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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, February 8, 2017**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Wednesday, February 8, 2017

• (1635)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** Welcome back.

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 I welcome to the committee the deputy minister, Ms. Marta Morgan; the assistant deputy minister of operations, Mr. Robert Orr; the assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer, Mr. Daniel Mills; and the director general, centralized network, Mr. Paul Armstrong.

Ms. Morgan, I believe you have a five-minute opening statement.

**Ms. Marta Morgan (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be speaking before committee members again today.

We are committed to assisting the committee and its work on family reunification. I will make a few short remarks on the topic, following which my colleagues and I will be very pleased to answer any follow-up questions that committee members have on the information we have provided to you.

[Translation]

Although the majority of newcomer admissions to the country go through economic immigration programs, the goal of reuniting families has long been an important part of the history of Canada's immigration system and remains one of its fundamental aspects. Family reunification is a top priority for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

[English]

Many of the follow-up questions that committee members have had throughout your study on family reunification have been focused on processing times and wait times. I would like to discuss the elements that allow us to address these issues: level space, funding, and efficiency.

[Translation]

As you know, Mr. Chair, we have announced that we are expecting some 84,000 admissions under the family class.

[English]

That includes about 64,000 spouses, partners, and children, and 20,000 parents and grandparents.

[Translation]

That represents an increase of about 5% in family class admissions from the previous year's levels plan.

[English]

During these hearings, the committee has heard people express their concerns about lengthy processing times. 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.

Because we are admitting more family class applicants, we expect fewer delays related to level space, which will allow for faster processing times for family sponsorships.

We announced in December that we were cutting processing times for spousal sponsorships from an average of 18-26 months to 12 months, which will help to notably reduce the backlog of these cases.

[Translation]

In other words, most families awaiting a decision about their sponsorship application to plan their future together will receive a response no later than the end of December 2017.

[English]

More than 64,000 applicants will benefit from these changes in the first year alone. In the case of the parent and grandparent program, we have increased the number of entry applications that will be accepted annually. For this program, we have tried to strike the difficult balance between accepting new applications and working to reduce the backlog.

We put a cap on new applications to control growth in the backlog, but beginning last year, the number of applications accepted for intake is 10,000, doubling the previous cap of 5,000 applications, and because our admissions exceed the intake of new applicants, we are able to continue reducing the backlog of inventory in this program.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, in terms of funding, we are also using the \$25 million allocated in the 2016 budget by working to reduce processing times in the family class.

[English]

We are also working to improve the efficiency with which IRCC treats applications. We're doing so in part by learning from the experience of processing temporary resident applications, which includes those who wish to come to Canada as workers, students, and visitors.

We processed more than two million temporary resident applications and extensions in 2015, an almost 4% increase in one year and a 19% increase over three years. This was accomplished via a combination of innovative measures and some permanent innovative funding.

[Translation]

If we can transfer the lessons learned from our management of the significant increases in the volume of temporary residence applications and the expedited processing of family reunification claims, we will make steady progress in this regard.

[English]

Mr. Chair, my department is also working on other initiatives that will help unite families more quickly. For example, we will be providing more opportunities for applicants who have Canadian siblings by giving additional points under the express entry system, and we are raising the maximum age for dependent children from 19 to 22.

In support of the committee's questions on these issues, we've provided follow-up responses when the committee has requested them. I'm happy to have the opportunity to clarify any of these responses today, should committee members wish to ask about them.

IRCC appreciates the important work the committee carries out and its valuable contributions. We are committed to seeking better communications with the committee through appropriate channels as we move forward.

In closing, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee once again. I would be pleased to respond to any of your further questions today.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Morgan.

Mr. Ehsassi, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank the senior officials from CIC for appearing before this committee once again. Obviously, throughout the course of last year, when undertaking work, we have relied extensively on the assistance, input, and guidance that officials have provided to us.

As you know, our most recent study is focused on the issue of family reunification. Family reunification, I can tell you, is an issue that pulls on all our heartstrings. We have seen how lengthy the wait times and the processing times have been in the past. I appreciate full well that the department is keen on ensuring that those wait times are shortened.

I know that the previous minister was very keen on that. I know that the current minister is also seized with this issue and would like to see improvements to the system. Members of our committee, likewise, are preparing a study that we hope will assist in improving the family reunification process.

As we were preparing our study, it came to light that some of the information we had asked you to provide was not provided to us in the comprehensive, accurate, or timely fashion that would have allowed us to conclude our study in the time frame we had agreed to. That obviously can be very frustrating to members of this committee. It has been distracting to the committee, but I'm sure it has been distracting to your officials as well.

Given our concerns about that, I was wondering if one of the officials could kindly provide us with some background information as to what systems are in place to make sure that when parliamentary committees do ask for information, they will receive that information.

**The Chair:** Mr. Ehsassi, according to what the committee decided, this one-hour session will be dealing with the substance of undertakings and not the process. If you could, please get to the substance of the undertakings that you would like some additional information on.

• (1645)

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Absolutely.

One of the issues... Obviously this committee has asked the officials numerous questions, and we are grateful for the information that has been provided. Some of it, I presume, proved very time-consuming for your officials. That said, I was wondering if you could assist us in understanding how the department undertakes modelling exercises when it comes to questions that are put to you by the committee.

**The Chair:** Mr. Ehsassi, once again, we have dedicated this particular hour with the department officials to getting further information on the substance of the undertakings themselves. If you have questions specific to the actual undertakings, the topics of the substance, I'm sure the department officials would be happy to answer those.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Okay.

I actually don't have a list of the specific undertakings. I thought it was more procedural. I will not ask any questions. I will let another member go.

**The Chair:** We'll move on to Mr. Tilson.

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have two questions, and then Mr. Saroya will have some questions.

The common thread throughout—these are the transcripts of our hearings, and you see I have nice little tabs attached to them—is that almost all of the witnesses said, with respect to levels, that we're not dealing with parents and grandparents. We're not letting enough in. They said we should increase it to 10,000, 20,000, 30,000, or 50,000. They said to raise the cap.

I'm going to read only one, because I'm sure the chairman won't let me read any more. Ms. Zena Al Hamdan said:

Of the 310,000, only 10,000 being dedicated to parents and grandparents is really not sufficient for the numbers of, specifically, skilled workers who are admitted to Canada. If you count that each one of them will be bringing.... The cap should be at least doubled, because a lot of them will need to go back to the labour market with the help of their parents, to assist with the family unit.

Someone else said that the amount should be 30,000. Throughout the transcripts, as I said, it was 10,000, 20,000, lift the cap. That was the information we sought.

Mr. Orr did respond somewhat, and I have two responses. I don't know what the dates are that I received them. I'll just read the first paragraph:

With regards to the numbers of incremental resources it would take to process an additional 10,000 cases, the Department is estimating that 28 additional employees, based both overseas and in Canada, will be required. This will also result in additional travel and non-salary costs estimated at \$9,250,000.

The question is, what are the salary costs? What are the total costs?

I'm leaving things out because we're obviously pressed for time.

There was another response, as follows:

In order to reduce the current inventory of parents and grandparents applications, it's estimated an additional 10,000 admissions over the course of a year would significantly reduce the processing inventory, which stands at over 40,000 persons. Doing so would allow for an inventory of approximately 17,000 to 20,000 persons, or one year's work of intake.

At the end, the figure of \$43,600,000 was given, but that's just part of the cost.

For us to adequately prepare a report, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Orr, or whoever feels up to it, the purpose of the question was that I don't want to hear partial costs. I want to know the total cost.

You've explained in the past that it may be difficult, and I understand that. In particular, estimating the cost of lifting the cap may be really difficult, but surely to goodness you can give us an estimate as to what the costs were for these different levels so that we can properly comment in our report in response to these people who have asked for the different levels to be increased.

• (1650)

**Ms. Marta Morgan:** Mr. Chair, I'll just make a quick comment and then I'll turn it over to Daniel Mills, our chief financial officer, to answer the financial question.

Current levels for this year for parents and grandparents are now 20,000. I'd just like to note to the committee that over the last five years, considerable progress has been made in reducing the backlog, which was 167,000 as of 2011, and is now, as of December 2015, down to 50,000.

With that, by way of introduction, we do have the total cost for increasing levels by 10,000 in our package that was sent back to the committee, and I will let Daniel Mills explain that.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Can you give it to us for 30,000? That was the specific question that was asked—10,000, 20,000, 30,000. I realize that lifting the cap may be very difficult, but even those figures would give us....

I don't want partial costs, but total costs.

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Finance, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** When a department does cost modelling, it must consider several factors to determine the total cost of the initiative.

As the deputy minister mentioned, we have to check whether it is within or outside the immigration reference levels that have been approved by Parliament. Consideration should also be given to the average number of persons who are categorized and the fact that some persons fall into several classes. We also need to determine whether the processing will take place in Canada—

[English]

**Mr. David Tilson:** Mr. Mills, did you do that? Did you look at those things?

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** Yes, we've done those analyses. We have this information in the case of 10,000, 20,000 and 30,000 additional applications in the family class.

[English]

**Mr. David Tilson:** I'm still waiting for a total cost. I understand the problems, but you must be able to give us an approximate cost.

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** For 10,000 additional admission applications for parents and grandparents, the total cost is about \$45 million, which includes the costs of the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, as well as of our partners.

[English]

**Mr. David Tilson:** Do we just multiply it by 10 or five or...?

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** No. As I was about to say, with cost modelling, we also have to consider the department's capacity. In the processing of 20,000 or 30,000 additional applications, we need to consider the infrastructure and training of new employees. Given that the increase is considerable, we have to train employees, and so on.

[English]

**Mr. David Tilson:** Did you do that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** Yes, we have those figures.

[English]

**Mr. David Tilson:** What does 30,000 cost?

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** The cost of processing 30,000 additional applications varies between \$150 and \$160 million.

[English]

**Mr. David Tilson:** Okay.

I have one more. How much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds.

**Mr. David Tilson:** I have 10 seconds?

Just before the House rose, we were advised that for family reunification there would be a lottery system for parents and grandparents instead of the first-come, first-served system. Can you tell us a bit about that and why that came about? I have a feeling that some people are going to be upset with that.

**The Chair:** Give a very brief response, please.

**Mr. Robert Orr (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Mr. Chair, with parents and grandparents, essentially the demand for places exceeds the number of places that are available, even within the doubling of the cap to 10,000. We tried to come up with what we think is the fairest way to go about it, and thus we asked for expressions of interest to apply. We have received those. It is now closed.

We're now going through the process of all those expressions of interest we've received to make sure they're not duplicates and so on, and we're scrubbing the numbers on those. Then we will begin to invite up to 10,000 people to apply. Given the situation, we thought this was the fairest way to go about it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Kwan is next, please, for seven minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have three areas of questions.

First, just to tee off, on the \$45 million or \$46 million to increase the numbers for parents and grandparents to 10,000 in the modelling, does that modelling include also the contributions that those parents and grandparents would bring economically? That is to say, aside from the cost for you to process, what is the contribution back to our economy, be it by way of the parent being able to get out into the workforce or whatever the case may be? I think that's an important part to include in the modelling as well.

I want to move on to my other question related to the live-in care workers, which is the caregiver program, because there has been a shift related to that question. Ms. Snow actually responded on the question to committee members to say that particularly in Manila, the staff consistently meets their levels as they are determined by the department, so it speaks well to this to say that people are working hard and meeting those levels. When we got the response back to say what the wait times are, they are 17 months on average, and we're at 76 months for Manila; that is to say, it is 6.3 years in addition to the two years that they are required to work before they can even make an application. That's 8.3 years. By any stretch of the imagination, reuniting families in the timeframe of 8.3 years is not a good timeframe.

To that end, I'm really interested in understanding what the numbers are for the levels, the targets that are allocated for this stream. I don't know if I can get those numbers, because related to

that I got a response back when I tried to get the target numbers for all the different countries for parent and grandparent reunification, and that response said, "The department cannot release office-specific targets publicly." Then it cited the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act.

If we cannot get the information for this year because it's government operations, can I then get the numbers for last year? I want to get a sense of what those targets are, because that builds into the delays, and where the country of origin is in terms of those delays, which will give us a sense of the lay of the land.

Those are the three areas that I would love to get answers for. It sounds like an undertaking, Mr. Chair. I will preface this to say that if this is an undertaking for which I cannot get an answer at this meeting, even if I can't get it for the committee's report—and I don't want to impede the work of the report any further—I would still love to get the answer at some point just so I get a better understanding of the situation.

● (1655)

**Ms. Marta Morgan:** Mr. Chair, on the first question, we recognize the important contribution that parents and grandparents make to the well-being of families in Canada and their ability to participate in the economy.

However, when we do costing, which are fiscal costs, we don't include those benefits in the costing that we do. The costs that you have received are direct fiscal costs to the federal government.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Can I pause you for a minute?

Does anybody within the department undertake to get the costing in terms of the benefits, or is that outside of this department's realm?

**Ms. Marta Morgan:** We have evaluations of the benefits. However, we don't cost specifically, across any of our streams, the benefits of bringing in an immigrant. We evaluate how immigrants do when they get here, what their incomes are, and how they contribute to family life in other ways than income.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** On that valuation, then, it would be useful for us to know what those contributions are. Can you provide that information to us and quantify it in some way, and also to break down this \$45 million into the categories? You cite resettlement as part of that. How much goes into resettlement? In actuality, how many people do you project would get into the need for language training, for example? It would be very useful to get a sense of how that's broken down.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I might need a second to answer parts of the questions.

In fact, they're very much linked. The overall processing time now for live-in caregivers is approximately 48 months. That is why one of the decisions was made to maintain a high-level space this year of 20,000, which will allow us to work through these applications.

What you are going to be seeing is continued high average processing times for this year, in 2017, because we're still working through some very old applications. However, once we get into newer applications in 2018, I think you'll see a precipitous drop in processing times for the live-in caregiver program.

One of the reasons it's so difficult to give the mission targets and so on is that we very much work on a centralized process. A large number of these applications never go back to the missions; they're done through the centralized network. That is the reason that when you do see processing times in a particular mission—and Manila is a particular one for the live-in caregiver program—it looks worse than elsewhere, because they're often getting the most complicated cases, which do take longer. Their caseload is rather different from what's being done elsewhere, and that's the variation.

• (1700)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** On that issue, as I understand it, there are some 60,000 applications that are now on hold. That's the last number we were given. That has maybe been reduced now, to I think 48,000. I don't know if that is the correct number, and perhaps you can get back to us on it.

What is your projection, then, to clear that backlog, so then people have a sense of how much longer they have to wait until they can reunite with their families?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** We understand that.

At the moment, there are about 30,000 people in the backlog for the live-in caregiver program.

As I said, in 2018 we'll start to see a significant drop in average processing times. Indeed, new applications, which continue to come in right now, are being processed quite rapidly. If they come in as a complete application, we're processing very rapidly right now. That is the good news for that category, but it certainly remains at approximately six months.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I think that's great that you're able to process the new applications more quickly, but those outstanding applications are still waiting. The truth of the matter is that some of them have waited so long that their medicals and their criminal record checks have expired. They have to pay more money. Frankly, their children have aged out, and they have to make a reapplication. People are in such a situation that their families are breaking up as a result.

What I'm really interested in understanding is what levels of numbers you need in order to process these in a timely fashion. It is not acceptable. Surely we can understand that it is not acceptable.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We can have a brief response, and then we'll move on to Mr. Sarai.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** I will say, Mr. Chair, I think that the 20,000 makes a significant impact this year, and in 2018 we will start to see processing times that are significantly reduced.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Sarai, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I'll continue on with that, as I have a lot of concerns. I have constituents who are live-in caregivers and I am asked about this a lot.

I want to be clear. There is currently a backlog of approximately 30,000 live-in caregiver applications. If that's so, and you said the newer ones are being processed faster, does that mean it's not a first

in, first out, or are the new ones being accelerated and the older ones in the back of the line?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, I'll clarify, and then I'll turn to my colleague Mr. Armstrong to respond further.

No, there continues to be a first-in, first-out process. The issue is that we will ask for the applications, but then new ones coming in are often more complete, and thus we're able to proceed with them more quickly. Sometimes we don't have all the information we need on the older ones, which seems to take longer on those particular cases.

Mr. Armstrong may be able to assist.

**Mr. Paul Armstrong (Director General, Centralized Network, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Just following up on the ADM's answer, when we take the applications, we take the oldest applications first, but it then depends on client compliance. For example, on some of the applications there are issues with medical furtherances. Of the fewer than 10,000 applications, which include principal applicants, and then about 20,000 dependants overseas, sometimes there are issues. Sometimes the medical cases will have to be furthered, or sometimes there are issues with family relationships, so, for example, people will need an interview.

When we look at the overall processing time, we always operate as a department on the 80th percentile. What really drives down the processing times, as far as our clients are concerned, is the number of cases that are more complex. For example, as the ADM of operations indicated, the cases that we send to Manila are always the most complex cases, because we have a centralized model through which we apply risk triage. The cases that are straightforward we never send overseas, because we can process them more quickly. When you look at the stats from overseas in places like Manila or in other visa offices, you will always see the worst processing times, because if the case were straightforward, we wouldn't have sent it overseas.

• (1705)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Of the ones I have, maybe two might be a challenge, and the others fit in your 80% category. Unfortunately, they're all women, and most of them have children. Most of them have been separated from their spouses, as Ms. Kwan said, in some cases for eight years.

I want to know if they will be processed in the next six months, because I did ask this question week after week. What I'm talking about are those that are 40 months and above in processing times. Can we expect that the backlog will be done in six months? I probably gave false assurances last year, thinking they might be done by December; unfortunately they have not been.

That's something I need to know.

**Mr. Paul Armstrong:** Mr. Chair, when we look at the processing of the applications, we can see the cases that are still pending—because of medicals, or where there needs to be more information about the relationship—are a very real concern. When you look at the overall number that we have, we believe that we will begin to see significant progress in processing times by 2018. The reason is that we're trying desperately to clear up the old cases first, the cases, as you heard, Mr. Chair, where people need to have medicals because the cases have been furthered, meaning medical issues have arisen during the application process. By 2018, we firmly expect that we will see significant progress in the processing time because there's been such a significant level space given to the live-in caregiver category.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** I understand that, but I'm saying we have 12 months. Is it all just going to be at the end of December? Can we anticipate a big chunk being done in the next three months, another in the next three months, so there is light at the end of the tunnel for them? Otherwise, from an 8.3-year perspective, it's a 9.3-year perspective that we have to give them hope.

It can't be that everyone is waiting for medicals. There must be an ongoing process for those who have completed everything, done everything, and theirs need to be expedited.

I understand a lot of the backlog has been done, but I am particularly dealing with only those who are 40 to 45 months and above. I haven't seen any of them get it yet, although the department's been helpful in getting some of them visas for spouses to visit. However, I haven't seen any reduction at all in the 15 cases I

have in the last 12 months or in the first month of this year, so that's what I'm trying to note.

I understand the complexities in certain cases, but I'm talking about the 80% who have applications. When can we see results? That's what I'm trying to get at.

Please give just a brief answer, and then I have another question.

**Mr. Paul Armstrong:** Mr. Chairperson, we're constantly processing, and of course it's very advantageous for the department to process in a steady way as the year progresses. Certainly, as we're able to clear up those older cases, which is very much our desire, we do so, but if we can't clear them up, then we will process cases that are ready. Even though we use the first-in, first-out principle, if we have a case that's complete, ready, and compliant, we will move the case through. We always have the intention to process cases through the year and not to leave them to the end of the year. It's a constant effort to try to clear up old cases and to clear up new cases that are ready for finalization.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Armstrong, and thank you, Mr. Sarai.

I'd like to thank the department officials for appearing before the committee today. We will suspend for a couple of minutes to allow us to go in camera to deal with committee business.

Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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