. You have to prepare kids for child care as well, and give services they need while they're at child care. So we are looking at these and other programs that have been underfunded over the years, that we didn't increase in the budget this time, but we will be looking at that under Best Start.

I was unaware of this situation. So I thank you for bringing it to my attention. You did bring a situation—I can't remember if you did it publicly or on the side table

last week—about the letter. Oh, you did it in the Legislature, but that was handled.

Ms Martel: It was more public.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: It was very public, and it was very well appreciated, because indeed we did rewrite that letter and clarified that children—and I know this is a sensitive case between the two of us—receiving IBI under the age of six, and there was, in one of my regional offices, a wrong interpretation of that, so I thank the member.

1650

Ms Martel: Can I raise one other issue in that regard? It might become a specific case, because we're dealing with a parent. The first part of it was dealt with in terms that children who are still five should still be able to access services. I appreciate that. The second part of the letter really did say that as of January 1, at least TPAS was not going to be accepting children with the two qualifications around autism and where they were in the spectrum.

I can just say that we heard from a parent this week who has been waiting for two years on that same waiting list, who had an assessment last week, and who it appears has been told—not formally yet, but as an aside—that her child will probably not receive services now because they were not going to meet that second criteria. I just have to say that I think it's really unfair for a child to be on a waiting list for two years, to now potentially be told—it hasn't been confirmed. I've asked her to give that to me, and I will give that to you, Minister, if that comes to pass. I just thought it was more than a little unfair that after two years of waiting for service, thinking they would qualify if they could only get an assessment, to now be told that they might not because of a change in criteria is just not on. That's not right.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: No, it's not, and I agree. There may be a few kids who are caught before our strategy is implemented and fully understood. I want all of those cases to be brought forward.

Part of the reason why there was a large waiting list was that parents were given false hopes. Even for children under the age of six, they're not all appropriate for IBI therapy, and yet they were languishing on these wait lists, and without getting any other kind of service, only to be told that they don't qualify.

There hasn't really been a change in criteria, although I know there's some confusion out there. You brought that forward, and I thank you for that, last week. But where there has been a change is that we are offering those children who have been diagnosed services other than IBI if they don't qualify for IBI. They don't wait on these wait lists, giving them hope for a therapy that they were not eligible for before and they're still not eligible for; they are just not appropriate for IBI therapy. These are professional judgments, not government directives.

It's precisely because of the cases like this that we've streamlined the preschool screening process. Obviously there are still kinks; obviously there are still people who have been waiting for two years. I am willing, as I did

with that other case, to look at it case by case, in case someone fell through the cracks or somebody out there misinterpreted the criteria.

Ms Martel: I appreciate that.

The Vice-Chair: That pretty well uses up the time, Ms Martel. Thank you. It goes to the government side.

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): Thank you, Minister. I understand, as a family doctor, that when we look after children's mental health, there is a decrease in the youth crime rate. You have told us before that during this year's budget, our government has put up approximately \$25 million for children's mental health services. I know the federal government has been giving some money to the province for child care services. Is there any federal funding for children's mental health services?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Actually, part of that early challenge fund, that \$194 million that I talked about earlier, some of that money is flowing, if you look at that chart, to children's mental health from the federal government. Presently, what we're giving is the \$25 million over and above what was spent last year, which will grow to \$38 million.

You're quite right. We call these crossover kids: kids that tend to go from child welfare to children's mental health to youth justice. Another reason why we have one ministry is so that we can follow these children, which I guess goes back to Ms Martel's observation, and the Provincial Auditor's, that we don't have a good handle on where these kids are; we don't have the wait lists. My ministry will definitely look at streamlining this.

Part of the reason is that we don't have an information system. It's very expensive. It's unfortunate that it hasn't been done before. But we definitely do have to look at that at some point. That wasn't a priority for this year. We prefer to give it to services directly because they were so starved and so underfunded over the years, but certainly that infrastructure is necessary, and we will be looking at that.

Mr Kular: Could you confirm that provincial funding for children's mental health services is not decreasing, but rather is increasing, every year?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: That came up earlier as well, and my CAO did address that. It is, in fact, increasing. I believe he addressed that to Mr Parsons's question, that it is increasing.

Mr Kular: The last question of mine is, this government is setting up a Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health in Ottawa at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. Can you comment on how this would help children's mental health services?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: It's a centre of excellence for children at CHEO. Dr Simon Davidson, of course, a renowned child psychiatrist, is the director. This centre will do research and will also do training and dissemination of information across the province of best practices. It will work with the child welfare secretariat. I don't know if I'm missing anything.

Trinela, maybe you can add some more, if you'd like.

Ms Cane: Perhaps I could provide some further clarification. We're working very closely with CHEO and the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. Dr Simon Davidson and Dr Ian Manion are both the key leaders of the centre.

I should comment that the centre is something that was transferred to us as part of the early creation of the ministry, from the Ministry of Health, which was responsible for the oversight on this. But we are clearly in the very early days of development of this centre of excellence, and it has been a wonderful opportunity to be on the ground floor of that.

The centre has actually taken what I would consider to be an extremely collaborative approach. They want to be sure that they are not a bricks-and-mortar-approach resident at CHEO itself, but in fact are developing a network of key experts and practitioners across the province, which I think is probably one of the most exciting parts of this.

The minister mentioned a couple of the key pillars for the centre of excellence, and I would like to include a couple of others. Not only are they doing research and development—and to the point that one of the members raised earlier as to what actually works in the area of children's mental health, I think it's an area where we've had some fairly significant gaps in knowledge. Even in the services that are being provided across Ontario, many of the practitioners that Dr Davidson and others have consulted with have expressed concern that they want to be doing the right things for the right reasons, and they've asked for help in that area. So research and development are key priorities.

Another piece related to the practitioners is the focus on training and development. Dr Davidson has not only established a fairly interesting advisory council, chaired by Senator Kirby and including both experts and practitioners at the highest level from across Ontario, he has also identified a number of smaller working groups, including groups of practitioners, to provide advice as the centre is moving forward. So education and training is a key component.

I will also mention that they are establishing what they call a clearinghouse, and that is really an interactive, Web-based opportunity for practitioners and experts in the field to come together using, as I said, Web-based tools and having the opportunity to both dialogue from a clinical perspective as well as to gain information about best practices.

I think that consultation and the other piece related to useful intervention and the most appropriate evidence-based intervention are all key priorities.

I would have to say that Dr Davidson and his group are just developing their approach, but already we're finding it very promising and quite exciting, and certainly a number of focus groups and consultations have already been held, including participants from key universities and academic centres. So it's not exclusively a centre-of-excellence approach; it's actually leveraging the best expertise available across Ontario, but also including

practitioners. Already, Dr Davidson has taken the advice he has received from these various informal and formal consultations to heart. As he is formulating his operational plan in discussions with the ministry, I think we'll see a lot of that feedback reflected—if that is helpful.

The Vice-Chair: Mr Milloy, please.

1700

Mr Milloy: Minister, first of all, I just want to tell you—and I mean this sincerely—how excited a lot of the stakeholder groups are in my riding at the formation of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

As members of the committee don't know, the minister came down to my riding a number of months ago and had a chance to meet. We had a fascinating lunch where we brought together a lot of the stakeholders involved with your ministry. I think their optimism is about starting to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together, about the fact that all the diverse services offered for children and youth throughout government have come under one umbrella and we can start to see how one complements the other, where there's overlap, where there's duplication and where there are ways they can work together.

As you know, one of the areas that I hold a certain passion for is children's treatment centres. My area boasts KidsAbility, which I think I'll say is the best in the province because it's in my area. As you know, the children's centres provide the best possible physical, emotional and cognitive development. I've had a chance to visit them on numerous occasions and see, really, the miracles that are taking place there. They have a team of dedicated staff and they're run by a voluntary board, which devotes many hours to making this organization a success. They also undertake a tremendous amount of fundraising to try to augment the money that comes from the government.

As you know, and members of the committee may know, children's treatment centres have had a very strange funding roller coaster through many years. They've had their funding frozen. A number of years ago, they got a tremendous boost in their overall budget, but then that was frozen. So you have the costs associated with inflation and also the costs associated with the wages of very specialized workers who, of course, are being attracted by jobs in hospitals and other sectors. So they have to keep pace with them.

I guess my initial question about the children's treatment centres is, what can we do about some of the funding problems that they're facing?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: It was actually a very interesting meeting. You do wonderful work there. I actually did my undergraduate at Waterloo and taught two years at Laurier. They were leaders then and they're still leaders in many ways in your community.

Yes, the children's treatment centres needed a boost, so we did find and give them the 3% increase for wages. But we also invested \$24 million for capital. As you know, in the north there was a great need, and we announced new ones in North Bay and Thunder Bay as

well as in London, Ontario, in the southwest. We will be continuing to work with the children's treatment centres and we will address their needs.

This is what we could do in this budget year. Many of these children do access other children's services as well. A research study was done about 15 years ago at McMaster by Gina Brown, which showed that 15% of families with special-needs children access 85% of the services. So there are high-needs children in these centres who also access other services.

I had the privilege of going to Brantford a couple of weeks ago, where the integration of services in that city are best practice. So a part of the solution is in the integration of services as well as in more investments.

As you know, we have our pressures, but I am looking at it. So far, I've had a lot of support from my colleagues in my new ministry, and an increase in the budget of \$200 million this year. So I'll keep working at it and, with your assistance, I know we'll get there.

Mr Milloy: Just to follow up on what you've said, one of the problems they're running into, of course, is increased waiting lists. As I've talked to some of the representatives of children's treatment centres from other parts of the province and also KidsAbility, it seems that part of the solution may lie in actually identifying a specific role for the treatment centres and, in a sense, outlining what services each one should offer and how they can complement other services in the community, and then find a basis of funding on that level.

One of their frustrations, of course, is that if they knew what their budget was every year, if they also knew how to sense—maybe this is much more difficult—what their take-up would be from the community, they'd be able to manage things a lot more smoothly. I don't know if you have thoughts on that.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I have thoughts and hopes on that. So I know, with your support, we will address these as well. This is what we could do this year on this budget, but we certainly recognize the stresses.

Trinela, would you like to address this any more? I don't know if you have anything more to add.

Ms Cane: Perhaps I could just make a couple of comments. One is that we certainly meet with this sector on a very regular basis. I had the opportunity a few weeks ago to speak to their annual conference. I know from a very heartfelt group of service providers and parents that the 3% increase went some distance toward their pressures. I think it's fair to say, as the minister noted, it doesn't go far enough, and certainly some of the feedback we've had has suggested the ministry could be looking at the children's rehab services policy framework, precisely for the reason the member and the minister have both articulated: to identify what core services should be provided in every community in Ontario.

The other point I would make is that CTCs themselves have expressed an interest in being a central access point for services, which is something that the ministry, as it comes together under one roof, will be considering in general terms. But we certainly work very closely with

the sector. One comment I will also make is that a number of the centres are very integrated with a variety of services, including preschool speech and language and services coming together. I guess it's my perspective that that is a model we would like to pursue: more integrated services for children.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: The model in Brantford that I was talking about is just like that. It's unique; it's best practices.

The Vice-Chair: There's seven minutes. We have Mr Milloy, or you could defer for a moment to Mr Parsons. It's up to you.

Interjections.

The Vice-Chair: Mr Parsons, please.

Interjection: We're fighting, actually.

Mr Parsons: I'm older.

In our family's 18 years of fostering, we on occasion fostered children who were also involved with the criminal justice system and, when we got to know them, found that incredible things had happened to them at home. I can think of one young man who defined wealth as having three meals a day. He got into trouble at school because he habitually stole food. The reality was that was the only food he got his hands on for most of that day.

I'm not an expert on it, but the federal government introduced the Youth Criminal Justice Act, I believe it's called, which has profoundly changed the way they deal with young people. But these are our citizens, and I assume there's a great deal of interaction between the federal government and your ministry. I'm wondering, what changes has it brought about in Ontario? Has it had any effect on our secure and open-custody facilities? Has it had any other changes?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Before I give it over to my ADM in this area, thank you for the question. I just want to say, I'm really pleased the youth justice sector is under the children and youth ministry, because we do need to track these youth in a much better way.

But before I give it over to Deb to say exactly what we've been doing in this area and what we plan to do, we also almost doubled the nutrition program. You mentioned he was stealing food because there wasn't enough food. We recognized that need and went from \$4.5 million to \$8.5 million a year in the nutrition programs. We're also reviewing that so we can do a better job of disseminating those monies, because we found a lot was being spent on administration, on fancy, glossy pamphlets and not on great food, quite frankly, in many parts of the province. I just wanted to address that part of the question before I handed it over to my ADM.

Mr Parsons: I want to say thank you for that. We never fostered a child who didn't hoard food when they first came, because they were hungry. And I watched an increasing number of schools offer breakfast programs, because the kids were coming to school without breakfast.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: That's right. We did a study in our city in my department a few years ago where we showed in one inner-city school—all we did was feed

the children breakfast. We did it with the help of the corporate sector back then. Their school marks went up by three years in one year; mind you, they were way below age level. They actually caught up to their peers just by not being hungry. So it's definitely an issue, and \$8.5 million isn't going to solve the whole problem, but we're working on it on other fronts in other ministries too.

Deb, would you like to address the youth justice question?

Ms Newman: Certainly. As you mentioned, kids get into trouble with the law for a very broad spectrum of reasons, addressing all manner of social and human service issues. The federal government recognized some of that and was also very concerned by the overuse of incarceration in Canada and introduced the Youth Criminal Justice Act. In fact, Canada was incarcerating more youth per capita any other country in the Western world, including the United States. Ontario was fourth in Canada in terms of the use of incarceration for youth, some of whom were doing the kinds of things you've described. The overuse of custody, the overuse of the formal court system, were a very significant issue in this country and in many jurisdictions, including Ontario in particular. There was significant concern about the ability of kids to reintegrate back into their communities. There was absent an after-care component to support youth who'd been in custody as they went back into the communities.

1710

The Youth Criminal Justice Act was implemented across the country on April 1, 2003, and the early experience with it has been quite dramatic in terms of the intended outcomes that the legislation was trying to address being realized. As has been pointed out, the use of custody, both secure custody and open custody, since the YCJA was implemented in this province and every other province in Canada has seen exactly the same dramatic decline. It's clearly having the intended consequence that the Department of Justice was after. As we've discussed, I think, last time we were here, and we've provided further statistics about the trends, we're currently experiencing that, and so have many empty beds in open and secure custody facilities in the province.

This is really enabling us to do a very significant shift in terms of our service delivery system in Ontario. We've begun some very exciting work, I think, in terms of investing in community-based programs for young people and providing appropriate, evidence-based services to them, including attendance centres, which is a community-based program which is one of the new sentences under the YCJA. So we have a number of youth now in five different attendance centre pilot programs across the province. In fact, I did provide a report and an evaluation of the first attendance centre program that was instituted in Ontario. It's extremely positive in terms of leading to better outcomes for those youth.

We were also beginning to put some youth in open detention rather than in secure detention so they're able to be in communities and be supported in their com-

munities across Ontario. We're also trying to address some of the issues that Mr Jackson raised around, are some of these kids in need of mental health services? So as we reposition the service delivery system, we're also looking at investing in appropriate services for kids in conflict with the law who also experience mental health problems. Specifically, as an example of that, I would say that we're getting ready to launch a new community-based program called intensive support and supervision, which provides precisely those youth who are in conflict with the law and also have mental health problems with wraparound services of a mental health nature. In terms of the realignment of our delivery system, we have multiple exciting opportunities to make a difference for kids in conflict with the law.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you, Ms Newman. That ends this rotation, and we will start with a new rotation. In the interest of orderly time, we'll say it's 15 minutes per party and we'll start with the official opposition: Mr Jackson.

Mr Jackson: I'd like to pursue a little more with Ms Newman, and I want to thank her for the statistics that I requested. You might help me navigate through them a little better and explain them. For the record, I didn't catch the new program you were considering, the intensive support and—

Ms Newman: Supervision. The intensive support and supervision program.

Mr Jackson: We have two pages that were presented to us a few minutes ago. These are phase 1 and phase 2. They are 2002 through to 2004-05 year-to-date.

Ms Newman: I'd be happy to walk you through those, if that's helpful.

Mr Jackson: Yes. Average count: Those are children, correct—or are these the reductions?

Ms Newman: There are two documents that have been provided. One shows the average count or utilization rates in both secure and open custody in phase 1 and phase 2 for different periods of time.

Mr Jackson: I've got that one.

Ms Newman: So the actual utilization rates. The other document shows the number of new admissions in both phase 1 and phase 2 by disposition, so secure and open custody, as well as probation and other community dispositions. One shows the number of new cases coming into the system year over year; the other shows the utilization rates.

Mr Jackson: It's safe to say that we're looking at utilization chill here of significant numbers which you've referenced.

The minister referenced that they needed to track these kids, and you mentioned tracking. How are you tracking these children currently?

Ms Newman: We currently have no means to track these kids who were in secure and open custody. In terms of what's happening with those kids now, they're not being admitted to our system. We know that the police, consistent with what's expected of them under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, are diverting a significant number

of these kids, it would appear, but the police do not maintain statistics. They are not required to do so under the YCJA. So we don't know to how many of them they've issued warnings, how many of them they brought home to their parents, how many of them they've referred for community service work, and so on and so forth. We don't have that data.

Mr Jackson: Deborah, it's not just the police, though. The CAS will contact the police when the matter's serious enough. I guess my question has to do more with why we're not tracking through, let's say, the CAS. A disproportionate number of those children are coming through that system. Is there any effort to try and track at least that cohort from that source? Their budgets have gone up rather significantly; they, in turn, do the referral for some kind of residential placement, whether it's in foster or whether it's in residential treatment. Some are mental health cases, as the minister referenced.

Ms Newman: Yes. Again, until the creation of the new ministry, this wasn't, I dare say, even recognized as an issue. The whole notion of crossover kids has now been recognized since the formation of the new ministry. The fact that some of these kids are actually the same kids—they're the same kids who start off in the child welfare system, graduate to children's mental health, and ultimately the trajectory for some of these kids is into youth justice. You may have a child in a group home who gets into a scuffle with another child and ends up being criminally charged, whereas they might not have been charged if they were in a family home. Their behaviour becomes criminalized and we end up with them graduating into the youth justice system.

That's something that's very much of concern to all of us in the new ministry. We're just beginning to try to assess how to begin to gather data that we now should have an opportunity to do because we're all under one roof, whereas we previously didn't even really recognize in our silos that the problem existed, frankly.

1720

Mr Jackson: What about those kids who go to court and the judge determines that—there are many occasions I can recall where judges would believe there is a community-based program that forms part of the condition for the child upon re-entry. Are we able to monitor at least that part, where the expectations are on certain kinds of facilities and programs in the community? Are they tracking that at all, such as children's mental health centres, which would be with children's aid societies?

Ms Newman: The courts, in terms of their application of the YCJA, are really only beginning to divert youth from the court system. In fact, the Ministry of the Attorney General is just now working with us on five diversion pilots from the court system. They have not yet begun a diversion program. Those pilots will be instituted in the next few months, in this fiscal year.

Mr Jackson: Where are those pilots?

Ms Newman: The locations are currently under discussion with the Ministry of the Attorney General. I have

staff contributing to those discussions and will be supporting their implementation.

Mr Jackson: This is a significant reduction. Have there been staff reductions at these facilities? Where are the savings? Who's monitoring the savings? What's being done? When I look at the budget, on page 71, I don't see any reduction anticipated. You've got a 70% reduction, in some cases, in your caseload, and yet the budget—the way I'm reading it—has actually gone up slightly. Any explanation for that?

Ms Newman: Certainly. In the open-custody sector, because it has seen the most dramatic decline to an average of 37.3% utilization post-YCJA implementation, we've been approaching a rationalization exercise incrementally in that sector. We closed 17 open-custody residences this past July and are only beginning to realize some savings from the 17 closures, given the 60- or 90-day notice provisions in their contracts. We're going to then invest that money in the new community-based programs I mentioned. We're looking at doing a further phase of rationalization of the open-custody system because their trends are holding in terms of the low utilization.

What we wanted to do was to be a bit measured in our approach, because when the Young Offenders Act came in in 1985, we also saw a dramatic decline in custody rates, and they rebounded within three years. We didn't want to move forward precipitously, because once you close a custody bed, as you know, it's very difficult to recreate. So we've taken a measured approach, but we are rationalizing the number of beds in the system and are planning to reinvest that money in the community-based programs.

Mr Jackson: Could you provide us with a list of those locations that have been closed?

Ms Newman: Certainly.

Mr Jackson: I appreciate that very much.

I want to revisit the children's mental health piece. The minister has put on the record where her commitments, those dollars—the \$25 million—are going to go. I guess really what I'm asking is, have we increased the capacity for children's mental health infrastructure in this regard? I understand that it's for your reviews, your planning tables, and the salary increases for direct agencies. But where are we increasing capacity, when we've established with what Ms Newman just shared with us—we're talking here about 1,000 kids who are receiving some degree of care in the community, and a high percentage with mental health challenges. That is one of the problems, the shortness of capacity.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Thank you for the question. The community planning tables, as I said earlier, have brought forward proposals. Those monies should flow in January for those mental health services, Mr Jackson. Our goal is to show increased services in January-February.

Mr Jackson: So this will be program expansion?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Yes.

Mr Jackson: Have you offered base budget increases to any of the children's mental health centres at all in the province?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: The 3%.

Mr Jackson: No, that will go into their base. Are you planning multi-year planning packages for this sector?

Ms Cane: As the minister mentioned, the 3% increase to transfer payments did go directly into the base of the various agencies that were in receipt of it. That is a base funding amount that will be in their bases from here on in.

For the other amount of money, which is the \$13 million growing to \$26 million, the tables are looking at their plans on a multi-year basis. They're looking at what their immediate needs are, but they're also planning on a multi-year horizon, because the funding is going to be available year over year. It does give them, I think, one of the best opportunities to start to make a little bit more of a medium- to long-term plan to address the needs in the community, and we're providing quite a bit of flexibility as they develop their priorities and their respective plans.

Mr Jackson: Thank you, Trinela. I know I'm going to run out of time here real quick, and I think Ms Martel is going to start more on the daycare, and I'll revisit that in a moment, but I had a couple of quick questions with respect to the autism supports in the elementary system. Clearly there is concern, and it was raised again in the House, about the failure to provide supports directly to families with autistic children past age six.

I'd be very interested in getting a sense from you as to why your funding in your \$2-billion ministry, which isn't a really large budget—it's a large budget compared to others. Yet the Minister of Education has got over \$16 billion and is on record as holding back special-ed money in our school boards across the province. Your ministry is being called upon to provide the resources here which are not direct support for kids who have to be removed from a school setting for their IBI. It's in fact a program with precious dollars in your ministry going to support teachers, when my understanding is that we've always had consultants paid for through the Ministry of Education.

Would you just share with us briefly what the thinking was in terms of why your ministry is being called upon to fund this, when there are so many things identified that require attention, let alone—I don't want to get into a big debate about the broken promise here. This is devastating for families.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: No, it's a fair question, Mr Jackson. Because I worked in the system—I didn't only work in Hamilton—I was also called upon by the province throughout the years to be on various committees across the province, both educationally and on psychology committees. Although some boards did have good resources, a lot of boards, particularly in the north and rural areas, had no resources for children with special needs. My colleague Mike Brown came to me a year ago and said constituents of his came to him and told him that

the school actually said, "If you were in this city, we would let your kid in this school. We don't have the resources." His constituents' child has autism. So one of the reasons is lack of consistency across the province.

Another reason, quite frankly—and I was part of the system, so it's not a judgmental statement; it's a fact. There are things built into the education system which quite often—and they're good things. They're collective bargaining, they're contracts, they're good things, but they are not always in the best interests of particular children because there are changes to those children's lives. When an EA gets bumped, when a teacher changes—all for good reason—those children go back and regress. So you need some consistency as well, even within the school boards that have some resources.

1730

The education community has welcomed the partnership—and I believe the partnership is good—between the new ministry and the education community. During my round tables and during my consultations, a lot of parents across the province, parents of children with special needs, told me, "Just when you finally get a hold of what is out there, my kid enters school and then we start all over again." So we need a smoother transition for special-needs children, and I'm not even going to pretend to say we're there yet, but this is a first step toward that.

I'm going to be honest here, Mr Jackson. I'm going to see how this works out. If this works out really well, we can do this with other children with special needs too. If this doesn't meet the needs of children—I don't think that's going to happen, but if it doesn't—I'll look at that openly and honestly and see what else we can do for those children. But this is what I was advised was a need. This is what I know was a need, from my experiences across the province.

The Vice-Chair: We're actually two minutes over on this cycle.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: If that response isn't enough, I'd be happy next week—

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. We are a couple of minutes over. It's now to Ms Martel. You have 15 minutes.

Ms Martel: I just want to ask some general questions before I ask about the Ottawa negotiations. Is your ministry operating under any financial constraint from the Ministry of Finance at this point?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: What do you mean by "constraint"?

Ms Martel: Do you have to meet a 3% reduction, a 2% reduction? Are you anticipating being told you have to reduce your allocations to some of your transfer payment agencies in this fiscal year?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: As you know, the first year I did not have to find those savings. I'm going to let Bohodar answer that question.

Mr Rubashewsky: At this point, we haven't had any in-year constraints or targets applied to any part of our budget.

Ms Martel: For fiscal year 2004-05?

Mr Rubashewsky: For 2004-05.

Ms Martel: Have you been told anything about fiscal 2005-06?

Mr Rubashewsky: No. We're just about to begin what is now termed the results-based planning process. Instructions have not been issued as of yet and the process has not commenced.

Ms Martel: So no transfer payment agency out there should be thinking that the rumour that there will be a 3% reduction in allocations to them is true?

Interjection.

Ms Martel: That's why I'm asking. Is there any chance that the CAS is going to get—you're not contemplating any reduction to any of the transfer payment agencies, CAS included?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: That's right.

Ms Martel: Great. Let me follow up with the CAS and then I will see if we have time for child care. We talked about the CAS last week; it was in the context of other questions. It looks like there will be about an \$80-million shortfall this year, which is going to be another significant shortfall that the ministry will be looked to to cover. I'm not sure who you want to bring up. I'm sure you want to bring someone up.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I might be able to answer.

Ms Martel: OK. How are you going to deal with that? You have a number of discussions that are going on, a number of reviews and recommendations, but the first thing you've got staring you in the face is an \$80-million problem that's going to become a significant problem by March 31. Does anybody want to tell me how the ministry is looking at dealing with that?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'll just begin generally, and then I'll hand it over to my team here. As I mentioned the very first day, it is an unsustainable system. We have to grapple with the system. At the same time, I'm taking my time doing this by having a review with Bruce Rivers, who is welcome to come up as well. As you know, these are sensitive issues. I don't want to make any changes that lead to the opposite of what child protection services are for, and that is, children at risk, so we have to look at this very carefully.

But definitely I am working with the children's aid societies to grapple with this. Number one, they are aware themselves that this is not sustainable, but they also brought forward reasons why they had deficits in the past, and even this year. They are doing things in services and paying for services and they have said to me, "There is a paucity out there in the system," and therefore they have to fill in—mental health and other services. Of course, we are hoping that, by starting to invest in those services that were underfunded, that will affect the child welfare sector. At the same time, though, these are huge pressures and we have to grapple with them.

First of all, we're changing the funding formula so they're not going to be solely funded on how many kids they take away. I'm not being judgemental in saying that's how they sort of plan—"Let's take away as many

kids as we can to get more money"—but that is the system. So we are definitely going to change that.

I don't know if Bruce Rivers wants to come up and talk about the other areas, because we did do a review and we are implementing the recommendations.

Ms Martel: I wanted to get some clarification, because I'm not clear on how many reviews were going on and what the difference between that work would be. Is that what you're calling the transformation agenda? Are those the recommendations from the child welfare secretariat or is that a whole different set of recommendations that are coming?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: There are two different ones. One was done and the recommendations were given to us—and now, Trinela, maybe you could—

Ms Martel: OK, can I get some clarification? Because I don't pretend to understand the differences between the two and where the processes are at.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Fair enough.

Ms Cane: If I could just clarify, about two years ago, a project was undertaken called the child welfare evaluation, which looked at the child welfare program. It was led by Lucille Roch in the then Ministry of Community and Social Services. That was a very collaborative process, working with children's aid societies and key ministry folks to come up with a series of recommendations, 37 in total, which dealt with about seven key themes that needed to be addressed as part of what would need to be a very significant child welfare reform.

That report was issued around this time a year ago and, subsequently, we were successful in retaining Bruce Rivers to come and lead what we're calling the child welfare secretariat, which is, in fact, tasked with implementing the 37 recommendations identified, but also other proposals that may contribute to a broader reform in this sector. Does that clarify, Ms Martel?

Ms Martel: So essentially, that has been produced and Mr Rivers is implementing those recommendations. The ministry has made a formal announcement that you're committed to all the recommendations and trying to implement them, or is there a sense that some are acceptable, some are not?

Ms Cane: We've indicated that we are accepting the recommendations in principle. There are a number of recommendations, which have fairly significant cost and other implications, that we will need to examine more carefully. That, in part, forms some of the work that Mr Rivers is undertaking for us.

We believe the recommendations made as part of the review are in absolutely the right direction, but some of them may take some time. This is a very significant reform that needs to take place. It does take time and a number of years. It will take some key investments in order to achieve the results we're looking for.

Certainly in principle, we support all of the recommendations. Bruce particularly, given his work both nationally and internationally, also has some other ideas for the types of reforms that would actually be quite complementary to those recommended as part of the child

welfare evaluation. So we're intending to come forward to the minister with what should be a very comprehensive package of reforms for her review in December.

Ms Martel: How does that tie in with the changing of the funding formula? Was that part of the recommendations from Lucille's review then?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I believe it was. It was also something I heard from my consultations with the sector.

Ms Martel: Right, and how does that then deal with the commitment that was made by the former government when they implemented the changes to tell welfare there would be a review of the funding framework and its benchmarks? Where does that fit here? Does it fit any more?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I believe that will be reviewed in 2005. Is that what Ms Martel's asking?

Ms Cane: Actually, it is. Just to be clear, it was one of the major themes from the child welfare evaluation, as you can appreciate: the funding arrangements themselves and the funding formula. Over the past number of years, the funding formula was, in fact, based on 1997 benchmarks which, Ms Martel, I think is what you're referring to. It did create considerable difficulties for the various agencies operating against what we know were outdated benchmarks and trying to provide the types of services required in the past couple of years related to our own cost-management strategies.

In conjunction with our agency partners, we have actually looked at the funding framework and provided opportunities for more flexibility in how the money is allocated. For example, in some areas, we have moved to block funding so that agencies have more flexibility in terms of how they use their dollars. We've also provided some—I shouldn't use the word "incentives"—opportunity for agencies that have been moving in the right directions, and these are directions that were identified as part of both the child welfare evaluation and the very incredible work that other jurisdictions are doing. Our interest was in recognizing those efforts as part of the funding framework and building appropriate recognition of their efforts moving in those directions.

So we have moved in the past two years to a much more flexible approach to the framework. We have moved beyond the actual benchmarks from 1997 to more accurately reflect actual costs that agencies are incurring.

Ms Martel: Is that what's driving up the deficits for this year?

Ms Cane: I think it's safe to say there has been a fairly significant pattern of deficits over the past number of years. I think the costs are driven from a variety of directions, some quite obvious in terms of the overall socio-economic situation in the province of Ontario.

I should note that the trends we're seeing in increased volumes are particularly in the areas of emotional maltreatment and neglect, as well as increased reporting in the area of domestic violence, which I should note are intended policy consequences of directions that have been taken and, if I could comment, certainly are not

only well-intended but very appropriate under the circumstances. Those also have driven costs up because volumes related to those areas have also increased. This is exactly the same type of situation that we're seeing in jurisdictions across North America and in fact the world, related to child welfare. Increasing trends in reporting was an intended policy consequence

We are also wrestling with a number of other issues in the child welfare sector, not only relating to the overall socio-economic situation but relating to what I would describe as very intense media scrutiny and inquests, coroners' inquests and other types of inquiries that have looked at the treatment of children and results of situations that have transpired and resulted in quite a number of recommendations. I think that, combined with what is a considerably litigious trend, has made not only our workers but our agencies quite risk-averse.

In addition, when we're facing a fairly young workforce in child welfare, there is significant turnover in this sector, as we've noted in other sectors, including children's mental health. I think when you have young workers in a very risk-averse situation, with a very important and difficult mandate to exercise, all of this does result in some trends that increase volumes and the amount of work coming to the doors of CASs.

Ms Martel: Will it require a change in legislation?

Ms Cane: That is something that is part of Bruce's work. He's currently looking at what legislative changes may be required as part of the work he's doing, not only related to the funding framework but some of the other pieces of his work. In addition, we're also looking at what regulatory changes to the Child and Family Services Act might be required, as well as what changes can be made with changes in policy direction, and other direction to the field.

Ms Martel: But you'll be in a position of maybe bringing legislation forward in the spring, and a deficit situation in front of you, so I think you'll be in no position but to deal with that deficit situation unless and until you have some new changes that a new framework for funding would fit into.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: It's a challenge. At the same time, I have to respect the process. We have a process in place, and I know Mr Rivers' report will be very helpful. At the same time, I have to respect the fact that it's children's lives we're talking about, so it's worth taking the time. It is something that the children's aid societies also acknowledge has to be grappled with.

Ms Martel: Will that package also include changes with respect to access orders and adoptions, or is that coming in a different piece of legislation?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: It's going to be part of it.

Ms Martel: And you are looking at other jurisdictions that are more successful in adoptions provincially?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Absolutely.

Ms Martel: OK. One final question, and it has to do with aboriginal agencies because there is a very good working relationship, obviously, in our own community with the First Nations on Manitoulin Island, but there

certainly is a goal and a view and a vision and a hope that, at some point, not only that group of First Nations but others across northwestern Ontario will be able to form their own protection agencies. I don't know how that fits into the package that came forward, if there were any specific recommendations with respect to aboriginal child protection agencies and the development of the same. Is the ministry looking at that, and what are the potentials and how would you fund that or look at that as part of legislation that's coming forward?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'll begin, before I turn it over the ministry. As you know, we did open the native children one in Toronto, and I have met with First Nations chiefs in Manitoulin and surrounding areas and they brought me that request. First of all, I respect their request and I understand the cultural issues. As minister, of course, my main concern is the safety of children, and all the standards that were met for the Toronto First Nations children's aid have to be met across the province. In other words, the kids have to definitely be safe, at the same time as respecting the cultural issues.

I've not committed to opening any other ones, but I have committed to the First Nations chiefs that I will be looking at it very carefully and that if we can ensure that the same standards and the same process—they want this too. They want to ensure that the change to First Nations children's aid will keep their children safe. They told me stories that, quite frankly, embarrassed me as far as some of the things they have to go through as a society are concerned.

I'm going to turn it over to—

The Vice-Chair: Briefly. You have one minute left, and if you could give your name for Hansard, I'd appreciate it.

Mr Dan Lafranier: I'm Dan Lafranier, regional director for the north region.

I'll just give you a little bit of background in terms of Manitoulin Island. The agency that's on the island is Kina Gbezhgomi, and as a ministry we have had a relationship with this developing agency for over 10 years. Part of our work with the agency—we provide over \$1 million in funding—is to do with child prevention programs, which is really an investment in those communities around recreation programs for children in a way to divert the programs from needing to become involved with child protection in the more intrusive end of the spectrum.

I say that because I think it's an important starting point—a foundation of organizations interested in expanding their mandate. We've had a long and very successful experience as a ministry in working with agencies like that.

Over the last number of years, they've clearly expressed an interest in proceeding down the road of gaining more and more control over delivery of services for their children. We've shared their interest and shared that direction with them. I think the interest we have as a

ministry is in ensuring that we do that carefully, that we do that in a way that makes sure they have the capacity to not only deliver child prevention programming and supports and services, but so that they have a sustainable infrastructure in the longer term to make it work.

We've had a lot of recent conversations and discussions with them around putting a multi-year plan together so that we can work through this together in a multi-year way. Without understanding the end date or how long this is going to take us, we both appreciate that it's going to take a while to get there. So there's a question of what I call multi-year investments, issues like service delivery, the accountability mechanisms they currently have with the funding we have. Is that working well? Are we getting the best services for children with our current investment, understanding that's a very important foundation for the more intrusive or the harder end of the spectrum on child protection?

We're working with them in developing protocols with the local children's aid society in Sudbury so that while we have that relationship we're not missing the point that there is a need for child protection support in those First Nations communities, and we want to make sure that's working well. So we have protocol agreements between the children's aid society and themselves so they share and have an understanding about how that's going to work around the decision-making that's happening in those communities, the chief and council and the organization, and how they're engaged with the society in Sudbury to make sure it's done in a thoughtful and planned way.

The issue there is really one of involving them. We try to do it through a formal protocol, but those discussions are always ongoing. I think it's fair to say that that relationship has been around for some time and continues to exist.

The Vice-Chair: That's a long answer. Thank you very much. It's actually a very interesting answer as well.

Procedurally, it might be simpler to adjourn, but we're waiting to see at the five minutes, when it comes up—it'll probably be about three minutes. I would look for indications, but I would like to move that this committee stand adjourned until tomorrow and we'll pick up with the Liberal rotation on this 15 minutes.

Ms Martel: No, next week.

The Vice-Chair: Pardon me; next week. It's a good thing I have administrative support on this job; otherwise, I'd be in some trouble.

For the record, there's about how much time left? I've asked the clerk to handle that.

Interjection.

The Vice-Chair: There is just under two hours remaining, and November 16 is the next day this committee will convene. Thank you very much for your time today.

The committee adjourned at 1748.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 3 November 2004

Ministry of Children and Youth Services	E-313
Hon Marie Bountrogianni, minister	
Mr Bohodar Rubashewsky, assistant deputy minister, business planning and corporate services	
Ms Jessica Hill, deputy minister	
Ms Trinela Cane, assistant deputy minister, policy development and program design	
Ms Deborah Newman, assistant deputy minister, youth justice services	
Mr Dan Lafranier, regional director, northern regional office	

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