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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, November 24, 2016**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** Good afternoon. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on February 25, the committee will resume its study on family reunification.

Once again, to conclude our study, we have officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. We have Mr. Robert Orr, assistant deputy minister for operations. Welcome back. We also have Mr. Armstrong, director general, centralized network, and Mr. Cashaback, director of social immigration policy and programs. Welcome, gentlemen.

You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Robert Orr (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before this committee as you continue this family reunification study.

You will recall that the minister appeared before this committee last month at the beginning of the process. At that time, he provided you with a broad overview of our family reunification program and some of the recent developments in our policies and practices as they relate to the program.

The minister pointed out that although economic immigration programs are responsible for the majority of newcomers who are welcomed to this country, the long-standing goal of reuniting families has been an important part of the history of Canada's immigration system, and it remains fundamental to that system.

He also identified, among other things, three areas allowing us to move forward to reduce processing times. They are increased levels space, increased funding, and greater efficiencies.

[Translation]

We know that family reunification helps immigrants to build successful lives in Canada, and that when families are able to reunite and stay together, their integration into our country, their economic outcome, and their ability to contribute to their communities, and to the broader Canadian society, greatly improve.

For example, sponsored spouses and partners do relatively well in the Canadian job market. Many of them report incomes and earnings that compare favourably to those of spouses and partners of immigrants chosen to come to Canada for their skills.

[English]

As well, the presence of parents and grandparents can improve economic outcomes for entire immigrant families.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada believes that unified families can help manage the task of child care more efficiently and as a result individual family members can more easily meet their work or academic obligations. This in turn can improve their chances of economic success in this country. In that sense, when Canadian citizens and permanent residents sponsor family members to join them in Canada, it not only benefits the members of those families, but also it contributes to our country's social, cultural, and economic development.

As we foster an increasingly diverse society, with more and more Canadians with spouses from abroad or with families that began abroad, we must ensure that our immigration system serves our country and Canadian families.

[Translation]

To that end, the department is particularly focused on reuniting close family members, who, in many cases, are kept apart by processing times that can be shortened.

[English]

As you know, Mr. Chair, we have announced that we are planning for about 80,000 admissions in the family class in 2016, including about 60,000 spouses, partners, and children, and 20,000 parents and grandparents. This represents an increase of about 12,000 family class admissions from the 2015 levels plan.

One of the reasons we are increasing admissions of sponsored family members is to help reduce inventories and processing times that keep families separated for extended periods of time. We're admitting more family class applicants, and we expect fewer delays related to levels space, which in turn will allow faster processing times for family sponsorships.

• (1535)

[Translation]

In the case of the parent and grandparent program, we have formally increased the number of entry applications that will be accepted annually. Beginning this year, the number of applications accepted for intake is 10,000, doubling the previous cap of 5,000 applications. We have also continued efforts to reduce the backlog inventory in this program.

[English]

We estimate that the parents and grandparents inventory will be reduced to 46,000 by the end of 2016, which is down from a peak of more than 165,000 in 2011.

To continually improve efficiency, we are learning from our experience in dealing with a huge growth in the temporary resident program. We have had success in this program by a combination of innovative measures and some permanent additional funding.

[Translation]

In order to make continued progress in that area, we are transferring the lessons learned from handling great increases in our volume of temporary resident applications, and from dealing more quickly with the processing of family class applications. The department is also working on other initiatives that will help unite families more quickly.

[English]

As the minister announced recently, we will be providing more opportunities for applicants who have Canadian siblings by giving additional points under the express entry system.

We are proposing to restore the maximum age for dependent children to under 22, from under 19, allowing more Canadians and permanent residents to bring their children to Canada. The proposed change was pre-published in the *Canada Gazette* last month.

[Translation]

We are also examining the current conditional permanent residence measure applied to some sponsored spouses and partners entering Canada.

[English]

The government is proposing to remove the conditional permanent residence requirement. This proposed change has also been pre-published in the *Canada Gazette*. Removing the condition is in line with the government's commitment to reunite families and make it easier for immigrants to build successful lives in Canada.

Mr. Chair, thank you once again for the opportunity to speak to the committee on this important topic. Again, I can assure you that family reunification is a key priority for the department.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Orr.

Ms. Zahid, you have seven minutes.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thanks to all of you for coming today, as we approach the end of the study on family reunification.

You mentioned in your comments that the inventory for parents and grandparents will be brought to 46,000 by the end of 2016. How much more time do you think it will take to clear that backlog and what will be the impact of lifting the cap on applications once the backlog is exhausted?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** There are two questions there, Mr. Chair.

On the first one regarding the prediction, it's a little bit hard to tell, but with current levels space, we anticipate that we will continue to make significant inroads in 2017 and continue on into 2018. What we are seeing though is, as we get rid of the old cases and process those through to completion, the processing times will drop significantly in the coming years. We are anticipating a major drop in processing times in the next little while.

The impact of lifting the cap would be significant because it's all tied to levels space, and if we do not have the levels space, that means the inventory would start growing again. It's a policy choice there, but if we are to lift the cap, to keep up to date we would need considerably more space within levels to keep pace.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** You mentioned that we would have 46,000 in the inventory by the end of December. Which year's applications are you dealing with right now?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** We have already started to deal with—mostly they are from 2014, but we have also started some 2015 applications in that. In fact, there are even some from 2016.

We start them all off at the same point. It's a matter of getting enough applications into progress so that we're able to finalize, but we start them in chronological order, first-come, first-served basically, but various applications can take much longer than others to proceed, so the end result is not the same, but we do start them off on a first-come, first-served basis.

• (1540)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** All the applications that you received before 2014 are done, or are there some pending ones still?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** They are not yet complete, but they are all in process.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Okay.

What would be the impact of moving the requirement for a medical to the end of the application process to ensure that medicals don't expire before the application process is completed? We heard that many families had to go through the medical process a few times in the whole process.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, we're making very real efforts to address that one, because it's not something that is beneficial for anyone concerned. Because of a new medical process and electronic medical processing, we're able to process them much faster, which means we don't require them at the beginning of the application. We're now going to be able to ask for the medicals at the appropriate time, so we will significantly reduce those occasions where individuals have to do them twice.

That will be applied to the spousal category, in particular, but it's also for parents and grandparents.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** I hope you understand that many families have four or five people, with the children, and the medicals can be very expensive and time-consuming.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** We're very conscious of that. There is serious work being done to prevent that sort of thing from happening.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** During the course of our study, we heard from many witnesses that the traditional definition of a nuclear family, one with two parents and their children, is not relevant in much of the world, including many of the countries from which we are drawing immigrants. In some cultures, family often included siblings, parents, and grandparents living under the same roof. Has the department studied the implications of broadening the definition of family when it comes to our immigration system and who can be included as a family member on the initial immigration application?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, I will turn to my policy colleague, but in the first instance, it is important to recognize that there is the proposal to move forward both in terms of siblings within the express entry program, which is broadening that aspect of family, and then also within the family class itself of raising the age of dependency from under 19 to under 22. There already is an expansion of who is included within "family".

I ask for further explanation, though.

**Mr. David Cashaback (Director, Social Immigration Policy and Programs, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** One thing I'll add is we have some experience to draw on in terms of our previous programs. Between 1988 and 1993, we did have an extended family program looking at that broader definition, which resulted in a much larger number of applications and subsequent backlogs. It took us up to a decade to clear a lot of that out. There is, of course, experience with that but also with managing the impacts.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** By when do you think the points will be added to the siblings for the express entry? Is this in process?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I can't give you a precise timing on that, but it's in the works and, as you know, it was one of the mandate commitments.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Right now we understand that children not included in the original immigration applications cannot be sponsored at a future date. This is even if the applicant was not aware of the child or did not intend to hide the child or misrepresent that on the application. Several witnesses raised cases where this rule caused hardships and unfairness. If given the flexibility, do you believe your officials would be able to determine between cases of fraudulent misrepresentation and innocent mistakes?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** The excluded family member clause is very much intended to prevent people who are not declared being sponsored at a later stage. It's to encourage full disclosure at the time of application and very much to help to prevent fraud, to protect the health, safety, and security of Canadians, and so on.

For those cases that are exceptional, there is the humanitarian and compassionate application process, which is available to those individuals. That is a safety valve, if you like, for those sorts of exceptional circumstances.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Saroya, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC):** Mr. Orr, what I'm looking at here is in 2011, the parents and grandparents numbered 165,000 applications. They will be reduced by 46,000 at the end of this year. Do we still have an inventory of 119,000 applications?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** No, the inventory at the end of 2016 will be the 46,000, so we have brought it down by the difference.

• (1545)

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Good. Some of the witnesses brought to our attention that in different areas, for example, on the east coast, expenses are much less than in Toronto, and for sponsoring, the necessary income required should be different for Toronto versus the east coast because it is much cheaper to live on the east coast in comparison.

Is there any rationale that we are applying to the standard income requirement for family sponsorship in the future?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** The basis for the minimum necessary income is very much based on work done by Statistics Canada. We take their lead on this for what the cost of living is, and how it should be applied to the family class.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** There is a difference between the east coast and other parts of the country. For example, the rent and grocery costs in many cases are much cheaper. Would the department be looking into that sort of thing?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** The methodology does vary somewhat in terms of whether someone is in a large urban area, which tends to be more expensive than in a smaller community. These sorts of things are taken into consideration in the work done by Statistics Canada. It really is the methodology of Statistics Canada that we follow.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Are there any advantages or disadvantages that would be applied for this sort of thing for the future? What I'm getting at is somebody was here from New Brunswick and was very insistent and protested that it should be applied differently there compared to Toronto.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, our view at this time is that the current framework very much is presented in a clear and transparent manner. It is very objective in the way it is applied, and there is no consideration at this time of moving from that.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** We have heard from senior IRCC officials posted abroad that there are various cultural training opportunities for immigration officers. However, witnesses have stated that more cultural sensitivity is required, especially in relation to assessing the genuineness of relationships.

What is the IRCC cultural training policy? Is there any special or standard policies we are applying to that?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** No. There are a couple of things here. Certainly for the Canadian officers who go abroad to a particular office, it is their obligation to become very familiar with the local circumstances. In some places the training is very structured. The most obvious example of that is in Delhi where they have the so-called Delhi academy. The officers go through quite an extensive training period, which is regularly refreshed to keep people up to date.

Another important aspect of this is the fact that we have so many locally engaged officers and staff at missions abroad who are absolutely immersed in the local culture. One of the reasons we have them is they are able to interpret the local culture for us, so we are very conscious of the local culture and are guided by that.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Mr. Orr, at every single event all of us go to, we get stopped by this sort of thing. I don't want to talk about special cases, but I will give an example for this question. There was a family from Gujarat, and I'm assuming the application is in New Delhi. It's the same story. It's an arranged marriage. They are stressed. It's a genuine marriage. They are waiting for them. They bought a house for them. The groom and bride live separately.

Is there any way there could be some special training for the officers to see if a marriage is genuine or not? Is there any special training program available for that?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** As I said, particularly in India the training is very sophisticated in terms of local culture, and we do have a large number of locally engaged officers who are Indian helping us to assess these applications. Certainly, there is a great deal of cultural sensitivity and awareness of what the local cultural practices are.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Some of the categories for immigration... We still keep taking applications, for example, for live-in caregivers, parents and grandparents. How does that work when it comes to the backlog? Is it first-come, first-served? Do they go to the back? How does that work?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Generally it is first-come, first-served within the various categories, but we deal with each category in a slightly different way. Mostly it is dictated by the levels space that is available in any given year for that particular category.

• (1550)

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** During his appearance before this committee, lawyer Richard Kurland suggested that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada should copy the Canada Revenue Agency by having clients create a single online profile with all of the required information which could be used as a base for any type of subsequent application for the department.

What is your opinion of this recommendation, please?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I think that in many ways it's an appropriate idea. In fact, we are moving in that direction to try to get a single identifier that can follow people right through the entire continuum.

It's a slow process, or slower than we would like sometimes, to get everything online, but we're certainly moving strongly in that direction. We now have e-applications for all temporary resident lines, and express entry is entirely by electronic submission, so we're very much moving in that direction.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, for seven minutes, please.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you to the officials.

First of all, I have a quick question for clarification. In your presentation you stated that you are expecting the grandparents and parents inventory to be reduced to 46,000 by the end of 2016. Is that completed or in process?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** That would be completed.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** So, approval granted then?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** That's correct.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** What is the average processing time when you receive an application?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** It varies, and sometimes it varies because of what we are requiring. Sometimes, for instance, if we're asking for police certificates, in certain countries it's a very slow process to get a police certificate, which can slow things down for the applicant. Sometimes it's very quick, and they can get it in rapidly.

Perhaps I could—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** What's the average number?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Perhaps I could turn to Mr. Armstrong.

**Mr. Paul Armstrong (Director General, Centralized Network, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Mr. Chairman, the average time which a case takes to be processed depends on a number of factors. One, it depends on the levels space. The government sets the levels space in a particular category every year, and then the department processes cases in accordance with that. It would also depend on client compliance.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Sorry, I'm just going to pause here.

On the question around levels space, given that the number of applications has increased from 5,000 to 10,000, and that would theoretically correspond with the levels space, as well, can you break down for me the number of applications from the country of origin for the levels space that's allotted based on those 10,000 applications?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** It's not done in that manner. We would get a levels space for the entire category regardless of from where those applications are. We would start processing those on a first-come, first-served basis regardless—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Is it all on a first-come, first-served basis?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Is that irrespective of country of origin?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** That's correct.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I want to get into this important topic. You mentioned that more and more you're using new technology online and so on, and the express entry system would be one of them.

Something has been brought to my attention with respect to the express entry system. People are contacting me saying that they've logged into their profile to update their Canadian education records to get the additional points since the new changes to the express entry, but many are having problems trying to get the updated information transmitted. Hence, the updated but not submitted message appears on their profile. They have contacted IRCC to try and get a response, and they're just stuck in limbo. I'm getting a whole host of emails from people with this problem.

Can you advise? Is IRCC looking into this to fix this problem?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I became aware of it this afternoon, in fact, just before I walked over.

•(1555)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes, I posted it on Twitter to the minister.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I know our IT people are very much looking into it. I do not know what the situation is, so I can't give you any further information. However, I assure you when there's any situation like that, we take it very seriously and act as quickly as we can.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Subsequent to the meeting, can you be in direct contact with my office on how this problem is being fixed? Some people's applications are pending. They're obviously very interested about it, because it has huge implications for them. I would appreciate it if I could get your assistance in the office, too.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** For sure.

Mr. Chair, there will be advisories on the website as well about what is available. If there are issues, we let people know, and take that into consideration when we're considering applications.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Related to this there is another technical issue. It's been brought to my attention there's conflicting information on the website.

I have a situation where a constituent has made an application. In one part of the government's official website, it says that a criminal record check or a police record is only required if she's been outside of the country, and in her instance the United States, for six months consecutively. In another part of the government's website, it indicates no consecutive requirement. When she made the application, she did not submit her police record check, because she did not think that she required it because she was not out of the country for more than six months consecutively. Since then, the application has been processed and has been rejected. She was not notified that she was missing a document, and so she's now had her application turned down. I have written a letter to the minister and brought it to his attention.

I'm appealing to the government and the minister to allow for her application to stand, given there was conflicting information on the government's website. At the time when she brought it to my attention, I went on the government website myself and looked, and found the two conflicting pieces of information related to that.

That's not particularly helpful with applicants. I would like to have a response on that issue.

Related to situations like that, where you have wrong information provided by the government on the government's official website, what happens to those applications, and where do people turn to get help?

Thank you.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Certainly we make every effort to try to avoid that situation. It's a very complicated, very large website. Clearly, if there is an issue we need to address on that particular point, we will. If that is the issue, I don't think we are going to be penalizing any applicants because of our mistake, and that would very much be taken into consideration. I cannot speak about a specific case, obviously.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes. I've written a letter to the minister about that specific case. I'd be happy to pass it along to you as well to take a look at. I think you're right—

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:**—that in those situations it's blatantly unfair for the applicant, given that it's not their fault. The individual immediately made another application, but because it's a points system, there's no telling whether or not she'll even get up in the line, so the anxiety she's experiencing is understandable.

I appreciate your effort with respect to that, and I'll follow up and send that letter to you directly as well.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Dzerowicz, you're next.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Thank you so much for your presentation, for coming back. I appreciate it.

One of the many things we bandied about in committee, asking questions of the various people who came to present to us, was we focused a little on the 10,000 number. We asked if 10,000 is the right number, or is 20,000 the right number, or what would the right number be?

It made me think a little about the factors that lead to the decision on the family class number. Is it that we look at the capacity of organizations within Canada, the number of express entry people we allow in, and so consequently will a percentage of that be family class? Can you help me understand the factors that lead us to that particular number?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Largely this goes back to how we assign levels for the given year, and therefore as the minister presents the levels for the coming year, the global number each fall. Within that there are also numbers for the various categories, and so it's always a balancing act, quite frankly, among the various categories to try to get the right number.

Essentially, that's how it comes about. There's no scientific formula to it. It's trying to balance the needs of the country and the emphasis the government wants to place on a particular category.

•(1600)

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** The reason I'm a little stuck on it, and your presentation today alludes to it as well, is we see—and we've heard this many times—that those who come through express entry settle much more quickly if they have their families with them. They contribute to the economy more quickly.

I kept thinking that if we're increasing our express entry, we might also want to increase the space for our family class. Are any of those types of discussions going on? I'm trying to get a handle on family reunification and the numbers.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** There are a couple of points there. First of all, as we've seen the levels go up, we've certainly seen the numbers for family class go up significantly as well. We're probably at the highest number for family class that we've been at for a very long time.

It might also be worth thinking that 55% of those who come in through the economic program are spouses and dependent children.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** That's helpful.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** It's a very significant portion: 93,000 out of 170,000 were spouses and dependent children, but counted under the economic category.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you. That's helpful.

The other thing that consumed me a little was data. There's so much different data out there, so I would love to get a sense about what data we collect. Do we collect data on the average age of the parents and grandparents who come? How many of them work? How many are retired? How many use our health care system? After a certain period of time, how many people go on social assistance? What are the different cultures?

I feel it's so hard to make decisions when you're not basing them on evidence and data.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** A huge amount of work is done to look at the evidence of who has come to Canada. We have a very robust research and evaluation department that does a great deal of work in this area. They would be able to respond to a lot of those questions, such as how many are seeking social assistance. A great deal of rich data has been brought together through that group.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** I'd love to get even a high-level list of the data we collect. The reason I ask is, again, when I get back to the numbers of 10,000 or 20,000, I often think, if we can prove there's not a huge economic impact or there's not a huge impact on a lot of our institutions, I often wonder why we couldn't argue that we might want a few more parents and grandparents, particularly since we believe they might contribute to settling their families more quickly, providing support around child care, that kind of thing.

It's hard, in the absence of data, to make some intelligent recommendations, so I'd be grateful if you could forward that to us. I don't need every piece of data, but if you could give us the high-level bits of data that we do collect, that would be really helpful.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, I think we could get back to you certainly with some data which might be helpful to you and an overview of some of the material that we do collect.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cashaback.

**Mr. David Cashaback:** I would just add that in addition to the data that we collect on applicants—I think we know the average age and that kind of thing—the challenge that we face in the 2014 program evaluation goes a bit deeper in terms of trying to cross some of the outcomes: economic outcomes, employment incidence, average wage. But also a lot of those qualitative social benefits are things that we were able to do internally through this research and evaluation group Mr. Orr references, and we did a survey in order to get to a lot of the outcomes that we're talking about in terms of helping with child care and the like.

It's an aggregate. We don't necessarily collect all of it, but we can cross and use Statistics Canada and other sources to do a composite picture of what this clientele looks like.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** I'm looking for whatever data you are able to give me that gives me a sense of what data we may want to start collecting or start focusing on. I'll leave it at that.

My next question has to do with another thing we hear a lot. I know there are people in my riding who are already trying to line up for January 1 to put in their applications, and there are only so many spaces. My understanding is that there are 10,000 spaces within a very short period of time, and after the 10,000 applications are received—or I don't know how many applications are received—basically there's a cut-off. I wonder whether or not there's a better way for us to go about this process and whether that has actually been explored. I don't know whether we accept applications for a full month, and then throw everybody into a big lottery and then basically pick.

It just seems really crazy that I have to team up constituents to figure out strategically how they're going to get their applications in. That seems like a crazy process. Has there been any thinking around that?

•(1605)

**Mr. Robert Orr:** There's considerable thought about how best to manage that. You're absolutely right. There are some real difficulties with the current process. It's hard to come up with one that is going to improve things, but we are continually looking at that.

We haven't announced exactly how it's going to work for this coming January, so we will hopefully be making an announcement about that shortly.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Yes, and change it. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Rempel, you have five minutes, please.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** I'll start with some testimony that we heard from the Canadian Bar Association. We heard from them that family class immigration should not be increased to the detriment of economic or humanitarian class, rather that overall levels should be increased.

Given that testimony, and some others we heard to that effect, could you give the committee a sense of how many staff it takes to process 10,000 cases, and if the department were going to start processing 50,000 new cases a year, how many new staff that would require?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, I don't have that information at hand. It would take quite bit of analysis to determine exactly how we would manage that, so I can't give you that answer immediately.

**The Chair:** Could you provide that to the committee, sir?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** It's a considerable amount of work, but yes, we would be able to come back to you on that.



**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** We'll be in the process soon, I'm sure, of wrapping up this study, so that would be very helpful. If the committee is going to look at increases in this, obviously there's a cost in resourcing implications to your department. I think we'd be loath to make that recommendation. Right now, would you be able to say that increasing to levels that are much higher than now would take an increase in resources?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Unquestionably.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay, great. That information would be very helpful.

To my colleague's point about data, that was also a concern for me. It seems there's a lot of anecdotal information and qualitative information on this program, and we heard that there wasn't a lot of quantitative, repeating data on the economic impact of parent and grandparent sponsored immigration.

For example, on the economic impact of these migrants coming in and providing services such as child care, do you track data on this at all right now, and if you don't, is this something that you're looking at generating or tracking, in terms of being able to validate some of the testimony that's coming out?

**Mr. David Cashback:** Some of the data that we do track is linked to a lot of the Statistics Canada longitudinal income database. In terms of their performance in the labour market, and employment incidence, and average earnings, that's something we do have access to and can track back. Social assistance usage is something that we have tracked and have reported on, but the challenge has been, as you mentioned, getting into that more qualitative thing.

That's where our 2014 evaluation has been a very useful tool, and I'd say, in comparison to a lot of our partners, we have a lot more on that side of the story to tell, because of the survey and that methodology.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Great.

We also had some testimony saying that witnesses would like to see paragraph 117(19)(d) of IRPA repealed. This is the section that excludes a person if the sponsor previously made an application for permanent residence and became a permanent resident, and at the time of application, the foreign national was a non-accompanying family member of the sponsor and was not examined.

The complaint that came up in testimony was that if a man immigrates to Canada without knowing that a woman has given birth to his child, that child is not his family member and therefore cannot be sponsored.

Can you speak to any negative unintended consequences that could result from repealing this section, and maybe provide the committee with your understanding of the intent of that section of IRPA?

I know that's a little unfair. If it's not conducive right now, maybe you could provide that to us prior to our wrapping up the study.

•(1610)

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Sure.

Well, perhaps I can just start. It was introduced in 2002, to ensure that individuals who fail to declare family members for whatever

reason would not be able to do so at a later date. I think one of the main issues around this is that it is seen as a significant dissuasive factor for fraud.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Good, yes.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I think it is seen that if it were to be repealed, there might be an increase in fraud in this area.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** We also heard a lot of testimony and recommendations around work permits for live-in caregivers, specifically changing the work permits to open work permits for caregivers so they can switch employers.

Can you speak to that in terms of the department's viewpoint, including similar sorts of lines of questioning? Are there unintended consequences should that happen? What concerns would the department have in terms of processing?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I'm not sure we're in a position to respond to that.

We can talk about the process and how that works, but in terms of the unintended consequences, I'm not sure we're in a position to respond to that.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Why not?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I'm not sure we have the information at hand to be able to do that.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay.

We heard that repeatedly in the testimony, so that would be something else we'd be interested in hearing from the department, just again in terms of capacity.

**The Chair:** Twenty seconds.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I'll stop with that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Tabbara, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** On several occasions, there have been constituents of mine who have applied to sponsor their spouses. They've informed me that their applications are complete, including medical, criminal, and security checks, and they've been in the queue for an officer review for the past few months.

Could you tell me what else may be taking so long for their application to be processed?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Usually in those circumstances, if everything of that nature is complete, it's purely the volume. It's getting time when an officer is able to get to that particular application.

Obviously, as well, we have to stay within the levels. We're not going to be issuing more visas in a particular year than the target, the levels space, allows.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Could you explain how the income threshold for an application to sponsor a parent or grandparent is calculated?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, it goes back to some of the comments we were talking about with Statistics Canada. We work very closely with them, and they establish the minimum income levels.

We're going to be looking at the individual's income for the previous three years to ensure financial stability over that period. It's basically a formulaic process provided to us by Statistics Canada.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** I want to again go back to this question, which was already raised by Ms. Dzerowicz, about the applications for parents and grandparents, for parent sponsorships, starting in 2017. We've increased it to 10,000.

There have been constituents of mine who have already applied. They applied on the exact date with their application fully done, but their parents didn't get accepted. What would you recommend that I tell them this second time? Should they follow the same procedure as they did last year?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I think it's going to be following the procedures, as we lay them out in the coming weeks. It is unfortunate, but there's a far greater demand than there are spaces. We have to find a means of taking the 10,000. We can't go beyond that number, and unfortunately, there are some people who are left out in that.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Thank you.

That's my question.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Tilson, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Orr, Ms. Rempel asked for some information about caregivers. A number of witnesses have said they'd like the applications for parents and grandparents to be raised to 20,000 or 30,000, and some even said to take the cap off completely. Obviously, we're interested in the effect of that. You indicated that it would take some time for you to get that information.

The problem we have, Mr. Orr, is that this is the last meeting, and now the analysts are preparing a report. For both those questions that Ms. Rempel asked, the one about caregivers and the one about what it would take to make these increases, these are very important questions. They're probably part of the core of the whole hearing.

I understand that Christmas is coming, and you're thinking, "Why are they asking us to do this now?"

Our problem is, we're going to do a report soon. My question is, when can you get this information to us?

•(1615)

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, perhaps I could give you just a few factoids that might be helpful.

For instance, we did a survey that indicated 85% of parents and grandparents provide child care often or sometimes in a family. On average, the economic outcomes of parents and grandparents are below that of all immigrants, but that's not unexpected. Parents and grandparents have an average age of about 65 at the time of admission to Canada.

For immigrants who were admitted between 2003 and 2013, 49% of parents and grandparents report employment earnings one year after arriving in Canada, compared to 66% of all immigrants. The percentage of parents and grandparents who report employment earnings decreases over the first eight years in Canada, while the percentage of all immigrants reporting employment earnings remains

stable. We found that 8% of parents and grandparents report self-employment earnings one year after arriving, compared to 9% of all immigrants, so that's fairly close. The proportion of parents and grandparents reporting self-employment earnings increases to 13% eight years after arriving in Canada, compared to 15% of all immigrants.

**Mr. David Tilson:** I think, Mr. Orr, I'm going to yield the floor for a second, as long as she doesn't take over a specific question.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** To clarify Mr. Tilson's question, when can you have the data for us on, and let's give specific parameters, how many additional resources, staff, and cost, etc. it would take to increase the number of spots by increments of 10,000?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, I'm not in a position to say exactly when we can get it to you, given the complexity of some of these questions. Nevertheless, we can certainly make every effort to do it as rapidly as we can.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Well, this is probably one of the main reasons we've asked you back, because people said to raise it by 10,000, or 20,000, or lift the cap. To do that, I'm sure there's an effect. Either you have to hire more staff, or you have to cut something. Someone said that might be an alternative, to cut other areas to do this.

We need advice to properly prepare our report.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, if we are to increase parents and grandparents significantly, and if it's not at the expense of another part of the program, then we have to consider that it's not just if we cut here, then we would give it there. There can be differences in complexity on how we deal with the different applications. It's not necessarily that we can take some from here and apply it exactly there.

**Mr. David Tilson:** We would have to cut something else.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Without new resources, yes, that would have to be the case.

**Mr. David Tilson:** The government budgeted \$25 million for processing time reductions for 2016, and \$15 million for each of the next three years. Does that allow you to hire more staff for these applications?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** That is primarily being used in the spousal and children category. Yes, it certainly does allow us to increase our staffing in those areas, among other activities that we're doing. Certainly, staffing is part of it.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Would it be able to resolve these suggested increases of about 10,000 to 20,000 or lifting the cap?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I'm sorry. I'm not sure—

**Mr. David Tilson:** Would it be able to resolve the issue of raising the number of applications to either 10,000 or 20,000 or, indeed, removing the cap?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** The majority of the money is being spent on spouses and children, and therefore, it has limited impact on the parents and grandparents.

**Mr. David Tilson:** How much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You don't, Mr. Tilson.

**Mr. David Tilson:** I don't have any.

Well, a Merry Christmas to you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Before we proceed to Ms. Kwan, just for clarification, Mr. Orr, you said you would get back to the committee in terms of the request from Ms. Rempel on information, but you can't give us a time by when you would provide that information.

By when could you provide the committee a date for that information? You obviously need to go back to consult in your department. Would it be a day that you would need to consult so as to provide us with a date? It does have an impact on the report we would then be issuing.

• (1620)

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I think it's fair to say we could probably do it by the beginning of the week and have information to you on what the timing is.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I'm just not in a position to say how complex or not it is.

**The Chair:** That's absolutely understandable. Thank you for that clarification.

Ms. Kwan, for three minutes, please.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I have a quick question, as we know that all of this is tied to immigration levels numbers. Right now as it stands, to reduce the existing backlog you have for parents and grandparents, what sort of immigration levels numbers do you need to accommodate that?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, as we've seen over the last few years, given levels space of approximately 20,000, numbers are coming down quite significantly.

Yes, if we had higher levels, then yes, we would be able to clear it faster, for sure. I haven't done the modelling to know exactly what that would be.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Can you do the modelling so we can get that information? Likewise, if we can get the modelling, if we were to increase the number of applications from 10,000 to 20,000 and then from 20,000 to 30,000, what would that look like in terms of the need for immigration levels numbers to change? If we could get that

modelling, I would really appreciate it. That would give us a sense of the lay of the land.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Just to be clear, is that with existing levels of approximately 300,000?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** No, with changes in the immigration levels numbers.

I have one other question. For live-in care workers or care workers now, the wait time, we've been told, is four and a half years on average by any standard, and this is reunification with children and families. By any standards, this is not reasonable. Can you tell us what the department needs in order to reduce those unreasonable wait times for families to be reunited, especially for care workers who are here to take care of our own families?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Again, there has been a significant increase in the numbers within the levels plan to allow us to reduce the inventory of that category.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** If it's tied to the levels plan, can we then also get the modelling on what you require from the levels plan to address this issue?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** We can try to put something together.

Yes, Mr. Chair.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Related to that, all things are related to resources as well. We just heard that the \$25-million injection in reducing backlogs is primarily being put toward spouses and children, but not parents and grandparents.

Again, on that question, what sort of resources would the department need for it to be reduced in terms of the wait times? What witnesses have said is reasonable is somewhere in the parameter of six months to a year.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** We would have to look at that. Doing some of that financial modelling is very complex, but yes, we will try to get back to you on that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** You were just putting on the record some of the data you have in terms of the contributions. Can you finish providing that information to us?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I think there was just one more point I wanted to make with regard to earnings. Parents and grandparents earned on average \$14,036 after one year in Canada, and \$19,982—just under \$20,000—after eight years in Canada. The equivalent measure for all immigrants is \$22,686 after one year of arrival, and \$35,317 after eight years.

**The Chair:** I'd like to thank the departmental officials for their appearance before the committee once again.

With that, we shall suspend to go in camera.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*





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