



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Monday 27 April 2009

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Lundi 27 avril 2009

**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Poverty Reduction Act, 2009

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Loi de 2009 sur la réduction
de la pauvreté

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Monday 27 April 2009

Lundi 27 avril 2009

The committee met at 1415 in committee room 1.

POVERTY REDUCTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DE LA PAUVRETÉ

Consideration of Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario / Projet de loi 152, Loi concernant une stratégie à long terme de réduction de la pauvreté en Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Members of the committee, I invite you to begin with me Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario. As you know, we're here for clause-by-clause consideration. Before presentation of the first motion and first suggested amendment, are there any comments of a general nature before the committee?

Seeing none, we'll begin to entertain motions. We have Mr. Prue of the NDP.

Mr. Michael Prue: The first motion.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I'm sorry, there's section 1. For section 1, we've not received any amendments to date, so shall section 1 carry? Carried.

Section 2, NDP motion 1, Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that subsection 2 (1) of the bill be amended by striking out "that is guided by a vision of a province where every person has an opportunity to achieve his or her full potential" and substituting "that is guided by a vision of a poverty-free province where every person has an opportunity to achieve his or her full potential".

If I may just briefly, this is including the words "poverty-free". We borrowed this from Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador. Their ultimate goal is to eliminate poverty. We believe that should be the ultimate goal here in Ontario as well.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. Any further comments? Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you. I would like to draw the committee's attention to the second motion, which is coming up, in which we talk about Ontario being a leading jurisdiction in poverty reduction. Our feeling is that we are, first of all, moving forward with this bill that would require that all future governments would have to have a poverty reduction strategy in place with targets, indicators and initiatives in the strategy. By being a leading jurisdiction in poverty reduction, we

create an environment where we want everyone to be part of the solution.

1420

We feel that everyone has a role to play in poverty reduction, and so while government is being asked to create strategies, we want to make sure that everyone in Ontario knows that this is an opportunity-based strategy where there is, as Mr. Prue has said, an opportunity to achieve everyone's full potential. But we feel that we need to work at being a leading jurisdiction in this.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Ms. Van Bommel. Any further comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: Since we've started to deal with number 2, I could agree with number 2 if the last word in subsection (a) was eliminated. I would be very happy to withdraw mine because I think that would cover it. I think that should be the ultimate goal, to eliminate poverty, not just to reduce it. I have no problem with your amendment, but if the goal is not to eliminate poverty, then what is the goal? It's like a half life of an atomic substance. It goes down by half, by half, by half, by half, and a million years later there's still a little bit left.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I think we need to address the whole issue of poverty reduction in terms of what our goal is, and we feel—

Mr. Michael Prue: Is your goal not to eliminate it, though? That's all I'm asking. Is that not the goal?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We want to make sure we're a leading jurisdiction in this.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Seeing an impasse, we'll proceed to the vote. Those in favour of NDP motion 1? Those opposed? I declare NDP motion 1 to have been defeated.

Government motion 2, Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that subsection 2(1) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

"Poverty reduction strategy

"2(1) The government of Ontario shall maintain the poverty reduction strategy set out in Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy published on December 4, 2008, or another poverty reduction strategy,

"(a) that reflects Ontario's aspiration to be a leading jurisdiction in reducing poverty; and

"(b) that is guided by the vision of a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full

potential and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario.”

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. Further comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: Just for the record, I think this is nebulous. If the government is serious, and if the government wants to adopt a second strategy, the strategy should be to eliminate poverty. Again, I don’t know what a strategy is to be number one. Number one at what? To be the leading jurisdiction at what?

I’m simply saying that this is going to cause the government no harm by substituting the word “reducing” with “eliminating.” I’m not setting a time frame. It might be five or 10 or 15 years. I’m not trying to be utopian. I’m trying to say that has to be the ultimate goal of every government—this one and future ones. I want to eliminate it. I don’t think there’s a member in this whole room who doesn’t want to eliminate it. I just don’t understand why you are content on being a leading jurisdiction.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: As a jurisdiction, we all understand that there’s an imperative to reduce poverty. We need to make sure that we have the economic ability and opportunities in place for everyone to be at their full potential, but I still feel that leading jurisdiction is an important thing for us to play. This is a pragmatic way of approaching the whole issue of poverty reduction.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I believe we’re at the same impasse as previous, so we’ll now proceed to the vote, unless there are further comments. Those in favour of government motion 2? Those opposed? Government motion 2 carries.

NDP motion 3, Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by striking out the portion before paragraph 1 and substituting the following:

“Principles

“(2) Every new or modified long-term poverty reduction strategy is to be based on the following principles, and Ontario’s laws, policies and practices must be consistent with the following principles:”

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. Comments? Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I find this one hard to understand, because I think what you’re saying here is that you’re going to ask that all Ontario laws, practices and policies be consistent with the principles of the Poverty Reduction Act, and I’m not sure how that would work. How would you impose that upon things such as the Mining Act or the Highway Traffic Act?

Mr. Michael Prue: If the question is asked of me, this is what Quebec does: In every bill that is brought forward, the various ministers are asked to say whether or not there is a policy impact, and whether or not what is being suggested will aid or be neutral in terms of poverty reduction. With some things, like the Mining Act, I guess the minister has a fairly easy job. They stand up and say, “No, this is not relevant to this.” All the other ministers

are asked to comment on how and if it will reduce poverty, before the bill is allowed to proceed.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: So does that not become a bit burdensome, in the sense of ministries that would not have any response to give to this type of thing, in every piece of legislation that came forward before them?

Mr. Michael Prue: It’s my understanding that 15 or 20 ministers either sign something in advance or stand up in the House and make a two- or three-sentence statement, and the bill commences.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I’m not sure that I can support that one. I find it a bit burdensome on ministers and ministry staff.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Any further comments on NDP motion 3? Seeing none, we’ll proceed to the vote. Those in favour of NDP motion 3? Those opposed? NDP motion 3 is defeated.

Government motion 4, Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by striking out the portion before paragraph 1 and substituting the following:

“Principles

“(2) Every new or modified poverty reduction strategy is to be based on the following principles:”

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. Comments? We’ll proceed to the vote. Those in favour of government motion 4? Those opposed? Government motion 4 is carried.

NDP motion 5, Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that paragraph 1 of subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by adding at the end “irrespective of their race, aboriginal status, gender, ability, family status or immigration status”.

I understand that the government will be amending this in 5A, but just by way of background, this was a recommendation of several of the groups, including the Colour of Poverty. It seems to me very fair that we set out the places or the circumstances under which people find themselves in poverty. I certainly have no objection, and will have no objection, to government motion 5A when it comes forward, but that was the rationale of putting this motion.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We certainly appreciate that. As was discussed, we will move the amendment on 5A.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. Those in favour of NDP motion 5?

Mr. Michael Prue: Don’t we have to vote on the amendment first?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Yes, I’m going to amend the amendment, if that’s okay.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): It’s a separate motion.

Mr. Michael Prue: A separate motion, okay.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Those in favour of NDP motion 5?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Can I—

Mr. Michael Prue: I wonder if we could defer that.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Okay, let's clarify here.

Mr. Michael Prue: I wonder if we can defer it until after 5A, because if 5A doesn't pass, for some miraculous reason, I still want 5 to go forward. Is that possible?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Is that possible?

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): You can stand it down, yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: Stand it down, okay.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We'll now entertain government motion 5A.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that paragraph 1 of subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by adding at the end "and, in particular, persons who face discrimination on the grounds of their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or disability".

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: Just to say that I find it more all-encompassing, and thank you very much.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Those in favour of government motion 5A? Those opposed? Government motion 5A carries.

We will return, then, to NDP motion 5. Those in favour?

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm prepared to have it declared redundant.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): It's out of order, therefore annulled.

NDP motion 6.

1430

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that paragraph 3 of subsection 2(2) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

"Recognition of racism and other forms of discrimination

"3. Racism and other forms of inequity and disparity have long existed and continue to exist in Ontario. The poverty reduction strategy must recognize racism and other forms of discrimination, on the basis of gender, disability, aboriginal status, family status and immigration status, and that discrimination results in heightened risks and disproportionate levels of poverty among groups subject to discrimination."

I think it's clear what it stands—for the record, I think that 5(a) covered some of that. I would still move it all the same. I am content that it has its fate.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. Those in favour, if there are no comments, on NDP motion 6. Those opposed. NDP motion 6 is defeated.

Government motion 7.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that paragraph 3 of subsection 2(2) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

"Recognition of diversity

"3. That not all groups of people share the same level of risk of poverty. The poverty reduction strategy must recognize the heightened risk among groups such as im-

migrants, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal people and racialized groups."

What this motion does is add the word "women" to that particular section of the act.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. Ms. Munro?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes, just for the record, I wanted to say that if you look at the work that Roger Martin did on competitiveness in his research on poverty, there's one group that is not included in the list here, and that would be people without high school graduation. Obviously, the intent of this is the issue of diversity, but I would just want it to be on the record that that is very much an at-risk group for poverty.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): If there are no further comments, we can proceed to the vote. Those in favour of government motion 7? Those opposed? Carried.

Government motion 8, Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that paragraph 6 of subsection 2(2) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

"Involvement

"6. That Ontarians, especially people living in poverty, are to be involved in the design and implementation of the strategy.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Comments? Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm thankful for this motion being put forward. You heard me many times in the House complaining of going to the meetings in Peterborough, Durham, Ottawa and other locations and being denied entry. But it wasn't so much that I was denied entry to the meetings, it was that the poor who were standing outside were denied entry to those meetings. I think that by putting this in, we will ensure that future governments will not make that mistake. The poor have every right to discuss matters that will deeply affect them, their families and their livelihoods. I think that if you're ever going to discuss poverty without involving the poor in a dynamic and ongoing way, such poverty strategies will be doomed to failure. So I will be voting for this motion.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: And I think we also heard during the public hearings from 25 in 5, who asked that we be much more explicit in who would be involved, not just in poverty reduction but in the design and implementation of a strategy. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. We'll proceed to the vote then. Those in favour of government motion 8? Those opposed? Motion 8 is carried.

NDP motion 9. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that paragraph 7 of subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by striking out "to develop strong and healthy children, families and communities" and substituting "to develop strong and healthy children, adults, families and communities."

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I think what we're doing is just simply adding the word "adults," and youth, and I think that is important. We had a number of groups come

forward and state that the poverty strategy to that point was narrow, or was too narrow, and seemed to involve children to the predominance of other groups. What we're simply trying to say is that other groups are of necessity involved as well. To add adults and youth will make sure that it encapsulates everyone.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I would like to move an amendment to this amendment, adding the word "youth," as well because we certainly appreciate the intent of what's happening here and what Mr. Prue is proposing. We think that we can enhance it further by adding the word "youth" as well.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would consider it a friendly amendment, if it causes any difficulty.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We've caused some serious confusion here today.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I'll call for the will of the committee: Shall the amendment to the amendment carry? Carried.

Shall the amendment, as amended, carry? Carried.

Thus, government motions 10 and 10a are redundant, so we'll move on to NDP motion 11. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by adding the following paragraph:

"Equitable life chances and equality rights

"8. Strengthening Ontario's human rights laws and enforcement system is essential to the reduction of poverty."

By way of explanation, I believe this is essential. We had some deputants come forward and talk about the human rights laws as they exist, and that in order for poverty to be attacked successfully by the government, the enforcement of the system of human rights needs to be augmented to ensure that they go out and make sure that groups that are at risk, both of abuse and of poverty, are protected.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Comments? Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: As much as we understand where Mr. Prue is coming from on this, in terms of the human rights laws and act, I feel really that matters that pertain to the code should stay within the code and not necessarily be addressed through this bill.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We'll proceed to the vote.

Those in favour of NDP motion 11? Those opposed? NDP motion 11 is defeated.

Government motion 11A.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by adding the following paragraph:

"Importance of the third sector

"8. That the third sector, including non-profit, charitable and voluntary organizations, are integral to a poverty reduction strategy by delivering the programs and services that matter to people, by strengthening communities and by making a positive contribution to the economy."

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Further comments?

We'll proceed to the vote, then.

Those in favour of government motion 11A? Those opposed? Government motion 11A carries.

NDP motion 12.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by adding the following paragraph:

"Equal opportunity for disabled persons

"9. Meaningful enforcement of the provisions and standards set out by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 is required to effectively reduce poverty."

By way of explanation, we believe that the provisions set out in another act, if enforced, would have a meaningful and deliberate effect of reducing poverty. Unless and until there is an enforcement agency and enforcement people checking those out, people with disabilities will continue to be at risk.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Comments? Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: During the public hearings, I think we heard from people commending Dr. Marie Bountrogianni for the work she had done on the disabilities act. I know that we are moving forward as a government. We have worked in a collaborative way with the Retail Council of Canada to get an enactment of the disabilities act requirements there. We have moved forward with certain tools, and been successful in getting that started. We've now started consultations for the employment accessibility standard.

As was stated by one of our deputants, I think the act has been a great leap forward for us. At this stage, I'm quite happy to allow the act to move forward as it has, and I don't see any real benefit in having it included here as well.

1440

Mr. Michael Prue: If I could, Mr. Chair, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act has a 25-year time frame. Although there is nothing in that act that I would oppose and everything in that act that I would agree with, the problem is that the 25-year time frame is far too long. The enforcement that is being contemplated here, we hope, will speed up the process as it relates to poverty so that people who are living with disabilities will be able to have their claims adjudicated and be supported by the government.

If there is a marginalized group—if there is a group that is almost predominantly in poverty—it is the disabled. All we're saying here is, enforce the provisions of that act as quickly as possible now, as opposed to 25 years from now, and you will do a great deal to eliminate poverty. That's what we're trying to do; that's what we're trying to say.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: But I'm not sure we could necessarily open up that particular act by going through this act to do it. If the strategy within the original disabilities act is over 25 years, as much as I understand where you're coming from, I don't think we can be doing that through this act as well. If we need to move forward—if the strategy should be to move along quickly on that particular one—then we need to deal with that act specifically and not try to do it through this one.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We'll proceed to the vote, then.

Those in favour of NDP motion 12? Those opposed? NDP motion 12 is defeated.

NDP motion 13. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by adding the following paragraph:

"Equity and equality

"10. That equity, equality and fairness are integral to a poverty reduction strategy. The poverty reduction strategy must move beyond averages and aggregates to reduce and ultimately eliminate the gaps experienced by groups that are protected under the Human Rights Code."

I think what is being said here is self-evident.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Comments?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm not quite sure of the meaning of "move beyond averages and aggregates." I find that a bit vague. What we're trying to do here is require governments, our own and future governments, to have a strategy in place. I'm a bit confused as to what we're trying to achieve with this motion.

Mr. Michael Prue: Quite frankly, a lot of things we do around here are statistics, and I'm always reminded of what Mark Twain had to say: "There are ... lies, damned lies," and then there are statistics.

What we're trying to say here is that these are individuals and people, and we need to look at what the poverty reduction strategy will do to move beyond those, so that you're not just looking at numbers but looking at individuals and groups of people, to eliminate the gaps they experience. What we're asking governments to do, now and in the future, is to be flexible: Look at what is best for the human condition, not just at numbers on a page.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I think that is what this bill will do. When we talk about the whole issue of developing a strategy, and when we talk about targets, initiatives and indicators, I think we will accomplish that.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, and for the record, "Lies, damned lies and statistics" was Benjamin Disraeli.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no. Mark Twain came before him.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We will now move to the procedure—

Mr. Michael Prue: We can argue about this another time.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): —for the vote.

Mr. Michael Prue: We argue about stuff all the time, and who said what.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): The committee is willing to entertain a vote on that too, by the way.

In any case, those in favour of NDP motion 13? Those opposed? NDP motion 13 is defeated.

NDP motion 14.

Mr. Michael Prue: Subsection 2(2), new paragraph 11.

I move that subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by adding the following paragraph:

"Importance of the third sector

"11. The third sector, including non-profit, charitable and voluntary organizations, are integral to a poverty reduction strategy by delivering the programs and services that matter to people, by strengthening communities and by making a positive contribution to the economy, especially when those who are living in poverty play a key role in managing or being employed by third sector organizations. The third sector must be supported by legislation, funding, policies and practices related to poverty reduction."

It seems to me to be self-evident. I'm also given to understand that the government may be moving an amendment here to delete the last sentence. Although I don't like that, I am certainly aware that the main body of what we're trying to say would be accomplished. I'd like it all—the last sentence: "We think that this will be incumbent upon future governments, future Legislatures, to support poverty reduction by legislation, funding, policies and practices." But I admit that this last sentence may not survive.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: As Mr. Prue may recall, I was a little confused looking for 11A, and I had thought we would be attaching it. But the sequence of the numbering is where I got caught. When we passed 11A—this becomes redundant in the sense that what we had agreed to in deleting the last part of it was accomplished in 11A already.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, this is paragraph 11; the last one was paragraph 8, so it cannot be redundant. It might be saying much the same thing, but—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We comment not upon the redundancy, but it is a separate motion which is now before the committee and shall be disposed of in the appropriate manner.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: In the appropriate manner; okay.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We'll proceed, then, to the vote. Those in favour of NDP motion 14? Those opposed? NDP motion 14 is defeated.

I'll now invite Mr. Prue to do NDP motion 15.

Mr. Michael Prue: I am quite surprised that that lost.

I move that subsection 2(2) of the bill be amended by adding the following paragraph:

"Good stable jobs in a sustainable economy

"12. All Ontarians are entitled to work in good, stable jobs that promote strong, healthy communities and contribute to environmental sustainability."

The reason this was put forward is that we believe that an economic strategy adopted by the government will have a profound effect on poverty reduction. The more people who are working in good, stable jobs, the more people who are paying taxes, the more people who are contributing to the economy, the stronger and healthier the communities will be, the stronger the contribution to environmental sustainability. All of those things will

have profound effects on poverty reduction. We think that a new section 12 is warranted.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate? Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: What I know we're trying to do with this bill is to develop a strategy in terms of how the economy is treated. Talking about a stable economy and a sustainable economy is something that is addressed through the budget and through the Minister of Finance. There have been a number of proposals put forward through the budget in terms of training and the building of infrastructure and the supporting of the vulnerable, including our Ontario child benefit, and the increases in the acceleration of the payments. Through that, we are doing a great deal to make Ontario more competitive, but all of those things are addressed through the budget, and I think they're appropriately dealt with that way rather than through this bill.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further comment? Seeing none, all those in favour of NDP motion 15? Against? That's defeated.

Next is government motion number 16. Ms. Van Bommel.

1450

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that subsection 2(3) of the bill be amended by striking out the portion before paragraph 1 and substituting the following:

"Contents of poverty reduction strategy

"(3) Every new or modified poverty reduction strategy is to include the following:"

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Ms. Munro?

Mrs. Julia Munro: In an earlier part, you had a similar phrase that you had brought forward as an amendment. I wanted to ask why you took out "long-term."

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Actually, it's an issue of clarification. There seemed to be confusion in terms of what "long-term" means. Some people's perception of "long-term" is the five-year strategy, whereas for others "long-term" means the whole issue of reduction of poverty over cumulative strategies. So rather than having the confusion about what is "short-term" or what is "long-term," we felt that by taking that word out, we would then be able to clearly say what a poverty strategy should be, whether it's a five-year strategy or even a three-year strategy. We don't necessarily want to be tied down to arguments about what's "short-term" and what's "long-term"; we just simply feel that for every subsequent government, it should be mandated that they have strategies in place. If they are able to accomplish the targets of that strategy in a shorter time frame, there should then be another subsequent strategy put in place.

Mrs. Julia Munro: If I just might ask further, where you have it now as "new or modified," is that to imply that you wouldn't be taking something that you've been doing and putting it into a new time frame?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We require targets to be set. In terms of "modified," it is a situation where, if part of the target has already been accomplished, and it is the government's desire to modify the strategy based on

some of the things that have come about, as long as the targets are still accomplished over the term, that would still be the intent.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I guess my question comes to: Let us assume—since obviously all of this is hypothetical at this point in terms of developing a strategy, what if you were satisfied with the strategies that were working?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Now I'm confused. Can you give me an example?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It implies, I think, that where you have every "long-term" poverty strategy in the original, you've now changed it to "every new or modified," and all I'm asking is, does that mean you throw out things that are working by omission, by not referring to those strategies that you would wish to continue?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm not quite clear what were—I'm sorry, Julia. I'm just trying to understand what your concern is.

Mrs. Julia Munro: All I'm concerned about is that you are imposing the need to have "new or modified," as opposed to finding that what you have already working is working. So when you talk about a contents of poverty reduction strategy, it says, "every new or modified," so they have to be new or modified. Could you not have ones where you are just going to say, "We're going to continue doing what we've been doing"?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm a bit confused because my thought is, when you have set a target, and if it's working and you've achieved that target, then you're in a position at that stage to develop another strategy. The bill is saying that at least every five years there has to be a new strategy put into place.

Mrs. Julia Munro: That's my question. Thank you.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate? All those in favour of government motion number 16? Opposed? That's carried.

NDP motion number 17.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that paragraph 3 of subsection 2(3) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

"3. Indicators to measure the success of the strategy that are linked to the determinants of poverty, including but not limited to income, education, health, housing and standard of living."

I might note that 18 is pretty much the same wording. I think we came from the same place, although I do think ours is a better motion because it reads "that are linked to the determinants of poverty" within the body. Therefore, I'm asking the government to support this. I think they're already on the same wavelength.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We will be supporting this motion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): All those in favour? That's carried.

Government motion number 18.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I will be withdrawing that one. As was earlier noted, it will be redundant to 17.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Thank you. NDP motion number 19.

Mr. Michael Prue: Number 19, I'm given to understand, is out of order. I can read it for the record if you like, but I am content that it probably does go beyond the bounds of an opposition member to move this in that it involves the expenditure of money across a wide swath of government programs. Would you like me to read it into the record? Okay, I'll read it into the record, but I do understand its ultimate fate.

I move that section 2 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

“Same

“(4) Every poverty reduction strategy must include targets, standards, requirements or commitments to increase social transfer payments that are crucial to the reduction of poverty, including but not limited to the following:

- “1. Indexed living wage.
- “2. Income support.
- “3. Non-profit public child care.
- “4. Labour market participation programs.
- “5. Affordable social housing.
- “6. Targeted investments in aboriginal communities.”

By way of explanation, this is our dream; this is what we want. This is why it's here, and I await its fate.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Thank you, Mr. Prue. I'd just like to rule on the admissibility of this amendment. It proposes to add a section that is beyond the scope of the bill that is currently before this committee, so therefore this motion is out of order.

Shall section 2, as amended, carry? All those in favour? That's carried.

Next, NDP motion number 20.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that section 3 of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“Poverty reduction target

“3(1) At least every five years, either as a result of a review under section 6 or otherwise, the government of Ontario shall establish a specific target for poverty reduction which contains specific targets for each group of individuals who face heightened risks of poverty, including communities-of-colour, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and newcomers.

“Target must represent significant and substantive reduction in poverty

“(2) The government's specific target for poverty reduction must represent a significant and substantive reduction in poverty within the next five years.”

By way of explanation, many poverty groups came forward wanting to see that the effect is cumulative so that every several years when the government comes forward, it must be added to the list. If poverty has been reduced by 20%, they want to see a further 20% or 25% added to that. That is the intent, and also to ensure that all of the groups that are affected beyond what the government's initial program for children was focused on are included. I understand that has been changed and that this may require modification if it is to pass. Notwithstanding

that, I think the important thing here is that the significant and substantive reduction in poverty has to be brought forward at least every five years by the government in power.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I feel that this particular motion is overprescriptive in the sense that it wants to have specific targets for each group. Certainly the framework that the bill addresses as a whole doesn't talk about specific targets for each group, and I think what the bill is trying to do is make sure that governments, our government and successive governments, are held accountable. I think they will be, but I'm not comfortable with the idea of specific targets for specific groups.

1500

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Thank you. Any further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes. I am comfortable with that, because over time, there may be deviations from the norm. You may find the poverty rate of children and/or seniors or others going down, whereas the poverty rate among the disabled or aboriginals or other groups may be going up. I think it's very clear that a strategy would have to look at that and ask itself the question, why are some people living in poverty starting to become better off while others are not, and what do we have to do to change the strategy to work to the benefit of all?

That's all it's intended to do. I have no doubt it will be, like anything else, that some groups will move ahead more quickly under certain legislation than others, but I think it behooves this government, this Legislature and future governments to look at what is happening and to make the necessary modifications.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Ms. Van Bommel?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I understand the intent of what is happening here, but, like I said, I think to say in the bill that there have to be specific targets for each group is overly prescriptive. As you have said, there may be occasions where there need to be specific targets. The bill does not preclude that from happening. It just simply—the motion as stated would require that every group have specific targets, and I think that's a little bit onerous for any government to have to work with.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Thank you. Any further debate? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? That is lost.

Next is government motion 21.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that section 3 of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“Poverty reduction target

“3. At least every five years, either as part of the development of a new poverty reduction strategy under section 6 or otherwise, the government of Ontario shall establish a specific target for poverty reduction.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes, I have a question. When you look at the part about a specific target for poverty reduction, are you talking about a group of people such

as we had in the conversation a moment ago or are you talking about a specific number that you are looking at, and would that specific number have anything to do with a particular group?

One of the comments that came out of the hearings was that, because of the complexity of poverty and the number of multiple causes, you can't assume that there is a one-size-fits-all. So my concern about this is that I don't know whether the specific target is numerical; I don't know whether poverty reduction is for an aggregate, going back to an earlier concern, or whether or not the target is actually a group of people. What's meant by "a specific target for poverty reduction"?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I think we're going to get legal counsel to give us a hand on this one right now.

Interjection.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you, Julia, for the question. When we say "specific target," what we are saying is that there needs to be a target. It doesn't necessarily have to be in terms of a specific group or a reduction of a certain level. That would be within the flexibility of the government of the day to deal with, but they need to set a target, and that's what we're asking for. We're not going to be so prescriptive as to say that it has to be for a certain group, as was brought up earlier, or that it has to address a certain number, but there needs to be some specific target. It could be a combination, it could be that they want to address just a specific group, but there needs to be targets. It's not just simply a case of being able to say, "Well, we're going to reduce poverty."

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Mr. Prue?

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a little bit of difficulty with this because the groups that make up the poverty community—and I don't know how else to delicately phrase that—vary in size. You have the large groups, the disabled and children. You have other smaller groups because of the size of them, and maybe the First Nations community—although their poverty is dire, they're smaller in numbers and far away. So when you have a poverty strategy that aims to reduce poverty, say, by 25%, it will be skewed by the size of the groups that are affected, so that some smaller groups—there may be an announcement made that poverty has been reduced by 25% without actually assisting them in the way we need to.

We are starting to become very sophisticated in terms of collecting numbers. I remember years ago that we didn't collect numbers based on race because we were afraid that they were going to be used for deleterious effect. We're starting to understand that when you collect those and manage them and look at them properly, you can find out where you can be of best assistance. I'm not suggesting for a minute that you not collect them, but I am suggesting that to simply use an umbrella and say that we have reduced poverty by 15% or 20% or 25%, whatever the number is, will not give a clear picture, and will leave pockets of places where it has not been effective, depending on the sizes of the groups. I'm merely cautioning the government that I think it's better to collect

them in a way that they can be earmarked and separated so that we can have a better understanding. After all, we are hoping, through this process, over a number of years, to get as many people out of poverty as possible.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I certainly understand where both members are coming from. I think what also needs to be remembered here is that as much as someone may be tempted to want to play with the targets and that sort of thing, there's always the real fact that there is public accountability here. As Mr. Prue has said, if you decide you're going to reduce poverty by 25% in a very small population, you could certainly say that you've accomplished that goal, but I think for the public to find that acceptable might be quite another story.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall section 3, as amended, carry? All those in favour? Carried.

New section 3.1, NDP motion 22. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that the bill be amended by adding the following section:

"Involvement of government agencies, boards and commissions

"3.1 The minister shall ensure that the activities of all agencies, boards and commissions of the government of Ontario are considered and included in the design, implementation and evaluation of poverty reduction strategies."

Quite frankly, this is a reasonable thing, I think. We have many boards, commissions, and agencies that are dependent on government funding, everything from universities to schools, hospitals—the MUSH sector—and municipalities. We have myriad numbers of commissions and boards, everything from the liquor licence board to the gambling commission—we have them all. I think that if there is something they can do or something that they are expected to do, it would not take a great leap forward to include them at this time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I think this one would be very difficult to actually do because we've got 295 agencies that are classified by the Management Board of Cabinet. If we were to involve all of them in the design, implementation and evaluations of the strategies, I'm not sure that that would have a practical advantage at all. I think in many ways it is—well, we want to hear from our stakeholders on this more than we need to hear from agencies.

1510

Mr. Michael Prue: If I can, all it says here is that they are "considered"; it's not saying that they're part of the design. It says that they are "considered and included in the design." I think it's the government's role to include them, to look at those agencies—and you have some very capable bureaucrats here in the room, I'm sure, who know all 295—to look at what they are intended to do, to consider them and then include them in the design, the implementation and the evaluation. That's all that's being

asked here. It's not to call 295 groups in. That isn't what this says. It's merely that they be considered and that someone take it upon themselves to include them in the design so that they're not left out. You leave out 295 boards, agencies and commissions, and you leave out a good hunk of government. I think, as the minister and the Premier have said over and over, we're all in this together, and we should be.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I still won't be able to support the motion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): All those in favour? Those against? That's lost.

We'll move to section 4, government motion number 23. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that section 4 of the bill be amended by striking out "long-term poverty reduction strategy" and substituting "poverty reduction strategy."

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Debate? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? That's carried.

NDP motion 24.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that section 4 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

"Report to be tabled

"(2) The minister shall table the annual report referred to in subsection (1) in the Legislative Assembly within 60 days after its completion or, if the assembly is not in session, at the beginning of the next session."

This is merely meant to be current and to allow that the motion and the information be brought forward at the earliest possible occasion so that all members of the Legislature can participate in the ongoing strategy.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Debate? Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I understand where Mr. Prue is going with this, but I think—again, I look at the word "completion," and it doesn't really tell me when that should be. Does that mean when it's written, when it's actually printed or when it's approved internally? We need to have a clearer idea of when the report is completed, and it doesn't say in this motion when the clock starts to run for the tabling of it.

Mr. Michael Prue: I invite my learned friend to simply substitute any one of those and I will vote for it: the date it's written, the date it's submitted to the minister or the date that the minister signs off. Sixty days is fine by me on any of them. Just pick one; I'll vote for it.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We have a government motion coming forward with that. I'll happily sit here and wait for that to come.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): All those in favour? Opposed? That's lost.

PC motion number 25, Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I move that section 4 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsections:

"Report to be tabled

"(2) The minister shall table the annual report referred to in subsection (1) in the Legislative Assembly within

60 days after its completion or, if the assembly is not in session, at the beginning of the next session.

"Referral to standing committee

"(3) The government House leader shall refer each annual report to a standing committee of the assembly.

"Committee to hold public hearings

"(4) The standing committee shall hold public hearings and invite written submissions with respect to each annual report referred to the committee.

"Recommendations to the assembly

"(5) The committee shall make such recommendations to the assembly concerning the poverty reduction strategy then in effect as the committee considers appropriate after consideration of the report and the oral and written submissions received by the committee."

I want to just take a moment to outline the reasons for this particular motion.

One of the things that has been stated throughout the process, and particularly from all stakeholders, is the importance of recognizing that this has to be part of a public process. This would then go beyond the process of simply reporting it after its completion, however that is defined, and in fact allow for a public response.

We all have recognized how complex the group is that we are considering in terms of poverty reduction. When I look at the government's own amendments to this bill, starting with the second one, which talked about reflecting Ontario's aspirations to be a leading jurisdiction, it seems to me that kind of accountability is inherent in having that kind of approach. Another government motion today refers to the need to amend the bill by adding, in particular, "persons who face discrimination," and the list of people who are included there.

Again, it would seem to me that the public interest in this bill and in this process deserves the kind of scrutiny that would come through a process such as the one that has been put forth.

I mentioned earlier that the government says that not all groups of people share the same level of risk. I mentioned, for instance, that one of those groups is people without a high school education. Obviously, that cuts across all boundaries of ethnicity and so forth.

I'm putting forward this motion for the public to have an opportunity to help the government to move forward, obviously taking into account the kinds of suggestions and comment that would come from the public hearings and written submissions.

So that's the purpose of this amendment, to provide that level of accountability and transparency in a public process.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Thank you very much. Any further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: The motion talks about the annual report going forward to a standing committee and also to public hearings and then recommendations coming back from that. I'm not quite sure if the member is talking about an accountability piece here because if we do this on an annual basis, by the time the results

were to come back we would have moved along to the next annual report.

If we're talking about accountability, I think the public certainly would hold the government of the day accountable. It could hold the minister accountable. The annual report would be available to people online. They certainly have an opportunity to make their own comments to the minister through their MPPs.

I wonder if, at some point, people would sort of wonder why we were doing this annually anyway. I think we need to make sure that people stay invested in this whole process and, doing it through this, people would probably want to go and talk directly to their MPP and the minister or through to the Premier and continue to do that and get a quicker result.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Ms. Munro?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes, if I might just respond to that. The difference is really very clear. Those are informal opportunities that people could or might wish to avail themselves. That's very different than a public accountability process. People can write to their MPPs any time they like, which they do. They can e-mail the Premier. That can be the end of the process. There is nothing in this bill that provides people with any kind of sense of involvement in the process, not as the bill stands right now. Frankly, the government has seized upon this as something that's very important to them, and I would assume that they would like some more formal public sense of feedback.

1520

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm just reminded that the bill does actually mandate that we have ongoing consultations, in particular, in terms of the development and implementation of a strategy. I think that in terms of public involvement and opportunity, that is an ongoing process that is mandated within this bill now. The whole possibility of going to standing committee and to public hearings, like I said, on an annual basis, I don't think will be as fruitful as the process that is already outlined in the bill itself.

Mrs. Julia Munro: If I might just comment, and it will be my final comment, that's not a public process. It is in the bill that they're going to consult, but there is nothing in the bill, as it stands, that would require that process to be public.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate? Seeing none, all those in favour of PC motion number 25? Opposed? That's lost.

Government motion number 26.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that section 4 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

"Report to be tabled

"(2) The Minister shall, not later than March 31 of the following year,

"(a) lay the annual report before the assembly, if the assembly is in session; or

"(b) deposit the annual report with the Clerk of the assembly, if the assembly is not in session."

In terms of comment on that particular motion, I think we talked earlier about the need to have a specified time and date for putting an annual report forward. In looking at the comments and listening to the comments from people on the issue of an annual report, there was certainly a sense that people wanted this to be available to them and wanted it to be available to them quickly. By putting in a deadline, that means that it won't just slide from year to year. Annual reports need to be done within a certain time frame and brought forward to the assembly.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Mr. Prue?

Mr. Michael Prue: Just to play devil's advocate for a minute, this will take a few more weeks in committee, third reading, Lieutenant Governor's signature. When would the first report come forward? Because it's quite conceivable the first report would not come until 2010, possibly even 2011, at which time, if it's April—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: If it's April, then you're not going to see one until 2011 or 2012. So that's what I need. I don't mind that it only comes once a year. I don't care if the date is soon after March 31, but when will the first report be presented, because unless we have some guarantee that it will come forward fairly rapidly then—just please assuage my fears.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I just draw your attention to section 4, annual report, "The minister shall, commencing at the end of 2009, prepare an annual report on the government's long-term poverty reduction strategy, including the government's"—

Mr. Michael Prue: So the first one we would get would be soon after March 31, 2010.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Ten.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate? All those in favour of government motion number 26? Opposed? That's carried.

Shall section 4, as amended, carry? Carried.

Section 5, government motion number 27. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that section 5 of the bill be amended by striking out "long-term poverty reduction strategy" at the end and substituting "poverty reduction strategy".

Again, it relates to the whole issue of the definition of "long-term."

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

NDP motion number 28. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that section 5 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

"Groups to be consulted

"(2) The individuals and groups to be consulted by the minister must include members of or groups working with communities of colour, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and newcomers."

I'm given to understand that Ms. Van Bommel will be moving amendment 28A. Since it is more inclusive, I

will support that. Again, I ask that this be held down pending approval of 28A. If it is, then I will withdraw it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Okay, we'll stand that down and move on to government motion 28A. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that section 5 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

“Groups to be consulted

“(2) The individuals and groups to be consulted by the minister must include representatives of people at heightened risk of poverty, including immigrants, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and racialized groups.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Debate? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Michael Prue: I intend to either withdraw mine or have it declared redundant.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Motion number 28 is declared redundant.

Shall section 5, as amended, carry? Carried.

Section 5.1, NDP motion 29: Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that the bill be amended by adding the following section:

“Independent review panel

“5.1(1) Within one year after the issue of Breaking the Cycle—Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, the minister shall appoint an independent review panel,

“(a) to undertake the review of the implementation and effectiveness of the changes resulting from the execution of the poverty reduction strategies as required under section 6; and

“(b) to advise the minister on such matters as the minister may refer to the panel relating to poverty reduction.

“Composition and selection panel

“(2) The minister shall determine the process and criteria for selection of the members of the independent panel in consultation with members of the private, public and non-profit sectors and individuals, including those living in poverty, and the minister shall ensure that the process and criteria are made public.

“Powers

“(3) The independent review panel may,

“(a) consult with, solicit opinions from, or receive or hear requests and suggestions from persons, bodies, organizations or associations with respect to any matter relating to poverty reduction;

“(b) make recommendations to the minister on any matter relating to poverty reduction; and

“(c) give opinions to the minister on government policies that can reasonably be expected to have an impact on poverty levels in Ontario.

“Association with advisory bodies

“(4) In the exercise of its functions, the independent review panel may work in association with any advisory body whose work is related to the reduction of poverty.

“Publication of recommendations

“(5) The independent review panel shall make its recommendations and opinions referred to in subsection

(3) publicly available no later than 30 days after the recommendation or opinion is given to the minister.”

By way of explanation, this is a way to try to democratize and to open up the entire process, to have a group or a single individual there to advise and review on the implementation and effectiveness of the changes. It’s an opportunity to bring in the panel, to bring in and consult with opinions from other people, including people who live in poverty. It’s an opportunity for the advisory bodies—that the panel may work in association with any advisory body whose work is related to the reduction of poverty and that it be published.

Quite frankly, a lot of work has been done in the last year, year and a half. Groups like 25 in 5, the Colour of Poverty, associations of First Nations groups—there’s been lots of work done, and I would hate that that would suddenly stop. They have done a good job in bringing forward to the government what needs to be done. We’re simply asking that the government continue to go along this line, to pick an advisory panel that will work, and to have them continue the consultations with the many, many groups—I forget what the number is; 400 or something, some huge number—that have made submissions and been part of this. If you were to just simply stop and freeze them out, I think that it wouldn’t be doing as much of a service as to continue them working along this laudable goal.

1530

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We heard throughout the public hearings that there is some confusion about what is intended by the word “review.” What the bill intends to do by a review is an assessment, so that we can move forward and take the strategy forward. This is really a very important part of the bill. What we need is, as Mr. Prue has said, a number of organizations, and there will be others in the future, that have a stake in making sure that the strategy will work and will get the results that they need and that we need as well. So there’s been some confusion about the word “review.”

What we intend here, when we say “review,” is that we’ll make sure that it is a review in the sense of going forward with the new strategy. When we talk about that, we certainly want to make sure that when we put forward a new strategy and the process for that, in terms of consultation about it, for setting specific targets for the future, all those would be affected by that review. But the review is intended to be on a going-forward basis.

Mr. Michael Prue: But I understand, from subsequent motions, or ones that will follow, that it’s your intention that the government conduct the review, not an independent review panel. I think that’s where, perhaps, we are differing. We believe that the review is essential, but like so many other boards and commissions in the province of Ontario—you have the Ombudsman, the privacy commissioner, the Integrity Commissioner, the medical officer of health, all of whom report to the Legislature and are somewhat at arm’s length, and here you

have the government reviewing itself. We think this is too important a policy not to be independent.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: But the review would go forward in consultation with exactly the same groups that you talked about, because we talk about the ongoing consultations. I think where we are confused is the whole intent of the review. The review is intended to move the strategy forward in the development of a new strategy. I think that's where some of the confusion goes, at this stage.

Mr. Michael Prue: If I could play devil's advocate, what if you get a government elected that is not interested in the strategy?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: But the bill requires governments to develop a new strategy at least every five years. The whole point of having this bill is that there will no longer be an opportunity for a government to ignore the whole issue of poverty reduction. It becomes—

Mr. Michael Prue: But certainly the government could say—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: —a mandated priority for them.

Mr. Michael Prue: But they could reduce it to a 1% poverty reduction. They could do any number of things.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I think that with public accountability, when you come forward with specific targets—and Ms. Munro talked about that same sort of thing. What we are saying here, very clearly, is that these targets—there's a certain structure to the strategy, and there is public accountability there as well, because it will now be mandated as a priority for a government. It is something that they are going to have to address. By setting forward this bill, that is exactly the intent of it.

The public will certainly hold people accountable if they try to reduce the targets in such a way that they could say, "We only did 1%." I don't think there would be any public tolerance for that.

Mr. Michael Prue: I lived through the Harris years. I'm telling you, there is public tolerance.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I disagree with you. I guess we're going to have to disagree on that. Certainly, once it becomes mandated as a priority for government, I don't know how you would be able to say that the public would suddenly abandon the poor.

Mr. Michael Prue: See? Nor did Mr. Harris, she says. This is what I'm afraid, if you don't pass this, is going to happen.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Mr. Ramal.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I listened to your argument and also to my colleague's argument. It's important to put a lot of emphasis on it, but regardless of what kind of government is going to come in the future, it's up to them. They can change it at any time. Even though passed or being regulated, they can reverse it the way they want. So there's no—

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm just trying to make it harder.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Look what happened, as you mentioned, in Mike Harris's time. He reversed the whole social policy.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I think it's also fair to say that in the Mike Harris days, there was no legislation like this. It was not a mandated priority of the government. I don't mean to slight Ms. Munro, but the whole intent of doing this is that it now becomes mandated for governments to address the reduction of poverty.

Mrs. Julia Munro: There are two things I'd like to say. First of all, I don't think this is germane to the bill that we're looking at right now; and if we are going to discuss history, then I would certainly have to say that one of the things that has been used to talk about children in poverty is the breakfast program, which actually was begun in 1996, I think. The opportunity to take people off social assistance and create the ODSP just stands as simply another example of recognizing the importance for individuals who need special help and need some kind of structure. So I want to set the record straight, and I would also suggest that we need to be discussing the bill at hand.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate? Seeing none, all those in favour of NDP motion 29? Opposed? That's lost.

Since that was lost, NDP motion 30 is out of order because it's contingent upon the previous motion being carried. So we'll skip that.

Government motion 31. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that subsection 6(1) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

"Development of new poverty reduction strategy

"6(1) At least every five years, the government of Ontario shall assess the poverty reduction strategy that is in effect."

I think, again, this is an issue of clarification. We want to make sure that there is a strategy that includes targets, initiatives and indicators, and that every subsequent strategy must have these core elements.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

NDP Motion 32. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that section 6 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

"Timetable for review

"(1.1) The review shall be conducted in accordance with the following rules:

"1. The independent review panel shall begin its review no later than four years after the issue of the poverty reduction strategy"—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Mr. Prue, sorry, I'm going to have to just intervene. I've been advised that this motion is out of order.

Mr. Michael Prue: In view of the passage of the previous one?

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: It's been explained that with the defeat of the independent review panel, this is redundant.

That's all that needed to be said. I would agree that my motion to do that was—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): And so is motion 33.

We'll move on to NDP motion 34. Mr. Prue.

1540

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that clause 6(2)(b) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“(b) shall arrange for consultation to be carried out by such means as will facilitate participation by stakeholders, other levels of government, members of the private, public and non-profit sectors and individuals, including those living in poverty.”

If I can, Mr. Chair—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: The Chairs keep changing here. I look up and there is a new one. I don't know, I guess I'm wearing them all down.

We think this is essential for consultation by the broadest possible means. The most important one to me is the public and non-profit sectors and individuals, including those living in poverty.

Again, I said earlier in the deliberations here today that part of the first phase did not include adequately, in my view, people living in poverty and that everything we do around this bill must include those who live in poverty because the effects of whatever we do will be felt most strongly by them. I think their opinions are valuable.

Having grown up in Regent Park, if you want to know about poverty, you should ask someone living in poverty, not someone who works with someone living in poverty, because the difference of not having the money and looking at someone who does not have the money—as much as you might be empathetic and try to deal with them—is quite striking. I think poor people have a dignity of themselves that needs to be heard.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): Further discussion?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I absolutely agree. The value of what was presented to us here in standing committee and through the consultations that the minister did on the current poverty reduction strategy is very valuable. Certainly, those who live in poverty have the best understanding of what that life is like. It's not the same as going in and helping and then getting to go home to your own house and not having to live it every day for every year as well.

I think our next motion is going to elaborate a little bit more, a little further on the point that you're trying to make here. We feel that the minister responsible should be accountable for arranging consultations. We feel that the minister has the responsibility to ensure that it happens in a way that those who are interested—the poor themselves, those who work with the poor—are all involved in that.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): Further discussion? Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: If I could, I would be content, again, if we could deal with government motion 35, to

see if that passes, and then, should it do so, I would be prepared to have mine declared redundant.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): Is there unanimous consent to stand down item 34? Agreed? Agreed.

Then we'll move to government motion number 35.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that subsection 6(2) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“Consultation

“(2) As part of an assessment under this section, the minister,

“(a) shall inform the public of the proposed assessment of the strategy and solicit the views of the public with respect to the strategy; and

“(b) shall arrange for consultations to be carried out by such means as the minister believes will facilitate participation by key stakeholders, other levels of government, members of the private, public and non-profit sectors and individuals, including individuals living in poverty.”

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I think, certainly, that we've talked about this in previous discussions, and I would just reiterate the same thing again.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): Further discussion? Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'd just point out that it's not necessary for it to be in the public. This is just the minister having consultations.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): Further discussion? There being none, those in favour of government motion 35? Those opposed? The motion is carried.

We return then to motion 34—just bear with me for a moment.

Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): I'm advised that item number 34 now becomes a redundant item and requires no further action in light of the passed item 35.

Government motion 35a, Mrs. Van Bommel?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that section 6 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

“Groups to be consulted

“(2.1) The individuals and groups to be consulted by the minister must include representatives of people at heightened risk of poverty, including immigrants, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and racialized groups.”

Again, we go to the same point that Mr. Prue was making earlier, which is that we received invaluable information from stakeholders, groups and people living in poverty as well, so we want to make sure that those groups are also involved in the consultations.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Any further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes. I just want to ask if the government would consider a friendly amendment to this, which would be “including, but not limited to”.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Just let me find out. Where would you like to put that, Ms. Munro?

Mrs. Julia Munro: In the middle of the line on (2.1), in the brackets, where it says, “The individuals ... to be consulted ... must include representatives of people at heightened risk of poverty,” “including but not limited to”.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: That’s fine. We would consider that to be a friendly amendment.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you, Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Now, do I need to move it as an amendment? No.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Shall the amendment to the amendment carry? It’s carried.

Any further debate?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Shall the amendment, as amended, carry? Carried.

All those in favour of 35A, as amended? Carried.

NDP motion number 36 is out of order.

Government motion 37?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that subsection 6(3) of the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“New poverty reduction strategy to be issued

“(3) Based on its assessment of the poverty reduction strategy then in effect and after consideration of the written and oral representations it receives, the government shall develop and issue a new poverty reduction strategy for Ontario.”

Again, this is a clarification motion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Further debate? Mr. Ramal.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: No, I’m okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): No? All those in favour of government motion 37? Opposed? Carried.

Shall section 6, as amended, carry? Carried.

Section 6.1, NDP motion 38. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that the bill be amended by adding the following section:

“Disclosure to the Assembly

“6.1 On the day that a government bill receives first reading in the Legislative Assembly, the minister responsible for the bill shall make a statement in the Legislative Assembly informing the members of whether any provision in the bill can reasonably be expected, if the bill passes, to have a direct and significant impact on the income of any person or family living in poverty in Ontario.”

I think we just want people to know what’s going to happen to them.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Further debate? Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you very much. I certainly understand the intent of the motion, but I don’t think we really need to prescribe to ministers’ ministerial statements. I think most ministers will deal with this in a head-on way and make their statements anyway, without the need of being told to do so by the bill.

Mr. Michael Prue: What we’re trying to make sure is that the minister states at the outset whether the bill and the passage of the bill is intended to ameliorate the lot of people living in poverty and, if so, by how much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Seeing no further debate, all those in favour of NDP motion 38? Opposed? Lost.

Government motion 39.

1550

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move that clause 7(c) of the bill be amended by striking out “long-term poverty reduction strategy” and substituting “poverty reduction strategy”.

Again, this is for clarification.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Further debate? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Shall section 7, as amended, carry? Carried.

NDP motion 40.

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Chair, I’m given to understand that NDP motions 40 through 45 are out of order. If that is the case, I am prepared to read them into the record, but can you tell me if that’s the intent?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): It’s up to you.

Mr. Michael Prue: But is it your intent to rule them all out of order?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Yes, they would be out of order, I’m told.

Mr. Michael Prue: I still think I should read them in, because we believe in these things. So let’s go.

I move that the bill be amended by adding the following section:

“Equity and Anti-Racism Directorate

“7.1 The government of Ontario shall establish a directorate under the name Equity and Anti-Racism Directorate in English and Direction générale de l’équité et de l’antiracisme in French, to do the following:

“1. Provide for the collection and analysis of ethnographically and otherwise appropriately disaggregated data across all provincial ministries and public institutions.

“2. Provide an ongoing monitoring and program development role for the effective implementation of comprehensive and inclusive equity and anti-racism policies and practices in order to respond to any identified inequities and disparities.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): I would like to rule on the admissibility of this amendment, in that it proposes to add a section beyond the scope of the bill that is currently before the committee. Therefore, I rule this motion is out of order.

NDP motion 41.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that the bill be amended by adding the following section:

“Equity in Employment Directorate

“7.2 The government of Ontario shall establish a directorate under the name Equity in Employment Directorate in English and Direction générale de l’équité en matière d’emploi in French to be fully mandated and adequately resourced in order to ensure merit-based employment across the province through the implementation

of mandatory and comprehensive employment equity programs.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Again, the admissibility of this amendment—it proposes to add a section beyond the scope of the bill that is currently before the committee. Therefore, this is again out of order.

Motion 42, NDP.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that the first paragraph of the preamble to the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“Preamble

“Recognizing that the reduction of poverty supports the social, economic and cultural development of Ontario, the government of Ontario published on December 4, 2008, Breaking the Cycle—Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, a comprehensive long-term strategy to reduce poverty. The government’s poverty reduction strategy is guided by the vision of a province where every person is entitled to an equal opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario, and builds on the foundations of Ontario’s education system, the Ontario child benefit program and such other public institutions essential to the building of an equitable and healthy Ontario.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): We’re just going to have to backtrack a bit; my mistake. In dealing with section 8, shall section 8 carry? Carried.

Shall section 9 carry?

Okay, now we’ll deal with NDP motion 42 and that’s out of order. I want to get this on the record. I’d like to rule on the admissibility of this amendment that proposes to amend the preamble of the bill. Second reading of a bill provides members an opportunity to hold a general debate on the principle of a bill. If a bill receives second reading in the House, then the scope of the bill is set. A substantive amendment to the preamble of a bill referred to a committee after second reading is admissible only if rendered necessary by amendments made to the bill. In my opinion, the proposed motion to amend the preamble does not reflect the amendments made to Bill 152, therefore I rule this motion out of order.

Next is NDP motion number 42A. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that the first paragraph of the preamble to the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“Preamble

“Recognizing that the reduction of poverty supports the social, economic and cultural development of Ontario, the government of Ontario published on December 4, 2008 Breaking the Cycle—Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, a comprehensive long-term strategy to reduce poverty. The government’s poverty reduction strategy is guided by the vision of a poverty-free province where every person is entitled to an equal opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario, and builds on the foundations of Ontario’s education system, the Ontario child benefit program and such other public institutions essential to the building of an equitable and healthy Ontario.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): That is also out of order. The explanation is the same as motion number 42.

We’ll move to NDP motion number 43. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I don’t want to be difficult, but can you tell me what has not been passed that is in this preamble, what’s not been passed today?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Counsel will explain.

Ms. Catherine Macnaughton: The rule on amending preambles after second reading is that you can’t do it at all unless there has been such an amendment made to the act that you have to amend the preamble or it would be out of whack with the amended act. So it’s not that there’s anything in your preamble that conflicts with the act, it’s that you can’t amend the preamble unless it’s absolutely necessary. It’s the same rule as for changing long titles: You can’t change the long title unless you’ve done something in the act that would require that you have to because it doesn’t line up with the bill.

Mr. Michael Prue: All right, so it is literally impossible to move these motions, save and except had we changed the act in such a huge way—that’s the only chance. Otherwise never, ever attempt to change a preamble.

Ms. Catherine Macnaughton: That’s the rule. And don’t try to add a preamble after second reading. After first reading, you have more latitude because the scope of the bill has not been voted on. So if the minister had referred the bill to committee after first reading, it’s much wider for what you can do.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Motion 43, Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: It’s going to be exactly the same, because now, given the explanation, 43, 44 and 45 would all fall under that, although I still think that they would be good additions.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): So would you like to withdraw 43, 44—

Mr. Michael Prue: No, I think it’s just as fast for me to read them in and have you rule on them.

I move that the second paragraph of the preamble to the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“A principal goal of the government’s strategy published on December 4, 2008 is to achieve a 25% reduction in the number of Ontario children living in poverty within five years and a 50% reduction in the number of Ontario children living in poverty within 10 years.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): For the same reasons, this is out of order.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): NDP motion 44.

Mr. Michael Prue: I move that the third paragraph of the preamble to the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“The initial focus of the government’s strategy is on breaking cycles of poverty by improving economic, learning and developmental opportunities for children and families across Ontario.

“A continuing objective of the government strategy is to reduce levels and depths of poverty for all adults across Ontario.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): That’s out of order as well, for the same reasons.

Mr. Michael Prue: And 45 I would withdraw in favour of 45A. It’s just a slight wording change.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: I’m moving 45A. So I’ll withdraw 45 in favour of 45A, which reads as follows:

I move that clauses (b) and (c) of the last paragraph of the preamble to the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“(b) to measuring the success of the strategy by setting a target at least every five years and assessing indicators of poverty reduction based on disaggregated data collected on the basis of race, gender, disability, aboriginal status, family status, immigration status and on such other basis as is reflective of the disproportionate levels of poverty experienced by different groups in Ontario; and

“(c) to reporting annually on the success of the strategy broken out on a constituency and community disaggregated basis as described in clause (a).”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): It’s out of order, based on the same reasons.

Shall the preamble carry? Carried.

Shall the title of the bill carry? Carried.

Shall Bill 152, as amended, carry? Carried.

Shall I report the bill, as amended, to the House? Carried.

Thank you very much, committee members. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Just before we adjourn, I’d like to thank all my colleagues on the standing committee for their thoughtful input. I think we all genuinely worked to make sure that this bill was the best it possibly could be. I’d also like to thank the staff of the standing committee for their involvement and Hansard.

I’d like to thank Tatum Wilson and Kevin Spafford of the ministry, policy advisers to Minister Matthews, for their work on the whole poverty reduction; Doug Ewart and Muriel Deschênes, legal counsel, for their involvement as well and their advice; and my own EA, James Berry, who has helped me to carry this as the PA. Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Vic Dhillon): Thank you. This committee is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1559.

CONTENTS

Monday 27 April 2009

Poverty Reduction Act, 2009, Bill 152, Ms. Matthews / Loi de 2009 sur la réduction de la pauvreté, projet de loi 152, M^{me} Matthews SP-675

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Chair / Président

Mr. Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord L)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest L)

Ms. Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke–Lakeshore L)

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls L)

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest L)

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park ND)

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Oak Ridges–Markham L)

Mr. Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord L)

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe L)

Mr. Peter Shurman (Thornhill PC)

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est L)

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell L)

Mr. Reza Moridi (Richmond Hill L)

Mrs. Julia Munro (York–Simcoe PC)

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York ND)

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex L)

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Katch Koch

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Catherine Macnaughton, legislative counsel