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# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

EVIDENCE

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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey



# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number five of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing, wear non-medical masks when circulating in the room and maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided sanitizer at the room entrance. It is highly recommended that masks be worn at all times, including when seated.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting. I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will ensure interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. The "raise hand" feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or to alert the chair.

For members participating in the room, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as is normal by the proceedings and verifications officer. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, January 28, 2022, the committee will commence its study of service standards for employment insurance claims.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin our discussion with five minutes of opening remarks followed by questions.

From the Department of Employment and Social Development, we have Cliff Groen, senior assistant deputy minister; Mary Crescenzi, assistant deputy minister; Lori MacDonald, senior associate deputy minister; Elisha Ram, associate assistant deputy minister; and Peter Littlefield, chief information officer. I want to thank the witnesses for being able to appear on short notice.

We will start with Lori MacDonald, for five minutes, please. Following the opening statement, I will open the floor to questions.

Ms. MacDonald, you have the floor.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lori MacDonald (Senior Associate Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development and Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today.

At the outset, I will say that we recognize the difficulties that any delay in the payment of benefits can cause to claimants and their families. This has been a difficult time, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an impact on our communities, including economic impacts and job losses. Many Canadians rely on employment insurance to help get through these times, and time can be of the essence for them.

[English]

Despite an increase in EI claims over the pandemic, Service Canada processes the vast majority of claims efficiently and within the service standard. In the past year, Service Canada has exceeded the 80% service delivery target, with a rate of 88% processed within four weeks. The vast majority of the remaining 12% of files are completed within the following two weeks. Unfortunately, sometimes complex claims take more than six weeks.

This is typically Service Canada's busiest time of the year, due to the winter peak of EI claims. That, and an unfortunate recent surge in EI claims due to omicron, has caused some delays in the processing of EI applications. In fact, for the first four weeks of this year, EI claims were 35% higher than forecast. While the height of the peak period is starting to decline, some service delivery delays are expected to continue throughout the month of February.

To deal with the unprecedented volume of EI applications since the beginning of the pandemic, the government has invested an additional \$825 million to increase Service Canada's capacity. These investments have made a tremendous difference. Since September 2020, Service Canada has paid over 4.4 million beneficiaries a total of \$56 billion in EI benefits. Despite these record volumes, 88% of applicants have been paid within the four-week, or 28-day, service standard.

Furthermore, the capacity of the EI call centre has nearly tripled, from approximately 1,100 officers prior to the pandemic to nearly 3,000 officers by the end of March 2021. Our EI call centre officers are on track to answer more than seven million calls by March 31, 2022. Despite this high volume, there have been peaks where clients have experienced longer wait times. However, from April 1, 2021 to January 2022, the average wait time was 18.6 minutes.

[Translation]

That said, Mr. Chair, we are acutely aware that delays in processing applications can cause hardship to claimants and their families. We are prioritizing cases of urgent need, especially situations where claimants have no income. No claimant will lose benefits because of a processing delay.

[English]

We have reviewed and we will continue to actively review our internal workforce strategies to help us better meet the challenges of the influx of claims due to the pandemic, including both mobilizing thousands of staff across business lines to help with the delivery of EI and hiring new staff throughout this period. We are also pursuing additional ways to streamline claims processing. We have on-line resources to guide claimants through the process, and Service Canada has proactively reached out to the employer community to reinforce the importance of issuing records of employment in a timely manner.

Service Canada takes the integrity of its programs seriously, but the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that in a time of crisis, there is an increased risk of fraud. From the outset of the pandemic, Service Canada has been actively detecting and preventing fraud in its programs. This week, we are finalizing our rollout of enhanced resources in our call centre to help clients whose legitimate claims were delayed or interrupted because of identity theft.

We are also implementing measures to validate the identity of clients more quickly and get benefits to them sooner. To combat the fraudsters who cause financial and emotional harm to innocent Canadians, we are constantly enhancing and prioritizing the security of our benefit programs. In 2020, the government announced it would spend \$68.1 million over four years on departmental initiatives to protect the integrity of benefit programs. Further, we have more than 1,200 investigators in all regions across Canada dedicated to preventing, detecting and addressing fraud, error and abuse in the EI program. We are also significantly increasing the number of investigators dedicated to quickly resolving these cases.

In conclusion, Service Canada will continue to work hard every day to get Canadians their benefits in a timely manner.

I will be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

• (1110)

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

I will now open the floor for questions. For the first round of six minutes, we have Mrs. Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you very much.

First of all, thank you very much to the witnesses for coming here today for this important issue. In fact, my team felt that it was very important. There are certainly Canadians across the country who are suffering significantly as a result of this problem—not only on one account, but on two accounts, the first one being that they were victims of fraud. I'm certain that we've all known about this problem. It has existed within our country for some time, and this is another example of it. Second, unfortunately, due to the delays, some of these accounts were frozen, so these individuals, in addition to not having received their money, couldn't even hope for it in a reasonable time frame.

For my team, it was very important to get the two ministers here, but for some reason the Liberals, supported by the NDP members—who claim they care very much about their constituents and about the highest level of accountability and solving this problem—worked together and colluded together. I know the Prime Minister has talked about not having an obstructionist agenda, but in fact the Conservative Party, which I represent, received a majority of Canadian votes. When the other groups are working together, they're actually working against the majority of Canadian voters.

I would like to ask Ms. MacDonald, why does she believe that the Liberal government, supported by the New Democratic Party, did not want the ministers to appear today? Why does she think that these two parties, working together against those who were victims both of the system and of fraud, did not want the ministers here today?

• (1115)

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, we are happy to be here at the invitation of the committee and further to the motion passed by the committee last week. We are happy to answer any questions the honourable members may have for us today.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** That really didn't answer my question.

Why do you think they didn't want the ministers here today? Do you think the ministers understand this issue? Do you think that they have the capacity to understand this issue and that they are aware of all the particularities around this issue, Ms. MacDonald?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** We actively work with ministers, often on a weekly basis, providing the information in terms of the status of our EI processing, and in fact all the processing across the systems.

On a weekly basis, the minister challenges us to make sure we are serving Canadians to the best of our ability, in the most effective and efficient way. This includes looking at additional resources, streamlining our processes, using analytics to further enhance the processes we're using, and realigning staff and resources as necessary to take on any delays that we see in the system and to ensure that people are getting their benefits in a timely fashion.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** That may be so, Ms. MacDonald, but still they—through their team here—decided not to be here today.

Do you think the ministers understand the gravity of this situation, that there are people in this pandemic who have been victims of fraud, first of all, but who also need their benefits at the most dire of times, Ms. MacDonald?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** I can reassure the committee members that, in fact, the ministers are seized with this issue. We talk about it on a weekly basis. We talk about fraud-related issues and operational impact issues. The minister challenges us on an ongoing basis to ensure that we're doing everything we can to decrease delays, to look at processing efficiencies, and to understand the pain points in the system that actually impact individual clients on a day-to-day basis. We continue to provide those updates, and we continue to look at measures to improve those services.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** They're seized with this issue, and yet they, through their team, made the decision not to be here today to be accountable for that, so—

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, on a point of order, please, this line of questioning is extremely unfair to officials. That's number one. Number two, this is an important issue that we're all seized with. We have officials here. We're trying to get answers from the officials with regard to challenges that are in the system.

You know, I would also remind the member that they lost a seat in the last election. They lost a seat. They went backwards, not us, and—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** We actually gained four in your region, Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Chair—

**The Chair:** Mr. Long and Mrs. Kusie, we'll stick to questions on the motion.

Ms. MacDonald, go ahead.

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

As I indicated, we meet with the ministers on a weekly basis. We provide updates in terms of our processing efficiencies.

I just want to restate my opening comments that we are currently processing our EI claims above the current process standard of 80% for the cycle. In fact, we are processing at 88% for the entire year. We continue to look for efficiencies in that regard. The vast majority of our claims are done and completed in the appropriate time of four weeks, about 88%, and of the 12%, the majority are processed within six weeks.

There are claims, though, that are very complex. There are claims that—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay, but, Ms. MacDonald, you said that the ministers were seized with this issue. Did they come to you? I've worked in a minister's office. I've worked in the public service.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, that's your six minutes—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** No, it's not. I'm at 5:48. The point of order took time out.

I would actually like the clerk to verify that, please.

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer):** I'm at 6:02 right now.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** How can that be, considering Mr. Long had a point of order in the middle of that and I've been...?

**The Chair:** Okay, Mrs. Kusie. Continue with your question and conclude it, please.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you.

Ms. MacDonald, they say they're seized with issues. I want to know, did they come to you and give you a specific directive as to this issue specifically? I've worked in a minister's office. I've also worked as a public servant. I want to know if the ministers themselves came and gave this directive to you to solve this problem as soon as possible, gave you a time frame, and as well had you ensure that this will not happen again.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Kusie. Your time has concluded.

We'll move to Mr. Collins for six minutes.

Mr. Collins, go ahead.

**Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.):** Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

First and foremost, I think we should thank Madame Chabot again for raising this issue. We all know that government supports, irrespective of what level of government provides them, are important for people, whether they're on a temporary basis or a permanent basis. The fact that this is our first study is important, I think, and we should thank Madame Chabot again for bringing it forward.

Based on the last line of questioning, we should remind everyone that it wasn't unanimous to get us here today. There were two parties, actually, that supported the motion on Friday—the Liberals and the NDP. We see it as a priority, and my line of questioning will certainly get at that.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, to the witnesses—whoever chooses to answer—how has staff transitioned the delivery of EI services to clients during the pandemic, and how has that impacted the delivery of service over the last two years?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** I'll begin the answer, and then I'll turn to my colleague Mr. Groen to respond as well.

Over the course of the pandemic, we have actually flipped our workforce from 100% place-based, for the most part, to almost 85% virtual and telework. During that time, from a continuity perspective, we've been able to continue to deliver services to Canadians across all of our business lines.

As we are here today to talk about EI, I'll ask Mr. Groen to speak to this issue in terms of what we've been able to put into place.

**Mr. Cliff C. Groen (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Benefits and Integrated Services Branch, Service Canada, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Thank you, Lori.

To further add to the response, over the past two years, \$825 million has been invested in the delivery of the employment insurance program for the timely processing of applications, as well as to nearly triple the size of our EI call centre. We've been able to do that work virtually. Almost all of our staff who are involved in direct processing and answering calls from clients are able to work remotely. We've been able to transition toward that as of April 2020.

In addition, over the course of the pandemic, different simplification measures were introduced related to the delivery of EI, helping to ensure that we were able to process these applications in a timely manner, as well as answer clients' questions.

Thank you.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Thank you for those answers.

Several media reports have referenced fraud and/or hacking, the impact on clients and the possible theft of their identity. Could you speak to how you have maintained security in the transition services that you just referenced? How have we protected our clients who have submitted personal information? What level of security have you invested in? What level of fraud have you realized through the security initiatives that you've put in place?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** We have invested a significant amount of money—the \$68.1 million I referenced earlier—in fraud activities. At the same time, we've worked very closely with other organizations and partner agencies to assist us in combatting those particular fraud issues.

I'll ask Mr. Littlefield to comment on this question, please.

**Mr. Peter Littlefield (Chief Information Officer, Innovation, Information & Technology Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Thanks very much, Lori.

Thanks for the question.

To further Lori's remarks, since the beginning of the pandemic, there is no question that we have noticed an uptick in attempts at fraud and fraud against our services, as has been the case around the world. We have made some significant changes, from a cyber-security perspective, to our systems that serve Canadians, putting in place additional measures to validate the identity of clients who are coming in to receive benefits, and to detect any fraudsters, or attempted fraudsters, who are trying to take advantage of the systems that we have.

These aren't perfect measures, but they have resulted in our ability to detect and repel fraud attempts in a better way than we did before, even recognizing that there has been a significant increase throughout the pandemic. There are further measures that will be put in place over time, as we continue to evolve our responses, in response to the way in which fraudsters continue to evolve around the world.

• (1125)

**Mr. Chad Collins:** If I still have time, I'd like to ask this. You provided an update on the security measures that have been implemented throughout the first two years of the pandemic. What's the vision for 2022 and beyond? What are you looking at right now in terms of investments to protect clients and the personal information that they provide when they apply for EI?

**Mr. Peter Littlefield:** Going forward, recognizing that this is not going to stop and the negative activities of fraudsters around the world will continue, we are continuing to make plans and invest in further measures. There is a large focus on the identity of our clients. Recognizing that the major challenge we have here is identify theft, in Canada and around the world, we need better and stronger ways to know for certain who the clients are who are coming to obtain services from us, and to validate that they are who they say they are.

Our continued measures going forward are to strengthen our identity proofing and the management of credentials—usernames, passwords and things like that—for clients who are coming in to obtain our services. We work with our security partners as well. It's not just Service Canada or ESDC, but also the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security and Shared Services Canada. Others, including the Canada Revenue Agency, have significant efforts under way to continue to improve our anti-fraud and cybercrime-type measures going forward, so there are many more measures to come.

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

Mr. Collins, your six minutes are up. We will now go to Madame Chabot.

I would ask the members of the committee to identify which members of the panel they are directing their questions to.

Madame Chabot, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us.

Ms. MacDonald, thank you for your testimony.

While we are very pleased to have you here, allow me to remind you that it would have been timely and wise to hear from Minister Gould today. I find it absolutely unfortunate that the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party opposed a meeting with the minister to discuss an issue that is very important to EI claimants. This is all the more true because, this morning, in an article published by Mr. Bellavance in *La Presse*, we read that Ms. Gould announced measures, particularly with regard to identity theft. For that reason, we strongly believe that ministers must feel fully accountable for their decisions and that she would have been perfectly able to come and inform us of the situation.

Ms. MacDonald, with all due respect, I listened to you, but I do have two specific questions to ask.

First, at what point were the two ministers responsible, not the cabinet, informed of the urgency of the situation, and at what point did you inform them of these important issues?

My second question is very specific. You talk about the service standard. The current situation for claimants—it's not just a question of identity theft—with respect to processing delays for regular or special EI benefits has been ongoing since last fall. This has been going on for weeks and months. How many files are in “limbo”, as you call it, or outside the service standard?

According to our information, we're talking about tens of thousands of claimants.

So I'll repeat my two questions. First, when were the ministers responsible informed of the urgency of the processing delays for EI claimants? Second, how many files are outside the service standards?

This situation has been disparaged since last fall.

• (1130)

[*English*]

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to break this question down into three parts, and I'll turn to Mr. Groen at the end to give Madame Chabot some statistics.

To begin, the minister has been seized with this from the very beginning. She met with us in the fall on the challenges associated with our benefit delivery services to Canadians. We meet with her on a weekly basis to provide her with updates. She challenges us in terms of how we are able to ensure that more people are processed within the timeline of 28 days or four weeks.

She has challenged us in terms of looking at various solutions, including, as an example, hiring additional staff, which we have done. We have had staff come in literally on a monthly basis so that we can train them and put them into these very important key processing areas.

We continue to brief her on a weekly basis. At each one of those briefings, she has very serious conversations with us in terms of what more we can do to deliver these services to Canadians. That includes things like hiring, realigning resources and doing deep-dive analyses in particular areas.

As an example, she raised the issue of fraud in the Quebec region with us last fall. She was concerned about that. As a result, we went out to hire additional resources, particularly for Quebec. In fact, next week we should be onboarding 105 new, additional investigators for Quebec as it relates to identity theft, so that we can more efficiently validate those claims to get people back into pay.

The minister is very seized with this issue.

Unfortunately, as I said in my opening comments, we are experiencing delays because we had two very difficult events happen at the same time: winter—a peak season that happens from late November until now—and then omicron. Unfortunately, when the region of Quebec locked down on December 19, all of those things came together to dramatically increase the volumes of claims. In fact, as I said, they were 36% higher.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you. My question is about the number of files. I think we understand the context very well. In any case, it's a regular volume of files in December and January, and I want to know the exact number—and you have the number—of files, not percentages, that are outside service standards.

[*English*]

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** I'll ask Mr. Groen to come in on that question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Cliff C. Groen:** Thank you very much for your question.

As Ms. MacDonald mentioned, over the past six weeks, we've seen a significant increase in the number of applications. In fact, the number of applications we received during this period is much higher than in the past and in normal times.

For example, during the week of December 20, we received 189,000 new EI claims. Over a four-week period, we received over 100,000 applications per week. This situation is not normal, and the impact of the Omicron variant on our service delivery is really clear.

During this period, we were still able to process the vast majority of these requests. Currently, we are still able to meet our target, which is to process applications within four weeks. As mentioned, the vast majority of requests have been processed, 88% of them. Twelve per cent of requests that are not processed—

[*English*]

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

Madame Chabot, your time has concluded.

We will now go to Madame Zarrillo for six minutes.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Ms. MacDonald and the staff she has brought with her today.

We all agree that the beneficiaries need their entitlement, so I'm going to direct my questions toward the fraud and the account lock-outs. When will people who have been victims—waiting over the four-week expectation—receive their benefits? Is there a unique liaison number for those “complex call” applicants to reach out to? If so, what is that telephone number?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Thank you for that question, Mr. Chairman.

I will begin, and then I'll turn to my colleague Mary Crescenzi to provide some additional information.

I think it's important from a context perspective to understand what we're talking about here in terms of pure numbers. Mr. Groen gave some examples of numbers that we've received over the last several weeks, but, grosso modo, during the past year we've processed hundreds of thousands of claims.

Currently in our inventory we have approximately 10,000 cases that would be identified under that umbrella of fraud. Of those 10,000 cases, about 2,000 would be what we would call “urgent” in terms of clients in dire need who have contacted us. Those cases will be resolved in the next two weeks, given the additional resources we've put in place over the last number of weeks and the triage we've been doing in those cases.

I would also say that it's important to recognize that fraudsters are very bold people. They actually contact us pretending to be clients, because they do have information pertaining to those clients. It's not always as simplistic as a one-phone-call resolution. Because we have to balance not revictimizing those clients and at the same time verify their information, they're not always resolved in one day, although most are. As I indicated, those 2,000 I referenced in terms of urgent need will be resolved in the next two weeks. Beyond that, we are also triaging additional cases, some of which will be fraudulent as well, and we continue to work through those identity pieces to resolve the situation.

I'll ask Mary Crescenzi to provide any additional information.

• (1135)

**Ms. Mary Crescenzi (Assistant Deputy Minister, Integrity Services Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Thank you so much, Deputy.

Hello, everyone.

As you know, Service Canada balances the protection of the public fund from fraudsters, while at the same time, we understand the priority of putting real clients into pay as quickly as possible. As our deputy indicated, we are working with a number of clients who have been the victims of fraud as a result of their credentials being either stolen or compromised through the private sector or financial institutions. These are not unusual sorts of circumstances, unfortunately, these days. We have heard from the International Public Sector Fraud Forum that these activities are happening across the country.

In support of those clients who are most in need, the 2,000 that our deputy indicated, we are redirecting our staff to focus on contacting these clients immediately and working through those issues. It really is on a case-by-case basis, but we hope that, in terms of the straightforward cases, we will be able to address them during the conversation of the second-level and third-level assurance questions we will need to have answered appropriately.

Unfortunately, there are more complex cases. There may be cases where the fraudster is trying to represent a legitimate client, and we will have to work through that as well. We are also developing, and will introduce later this week, a dedicated team at the call centre who will be taking on those calls, and we'll move the conversation of verifying identity right at the first point of contact to expedite addressing those concerns.

We are also hiring those additional resources in the Quebec region. They are starting imminently and they will be able to bolster our capacity. Unfortunately, the Quebec region has seen a disproportionately larger number of impacted...cases of fraud associated with compromised and stolen identities, but we have a dedicated action plan that will bring all of these activities to bear quickly and in a timely way to offset those impacts as quickly as possible.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Mr. Chair, those are all my questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Zarrillo.

We will move, then, to the second round.

Mr. Ruff, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thanks to the witnesses for coming today.

My first point would be that I've had constituents reaching out since last summer on issues with the 30-day standard, for different reasons, and 100% of the constituents who have reached out to me are ones whose cases were not resolved in the 30-day resolution period and standard.

My questions are going to focus on getting some facts around the scope of this challenge and this issue that's ongoing. My first question is likely best addressed to Mr. Groen.

Can you please provide the committee with the approximate number of EI cases that failed to be resolved during the 30-day target in 2021, just the number?



**Mr. Cliff C. Groen:** Certainly. We have received 3.1 million applications over the course of the current fiscal year, and 88% of those applications have been processed within the service standard of 28 days. Therefore, 12% of about three million applications have not been processed within that 28-day service standard. To do the simple math, it would be about 300,000 applications.

However, I would stress that for the vast majority of those individuals whose applications are not processed within the four-week service standard, they are processed within six weeks. It will happen, but it is extremely rare that someone would not have their application processed within six weeks, and those situations are dealt with—

• (1140)

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Thanks, Mr. Groen. That was the answer to my question: Over 300,000 Canadians have been impacted.

How many EI claimants have experienced payment disruptions due to these hacked accounts?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I'll jump in first here and say that, to be very clear, Service Canada accounts have not been hacked. These issues in terms of identity and fraud are a result of people's information being stolen or breached through the private sector or financial institutions.

As I said in the beginning, a few minutes ago, right now we have about 10,000 cases in our inventory. We don't know how many of those cases are legitimate and how many are actually fraudster cases. Of those—

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Okay. Thanks, Ms. MacDonald. That answers the question.

You are saying 2,000 are still frozen and need to be resolved, if I heard your earlier testimony correctly.

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** That's correct.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** All right.

How is ESDC communicating with the EI claimants whose accounts have been frozen or whose payments have been disrupted due to this hacking? Is it by email? Is it by phone? What are the processes?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** I'll ask Mary Crescenzi to come in, but yes, it's by phone call and by email.

Mary, go ahead.

**Ms. Mary Crescenzi:** Thank you, Deputy.

You are right. In order to ensure that we do not feed additional information into the hands of potential fraudsters, we are reaching out ourselves, directly to the clients who are impacted, who have declared or reached out about having an issue. We ask specific questions to move up to next-level assurances so that we can determine that they are who they say they are, because the last thing we want to do is to contribute to re-fraud. The procedures are very clear.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Thanks. That's perfect.

If I heard correctly, witnesses have testified that additional resources were required. I did hear that there are 105 new investiga-

tors for Quebec alone. I guess there are two parts to this question. One, how long does it take to train an investigator? Two, when was the minister provided the plan to address these shortfalls and challenges, especially considering there is an annual peak? On what date was the minister briefed?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairperson.

As I indicated earlier, we brief the minister on a weekly basis. These conversations started last fall. It does take some time to train investigators, so as we were hiring new staff, which started last fall, we'd hire.... It's obviously more difficult to—

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Approximately how much time does it take to train—30 days, 60 days?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** I'll ask Mary to respond to that question.

**Ms. Mary Crescenzi:** Training would take two to four weeks for an investigator to be able to start their work, but there is continuous training, of course, so that they can become more and more experienced. We are also shifting some of the call centre resource staff to help alleviate some of these pressures directly with clients as they are coming in. That training takes about a day, because we are able to train individuals who already know employment insurance and those procedures well.

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

We will now go to Mr. Coteau for five minutes.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by thanking Madame Chabot for taking the initiative to speak to this issue and bring it to this committee. This is a very serious issue, and we're here with the experts within the system discussing this issue, government employees, bureaucrats, who have been working tirelessly for the last two years, during COVID, trying to look for ways to ease tension within the system for citizens.

The associate deputy minister started off by talking about the hardships and the prioritizing of clients. I can tell that a lot of effort has been put forward to look for ways to mitigate fraud in the system. Even just seeing that there have been 3.1 million applications and seven million calls....

My question for the associate deputy minister is this: What initiatives have been put forward to further look for ways to reduce fraud within the system? I know money has been allocated to fight against fraud, but what other initiatives have been put in to mitigate fraud within the system over the course of the two years?

• (1145)

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** That's a big question. I'll ask Mr. Littlefield to respond.

**Mr. Peter Littlefield:** Thanks for the question.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, since we noticed that instances of fraud and attempted fraud were going up, a number of measures have been put in place. They have focused a great deal on identity proofing and strengthening. We have also uplifted some of our cyber-protection measures. For example, we've put in place a requirement for clients to authenticate with more than one factor to connect to our services. This is typical in the financial industry, and many would recognize it as the requirement for a message with a code to be sent to their cellphone so the code could be entered. This gives an extra measure of assurance that the people connecting are who they say they are.

We have also taken steps to simplify the means for clients to prove their identity to us through simplified measures, so that it is easier for them to establish themselves as legitimate clients so that we can recognize them when they connect. Further measures, as I said, will be put in place over a period of time.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you so much. I do appreciate that.

When the associate deputy minister was speaking, or one of the officials, there was an explanation of the system and the way in which fraud is being committed. It sounded like it wasn't specifically based on the manipulation of the technology within the system, or the system being hacked. It was more about identity theft and folks who are committing this fraud getting their hands on someone's identity, putting in an application on their behalf, and redirecting the funds back to another bank account.

Is that correct, and if so, can you explain how this process works so committee members know that this is not the fault of a breach within the government system, but rather external forces manipulating personal data?

**Mr. Peter Littlefield:** If it's okay, I'm happy to respond, Mr. Chair.

The question is quite correct. The general method that we are seeing for these attacks is.... There have been data or privacy breaches at other institutions in the private sector or the financial sector in the past, where large volumes of Canadians' personal information have been stolen from those organizations.

The fraudsters obtain this information on the Internet, through back channels. The list contains usernames, passwords, often social insurance numbers, and often the personal information of Canadians like addresses. The fraudsters use that information to attempt to get into legitimate client accounts inside our systems in order to obtain benefits. In many cases, if clients use the same usernames and passwords that they do for other institutions, there may be a way for fraudsters to get in.

So that's the general nature.

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

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Do I have more time?

**The Chair:** Your time has gone by.

• (1150)

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you very much to the witnesses.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Coteau and Mr. Littlefield.

We'll go now for two and a half minutes to Madame Chabot.

Madame Chabot, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you.

I want to make a heartfelt appeal to you. We are here to get answers, but above all, to find solutions. We don't seem to be taking the measure and the magnitude of the problem, which is that some 300,000 cases go over the service standard, and it could take more than six weeks.

We have already sounded the alarm every week since the fall. The ministers will tell you that. Up until the procedural motion, there was no sense of urgency among the ministers. However, we still do not feel the urgency of finding solutions for claimants who have been waiting, sometimes for months, since the fall. That's six or even eight weeks without benefits.

I'm not just talking about identity theft; I'm not ignoring it, there are obviously problems, but we're talking about the volume of current EI benefits. When people apply for their benefits, they need them. They do not want to be told that their case is not urgent enough and that it cannot be given priority. In every Action-Chômage movement in Quebec, in every MP's office, we have sounded the alarm that claimants are victims.

In the short term, what do you plan to do to relieve this volume of service requests? Will you hire and train staff? What do you intend to do so that people are no longer told, as is still the case today, that, unfortunately, there are wait times of six weeks or more? It makes no sense to people. There are human beings behind it. What solutions can you confirm are in place to address these needs in a timely manner?

[*English*]

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

I would just like to provide a context for a couple of things.

It is very rare for a client to wait six months to have their case resolved. In fact, each week we do an analysis on what we have in our inventories, so we can work from our most outdated to the most recent cases and ensure that those cases are not floundering. From a pure numbers perspective, Cliff mentioned that we have 3.1 million EI claims this year, and right now in our inventory there are about 200 at the six-month mark. Those are mostly fraudulent cases. The vast majority of claims are getting processed within four weeks and, among the rest, the vast majority within six weeks.

We completely appreciate and understand that those people are waiting, and it's not acceptable. As a result of that, we've done a number of things to try to process those more quickly. We have triaging processes in place, and we put an alternative service delivery model in place, where people can go online and contact us—either through a phone call to get a call back, or through an online application that they can quickly fill out and we can call them directly, so they don't have to come to a Service Canada centre or leave the comfort of their home. We're actually able to help them fill out the application online—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. MacDonald. We could probably follow up on that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I might add that I'm very familiar with triage in emergency departments and hospitals—

[English]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, your time is up.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I didn't get an answer to my question.

There is no reason why EI claimants are still waiting for their benefits. They have a right to their income.

[English]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, your time is up.

I will now go to Madame Zarrillo for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you very much.

I want to say how important this conversation is to the residents in my community and to the case workers in the MPs' offices who are receiving calls. I really appreciate all the information we are getting today.

I want to revisit a comment from Ms. Crescenzi. Thank you for your comments earlier. They were very informative. I want to get some clarification on this dedicated team and the timing. You said it was coming very quickly. Could I get the timing?

I also want to ask.... I'm not sure if it's Ms. MacDonald, or even if this is possible.... I'd like to get some information about proactive education in the community around identity fraud. The situation that we're in, where many of these EI recipients have been defrauded, is very sad and it can be devastating to their lives. I'd like for us to be able to proactively get ahead of that in the constituency, so anything you can do there would be appreciated.

• (1155)

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Maybe I'll go first and then I'll flip it over to Mary.

There are two important things.

We do have a regional inquiry unit in place for MPs to access. We have a standard practice to return those calls within 48 hours, and we do that 99.5% of the time. Please, I encourage everyone to call. We never want to see someone suffering and going through these issues of their claim not being processed. Reach out to that regional inquiry unit. In fact, I've asked my team in the Quebec re-

gion, at the direction of the minister, to make sure they're reaching out to all MPs in Quebec to help them with these cases that are coming to them and to try to resolve these issues more expeditiously. The regional inquiry unit is there to help and to help triage some of these issues.

We also use the cyber security centre, which has significant products in terms of education on cybersecurity. We would be very happy to share those contacts with the committee so that you can get educational products.

I'll flip it over to Mary.

**Ms. Mary Crescenzi:** I'll answer the question in regard to the dedicated team.

We have two layers of dedicated teams. One is associated with a newly formed dedicated team that will be stood up this week in the call centre. That is in regard to being able to.... When the situation occurs that the individual on the line is saying that they're faced with identity fraud, or we see a flag in the system that indicates there is an issue with their file, that call would be transferred over to a dedicated team that we are training now to be able to ask those second- or third-level assurance questions that normally would have had my team calling back.

At the same time, we are almost doubling the resources in the Quebec region, where we are seeing a disproportionate representation of these types of activities occurring. As we said earlier, we will be able to reach out to those who are most in need and respond in the next two weeks to those 2,000 who have been identified as an urgent requirement. We will then continue to work through the volume that we're seeing with the expanded capacity.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That concludes your two and a half minutes, Madame Zarrillo.

There are still two five-minute slots in the second round—one for the Conservative Party and one for the Liberal Party—but we're reaching our one hour. Unless there's objection from the committee, I will go to Mr. Jeneroux and then Madame Martinez Ferrada for their two five-minute rounds. Is that okay with the committee? I see a thumbs-up.

Given that there's no objection, I will now go to Mr. Jeneroux for five minutes, and then we'll conclude with Madame Martinez Ferrada for five minutes.

Mr. Jeneroux, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate there being no objection to allowing me to speak to this. I'm hoping to get in four questions quickly.

Repayments are a big issue in my riding of Edmonton Riverbend. Many people who lost their jobs due to COVID applied for benefits and are now facing serious repercussions. People who have been properly submitting their information on a monthly basis and providing all necessary updates are being severely punished by Service Canada's mistakes. They say 48 hours is the callback time, but honestly, these are people in their most desperate time of need. To have even 2% who weren't able to get that 48-hour callback when they reached out to their member of Parliament's office, in my opinion, is unacceptable, so I'm hoping we can reduce that to a shorter hourly period for our offices.

Many students in my riding have been asked to return their benefits, and they even received...though they followed every proper step along the way. Mr. Groen said that it takes about six weeks in many cases. Ours are at about three to four months.

For my four questions, I'll go in order and hopefully get through all of them.

How many cases is Service Canada now reviewing and currently seeking repayment from?

Ms. MacDonald might be best to answer that.

• (1200)

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** I'll refer this to Mr. Groen.

**Mr. Cliff C. Groen:** Thank you.

I do not have that information directly available with me, but I would be happy to provide it subsequently to the committee.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** Thank you, Mr. Groen.

Question two is this: As of today, how much money is Service Canada trying to collect from Canadians from payments that should not have been approved?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Thank you for the question.

Again, we will come back to the committee in terms of that.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** Question three is this: How many of these reimbursements have been reconsidered and waived by Service Canada?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Chairman, we don't have that information with us today for the purposes of this committee, but we can provide that information through a subsequent submission to the committee.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** This will be my final question, Mr. Chair.

Is Service Canada at all considering not collecting these funds?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Mr. Chairman, overall, I would say the government has a fiduciary responsibility in terms of debt repayment. We do that with our colleagues at CRA. There are very specific policies and guidelines in terms of that debt recovery. I would say that we have been very clear, in terms of debt recovery, that our first and foremost tactic is to notify of a debt and then to work with the client to repay that over time. There is no requirement to do that in an immediate fashion; in fact, in each individual case we work with them to determine what they're able to pay back, over what period of time and what amount, as we obviously understand that people have different financial circumstances and financial needs.

As I said [*Inaudible—Editor*] information, we'll provide it to you.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** Thank you, Ms. MacDonald.

Maybe I'll be a bit more direct. Have there been discussions with the minister, with your supervisors or the deputy minister, in terms of not collecting these funds?

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

We have constant conversations with respect to the collection of debt. It could be anything from how we collect the debt and what the communication messages are on collecting debt, to what impacts there are across different populations in terms of collecting debt. Prior to the pandemic and during the pandemic, there have always been conversations about the collection of debt and how we do that for the government overall.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** Mr. Chair, I'll cede my time. However, I do look forward, with respect to the first three questions, and I'd even say the fourth question, to getting some answers in a relatively quick fashion. These are questions that we're hearing directly from my constituents in Edmonton Riverbend day after day, and with respect to my caseworker and caseworkers across the country, I think many of them would love to hear the answers to these questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Jeneroux. Your time had just about concluded anyhow.

We'll conclude with Madame Martinez Ferrada for five minutes.

Ms. Crescenzi, when you're answering a question, would you lift your mike? It's popping and the interpreter.... Thank you.

Madame Martinez Ferrada is next, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's my turn to say how important this issue is. As my colleague Ms. Chabot said, and as some witnesses have also said, this is a problem that disproportionately affects Quebec. Yes, I have received several calls about this in my constituency office.

I would like to come back to your presentation, Ms. MacDonald. On the one hand, you said that you were dedicating additional resources to this problem; on the other, you said that you were going to use other methods to try to reduce the wait.

I also sense some confusion about the number of people who are waiting, whether it's fraud cases or people waiting for EI confirmation. Could you describe a little more clearly the department's response plan for finding concrete solutions? What are the numbers now? You're talking about other ways to reduce the wait. What are they?

Like my colleague Mr. Jeneroux, I have also received calls at my constituency office, and I expect to be able to provide quick answers to constituents who call me. Committee members would very much like you to provide us with a clear plan for the department's response to this problem. Can you shed some light on this?

[*English*]

**Ms. Lori MacDonald:** Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chairperson, I'll start off, and then I'll ask my colleague Cliff Groen to answer as well.

As it relates to the very specific issue of fraud, as we indicated earlier, we have right now in our inventory about 10,000 cases, and we know that around 2,000 of those are urgent requirements. We have hired additional investigators to assist with those cases. We have realigned resources within the department to do those investigations, and we have trained additional staff to take calls very specific to identity fraud to assist in unlocking those cases on a very quick basis. We will have the vast majority, if not all, of those 2,000 cases resolved in the next two weeks, but we will continue to triage additional cases, because every day we get new cases. We will also continue to hire new staff to help us with those cases.

In terms of processing, we have identified and hired additional staff for call centres, additional staff for processing. At the same time, we've streamlined our internal processes to take pain points out of the system and create more efficiencies. We use data analytics. We use interventions in terms of robotics. We also look at changing our caseloads so that we can actually process cases across the country regardless of where the client is.

These are just some of the things we've put in place to ensure a more efficient processing of EI claims. I will ask Mr. Groen if he would like to add anything.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Cliff C. Groen:** Thank you, Ms. MacDonald.

I would like to highlight a few important points. First of all, in terms of the payment of EI benefits, the results since the beginning of the pandemic have never been better than they are today. We have been able to pay benefits within our service standard 88% of the time, whereas prior to the pandemic it was closer to 80%.

We know that some people are waiting, but the vast majority of applications are being processed in a very short time frame. In terms of the number of applications received and processed, as of today we have received approximately 3.1 million EI claims, and we have already processed 2.9 million. Currently, 200,000 applications are being processed, including those we received last week.

We will do everything we can to resolve existing problems.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Mr. Chair, again, there are two figures out there, and I am trying—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Martinez Ferrada—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Is it okay? May I continue?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes, but we're coming to the end. You have five seconds, Madame Martinez Ferrada.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Could the committee be given the figures just mentioned regarding the situation before the pandemic and after the pandemic? Could we have a comparison to understand why the current situation is more difficult than before the pandemic? Could we have real numbers to go by, rather than relying on the ones reported by the media?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Martinez Ferrada.

That concludes the first part of the—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you so much to all of the witnesses who are here today and—

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, you do not have the floor.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I thought you recognized me when you said yes. Pardon me.

**The Chair:** No. I'm sorry. We concluded this part of the meeting—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** You did say yes, Mr. Chair, so I do believe when you said yes, that was recognizing me in having the floor. You said yes. What was the yes an indicator to, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** No, I did not indicate that you had the floor, Mrs. Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Can we go back and check, Madam Clerk, what the yes was an indicator to? I believe the yes was an indication that I had the floor. I don't understand. I said something and you said yes, so to me that was an indication that I had the floor.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, no, Mrs. Kusie. I did not. We were concluding the meeting, and I indicated that I was moving to thank the witnesses. I was clear on who we would have for the two last lines of questioning, so I want to proceed with—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Well, then may I have the floor after you conclude thanking the witnesses?

**The Chair:** No. We're concluding the—

• (1210)

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** You did say yes. Why can't I have the floor after we thank the witnesses?

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, could we be respectful here to the proceedings? I was very clear on how we were going to proceed. We know the rules. I identified the last two questioners and the time they had. I thanked Madame Martinez Ferrada and indicated that was concluded, and I was moving to thank the witnesses for their time coming in and appearing and for their thoughtful evidence before the committee.

We will now move to suspend while we move to the second part for—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Mr. Chair, I have something to say before we conclude, please.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, do you have a motion?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** No, I do not have a motion.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, you do not have the floor.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay, I do have a motion.

**The Chair:** What's the motion?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I was hoping to move that we could conduct the second part of our meeting in public. Everyone has worked very hard on presenting their motions regarding studies to the committee. It's clear that all parties have put considerable time and thought into this, so I was just hoping that our constituents and Canadians could see the hard work we've put into preparing these motions and the clearness and transparency with which we're going to have the discussion to determine the studies that we will be undertaking.

That was my motion, to move to have the second part of our meeting in public, please.

**The Chair:** The committee members have heard the motion. I will put it to a recorded vote. I would ask the clerk to confirm the motion that was put forward by—

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but I had my hand raised before you talked about calling the vote. I want some clarification.

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, I do not see somebody with their hand raised of those who are present in the committee room, so you will have to confirm that for me.

**The Clerk:** Ms. Zarrillo has her hand up.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Yes, I do, and that introduces another thing that we should talk about.

The reason I raised my hand was just on standing orders. We do have an outstanding motion on standing orders that deals with times that we can go in camera. I would welcome a discussion around that standing order. My understanding is that we don't have one right now, and maybe I should get some clarification on that. We have not resolved in our standing orders how we're going to deal with in camera.

The second thing that has just come forward, and it's procedural, has to do with the raising of hands. I see that there are five of us here in committee today and the chair is not able to see us raise our hands in order. We need to determine how we are going to be recognized in a hybrid format for speaking order. That has just come up based on what happened.

First of all, if I can get some clarity on the standing orders for in camera, that would be great.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'm going to ask the clerk to explain the motion of Mrs. Kusie. It's a dilatory motion. It has to be voted on right away.

Madam Clerk, am I correct on that?

**The Clerk:** Yes, Mr. Chair, you are correct.

**The Chair:** Okay. Then we will go to vote on the motion of Mrs. Kusie.

Madam Clerk, so that everybody is clear on what they are voting on—

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Mr. Chair, I'm raising my hand again.

**The Chair:** No, Ms. Zarrillo, the vote has been called. We have to move to the vote. It's a dilatory motion.

Madam Clerk, just before we go to the vote, so that everybody is clear on it, could you repeat to the committee the motion they're voting on?

**The Clerk:** The motion is that the committee sit in public.

• (1215)

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I just find myself in a really difficult position, because I have a long history of voting in favour of things like this and I would like to be able to vote in favour of something like this, but I'm not clear on how a motion that comes from the floor takes precedence over a motion that has been sitting since the middle of December that is addressing the same—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** A point of order, Mr. Chair. The interpretation isn't working.

[*English*]

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** There was no translation.

**The Chair:** When we get the translation corrected, I will ask the clerk to explain to Ms. Zarrillo.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I'd like Ms. Zarrillo to repeat what she said from the start, because her comments were not interpreted.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, that's correct. I'm not getting any translation into English.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, the translation appears to be working.

**The Chair:** Okay, Madam Clerk. Then could you explain to Ms. Zarrillo why we're voting on this motion?

**The Clerk:** Ms. Zarrillo, we're currently on a vote for the committee to sit in public. I do understand that you moved a motion on December 13 in regard to in camera proceedings. The motion was adjourned at that point in time, but you may resume that debate on the motion at any point in time. Should you do it this afternoon, you can resume the debate this afternoon during committee business, if you would like to do that, or any time.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I have another question, and I really apologize to my colleagues around the table. This is important procedurally, so I hope I can get some clarity.

I just want to understand fully that a motion can come from the floor, with no notice, at any point in time in procedure, regardless of topic. Is that correct?

**The Clerk:** You may move a motion in committee business. Otherwise, it will require 48 hours' notice.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, I don't want to dwell too much on procedure. However, I would simply like to point out that, last Friday, I was told that, under the Standing Orders, it wasn't possible to speak once the vote had begun. I see that we are resuming debate, and I don't understand how that's possible under the Standing Orders.

[English]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, you are correct. The clerk will conclude the vote. We're in a vote. I will not accept any more discussion until the vote is concluded.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, are we now concluding the first part and suspending because we have to exit this part and then log in to...?

**The Clerk:** Mr. Morrissey, we are currently in public. We'll be remaining in public for the second portion of this meeting.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Clerk, for that clarification.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Morrissey, Ms. Zarrillo has her hand raised.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I wonder if I could request a break. If we could get some information on how people will be recognized in the room versus online, and how we will coordinate that for the rest of this meeting, that would be appreciated.

I'd like to take a break for two minutes just to get that information.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I will suspend for a few minutes while I consult with the clerk.

Thank you.

• (1220)

(Pause)

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you, committee members.

We are now in the second hour and we are in public. We're resuming committee business in public.

I will ask the clerk to advise me on who has their hand up.

**The Clerk:** Mrs. Kusie has her hand raised, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, go ahead.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to applaud the committee for making the decision to go in public to have this discussion. I just think it's so very important that our constituents and all Canadians see that we have the issues facing this nation first-hand at mind and that we are here ready to take those interests to heart and to plan our studies.

Mr. Chair, certainly the Conservatives submitted many good motions, as did many others of this team. I see so many fantastic ideas here. I'm very excited about all of them, frankly. It will be very difficult for this group to prioritize how we will study and what we will do, but I think a good tone to start off our studies and to start off the conversations we're going to have would be Madame Chabot's motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot's motion is as follows:

That the committee invite the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Seniors to appear for one hour each before the committee to explain their mandate letters.

I think it will be an excellent opportunity to hear about the priorities of the ministers. We will also have an opportunity to talk to the ministers about their priorities for this session, that is, between now and the spring—we will obviously be here until the end of June. That would be a good start for the committee. After that, we can look at all the other motions.

As I said, there are a number of good motions on the table, but I think it would be good to start off with a motion on the presence of ministers at the committee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Is there any discussion on the motion?

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Mr. Chair, can I hear the motion again? Was there a motion actually put on the floor?

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, I had raised my hand.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** We were dealing with Mrs. Kusie's motion.

Mrs. Kusie, please repeat your motion.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Clerk:** There's a point of order, Mr. Chair, from Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Mr. Chair, given that today's meeting is in a hybrid format—

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I raised my hand first, Mr. Chair.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Ms. Chabot, I raised the point of order in an effort to help you.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** All right; I'm sorry.

Sometimes there are delays in interpretation.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** That is part of my point of order, Ms. Chabot.

Mr. Chair, it would be really interesting to check with the clerk on how to help the committee members function properly even though we're in a hybrid format. Since the chair is attending the meeting virtually, he doesn't see what's going on in the room, and vice versa. Perhaps the clerk could help the chair keep track of the speaking order of members. Since the clerk is in the room, she could help the chair, so that there is better cohesion in terms of the speaking order of members.

I would like to raise another point. I think I am the only French speaker in the room. It is extremely difficult for me to hear the interpretation, because I hear the English-speaking members in the room. If all my colleagues used earpieces and the sound in the room was turned down, it would help me hear the interpretation well.

For the benefit of my colleagues who are attending the meeting virtually as well as my own, it would be helpful if the clerk could assist the chair in terms of the speaking order of members, which would help facilitate the discussions. We are here to consider and discuss the motions at hand.

• (1230)

[*English*]

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I wanted to reiterate the same issue that the previous member just indicated. We're getting the translation of both, so if we could fix that, it would make it a lot easier to understand.

**The Chair:** I agree. Thanks for raising that.

Are we getting that clarified, Madam Clerk?

**The Clerk:** I will speak to the services right now about that matter.

**The Chair:** Let's suspend for two minutes while we're clarifying the issue that was identified.

• (1230)

(Pause)

• (1230)

**The Chair:** We're resuming the meeting.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I raised my hand almost immediately after Mrs. Kusie, before any hands went up on the screen, but there was no procedure in place at the time to recognize speakers.

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk?

**The Clerk:** On the decision, it's yours. I have Ms. Zarrillo as third, when I noticed her, but the decision is yours, Mr. Chair. I have Mrs. Kusie, Madame Chabot, Ms. Zarrillo, Mr. Collins and Mr. Coteau—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, my hand was raised when the meeting resumed.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We'll go to Madame Chabot and then to Madame Zarrillo.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Kusie. The motion that you put forward is the one that we tabled, which proposes that we hear from the ministers in relation to their respective mandate letters, which were provided sometime after the throne speech. We see that there are very important priorities for ministers in the mandate letters. What I understand from what you're proposing, Ms. Kusie, is that we hear from ministers on their mandate letters in the current context. I am in full agreement with my motion and the way you are prioritizing it.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Just so we're clear, if there's no further discussion on the motion, we have to deal with the motion that has been moved as it's currently on the floor.

Am I correct, Madam Clerk?

**The Clerk:** Yes. Ms. Chabot has moved the motion. The floor is now open for debate.

Ms. Martinez Ferrada has raised her hand in terms of the debate, so she is next in the debate on the motion.

**The Chair:** Madame Martinez Ferrada, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.



My question is about my colleague's motion. Was she going to make a proposal about time allocation? Indeed, once again, there are several motions to be considered at this time, and we will eventually have to discuss them. There are also several studies to be considered. I am very much in favour of hearing the ministers on their mandate letters; however, without wanting to take anything away from anyone or the ministers, we may as well read these mandate letters and, eventually, regarding each of the studies we will undertake, decide whether the ministers should be heard. At the moment, if we do a quick calculation, we can expect to spend an hour with each minister on their mandate. That would take up the time of two full meetings of the committee. This makes me wonder, then, about the effectiveness of the committee and the effect this will have on the studies we will undertake.

I would like to know if this is, generally speaking, what my colleague had in mind. I would like to hear the views of my other colleagues on the need for two full meetings of the committee to hear from four ministers at one hour per minister.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, who is next in the speaking order? We are debating the motion.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Coteau is next on the list in the debate of the motion by Madame Chabot.

**The Chair:** Mr. Coteau, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I will remove my name for now.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Madam Clerk, could you identify the next speaker on the motion?

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** Ms. Chabot is next.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to understand Ms. Kusie's intention in giving priority to my motion. If I understand correctly, her intention is that this motion should be given priority and that we should receive the ministers to consider their mandate letters, before we start work on other motions, in the immediate future. If that is her intention, and I would like it to be clarified, I will agree. The motion, then, would be to receive the ministers in respect of their mandate letters during the next two meetings, if I may put it that way.

For my part, I had calculated that we have 15 weeks of parliamentary business between now and June. I think we have time for that and for other very important motions that we have to deal with. We could receive the ministers without delay at our next two meetings, if Ms. Kusie confirms that that is her intent.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Continuing debate, Madam Clerk, is there another speaker?

**The Clerk:** Mr. Jeneroux is next.

**The Chair:** Mr. Jeneroux, you have the floor.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madame Chabot, for the motion. I think Ms. Martinez Ferrada's motion—I don't know if it's an official amendment or maybe more just for us—is a smart adoption.

I haven't been here long, Mr. Chair, but I think in the six years I've been here, it's always been nice to be able to have the ministers show up when we begin committees so we're all essentially on the same page of where the ministers are coming from. It gives us an hour with each minister to propose those key questions that we want to have answered. Ultimately, I think for the first two meetings, that's a good course of action. That's my opinion, Mr. Chair.

• (1240)

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, are there any other committee members who wish to speak?

**The Clerk:** Mr. Coteau and Madame Chabot still have their hands raised, in that order.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** My hand is now lowered, sir.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Madame Chabot, you had your hand raised.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

I had asked Ms. Kusie a question.

As I understand it, since I made this motion, I am the mover of the motion. My motion did not include a time limit. Ms. Kusie's intention is to impose a deadline for ministers to appear on their mandate letters as a matter of priority, that is to say at the next meetings. Does Ms. Kusie intend to amend the motion to that effect?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** If not, I will propose the amendment myself. It was just a question I was asking Ms. Kusie, who moved my motion first...

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, we're still on Madame Chabot's motion, and I do not believe—

**The Clerk:** I would like to clarify.

Mrs. Kusie, are you moving an amendment to the motion of Madame Chabot?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes, I am.

**The Chair:** Okay, because Madame Chabot cannot amend her motion.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I'm moving to amend Madame Chabot's motion to one hour with each minister over the next two meetings.

Is that adequate?

**The Clerk:** It's in the motion already.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay. That's what I don't understand.

**The Chair:** It's your amendment, Mrs. Kusie.

Madam Clerk, we have the amendment by Mrs. Kusie.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, may we have a moment to speak?

**The Chair:** Sure.

Committee, I'm going to suspend for two minutes while I consult with the clerk so that everybody is clear on the motion and the amendment.

• (1240) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1245)

**The Chair:** We'll resume.

Just so that everybody is clear, I will ask the clerk to explain the discussion between Mrs. Kusie...on Madame Chabot's motion, and why the item she wanted was already included in the main motion.

Madam Clerk, could you explain?

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, Mrs. Kusie was looking at the original motion. In the motion, it already explains that they're looking for the ministers to appear for one hour each before the committee. It is already included in the original motion as moved by Madame Chabot.

**The Chair:** Therefore, the amendment would not be in order.

**The Clerk:** You are correct, Mr. Chair.

Next on the speaking list right now is Ms. Zarrillo.

**The Chair:** Ms. Zarrillo, go ahead.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was going to speak on it, but I'm going to wait to hear exactly what's been decided on the amendment. I haven't seen it at all. I've only heard it on the floor. I haven't seen the amendment myself.

**The Clerk:** Mrs. Kusie would like to speak next.

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, could you explain? It's my understanding that there's no amendment on the floor.

**The Clerk:** No, there is no amendment.

Mrs. Kusie will be taking the floor. Madame Chabot has her hand raised, but Mrs. Kusie, in the room, is also looking to speak. Her name is on the speaking list as well.

**The Chair:** Who's first in the order, Madame Chabot or Madame Kusie?

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Well, I think I still have the floor.

**The Chair:** Who am I hearing from, Madam Clerk?

**The Clerk:** Ms. Zarrillo is next.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Yes. I have the floor, right?

Mr. Chair, it's my understanding that Madame Chabot has a motion. Mrs. Kusie brought the information about the motion to the floor first. Then Madame Chabot spoke to the motion and put her motion on the floor. She moved her motion that's on the floor. Mrs. Kusie wanted to put some timing around that motion.

That is the information I'm waiting for. I was under the impression that it was an amendment. I'm waiting for that information to come officially—or I can continue to debate just Madame Chabot's motion that was on the floor, with no timing.

Is that clear? I apologize for this, but it's because we have MPs in different locations. We have conversations going on. I really need to understand the process of what we are discussing right now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo. You're quite correct to get that clarification.

I would ask the clerk to again clarify for Ms. Zarrillo and the committee where we're at.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, Madame Chabot did move her original motion in regard to inviting the ministers to appear before the committee on their mandate letters. The motion stated they were to appear for one hour each before the committee to explain their mandate letters.

Mrs. Kusie did speak about a possible amendment to have them appear for one hour each, but that was already in the original motion.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Are you clear, Ms. Zarrillo?

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I heard some conversation about next meetings, or the meeting after, so maybe that—

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** With respect, Madam Clerk, Ms. Kusie's amendment is not to invite ministers for an hour each. I asked for that to be clarified. The motion that we put forward already contained the proposal to invite the four relevant ministers to appear for one hour each.

As I understand it, Ms. Kusie's amendment seeks to impose a deadline, so that ministers appear at the next two meetings. So the goal is to impose a time limit.

We want to understand the substance of the amendment so that we know what we are going to vote on. It will be up to Ms. Kusie to present her amendment. Otherwise, I will move an amendment to my motion myself.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, only Mrs. Kusie can speak for Mrs. Kusie.

Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Mrs. Kusie has her hand up to speak next.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mrs. Kusie, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

We have just had a conversation, and I will now move an amendment. I think that will allow us to move forward.

[*English*]

The conversation we just had, which I hope will be appealing to all members of the committee, would be that on Thursday we have another committee business meeting in an effort to determine the priorities of the committee. For the three consecutive meetings—so both meetings next week, and then we would require another meeting after that—we have all five ministers. In addition to the ones that Madame Chabot outlined—the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the Minister of Labour, and the Minister of Seniors—we would also add the Minister of Housing.

We would take the next meeting to complete the work, which unfortunately we will not have time to do today. However, the following three meetings would be dedicated to one hour with each of the five ministers who have some level of responsibility to this committee. I hope this also addresses Madame Chabot's concern with regard to timeliness.

My amendment would be following exactly what I just said.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, I'm going to ask you to clarify, because that was a long discussion, exactly what your amendment is to Madame Chabot's motion, so that everybody is clear.

Could you clarify what your amendment is to Madame Chabot's motion?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Let me make it clear. I move:

That the committee invite the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Housing to appear for one hour each before the committee, prior to Friday, February 18, 2022, to explain their mandate letters.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Kusie.

Madam Clerk, are you clear on the amendment?

**The Clerk:** I'll just repeat it:

That the committee invite the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Housing to appear for one hour each before the committee, prior to Friday, February 18, 2022, to explain their mandate letters.

**The Chair:** If there is no discussion on the amendment, I will call for a—

**The Clerk:** Ms. Zarrillo has her hand up.

• (1255)

**The Chair:** Ms. Zarrillo, please go ahead.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do have a subamendment to the amendment.

The reason I'm bringing this is that Mrs. Kusie mentioned the opportunity to do prioritization of studies. I want to share that a 12-year-old in my community took their life. A 16-year-old overdosed in a public bathroom in my community. I came to this committee today to do business of the committee to prioritize studies. I want to hear from the ministers as much as anybody else does, and I will support Mrs. Kusie's motion to get the ministers here. We need to hear from them. They need to know what we're hearing from our communities, just as much as we need to hear from them.

I'm asking for this subamendment, that we find time to sit together in a collaborative manner as a group of individuals to support people in our ridings—families who are hurting, families who are losing family members, because they don't have the privilege that we have to sit here and try to find clips to put out on social media. If a child passes away in my community this week because we have decided that we are going to sit around this table and try to get the ministers here, when we just had an hour of very, very good information on EI, I will be so upset. I came to Ottawa to support families and single people and to get them the support they need after two years of being stuck in their homes not loving their families, not hugging their mothers and fathers. They haven't had a funeral or a wedding. I was afraid to walk to work today. I'm a member of Parliament and I was afraid to walk to work today. I had to phone a number to ask, "Is it safe for me to enter the street today to walk to Wellington?"

I am over this discussion. I would like to move an amendment that we decide on the prioritization of the studies so that the staff can get to work on the information and the studies that matter to people. I am 100% onside to support every single minister who wants to come to this committee, but I cannot go home to my riding and hear of another child dying.

On Thursday, a woman was stabbed to death in the parking lot beside mine, and I had to speak to my staff and say, "Are you okay? Did you have an incident when you went down in the parking lot last night? The RCMP will be visiting us today for footage from our camera." Too many women have died over these two years, stuck in abusive situations, in abusive relationships, with no way to move out of their homes. I'm not saying that's what happened with the young mother who was stabbed to death in the strip mall where my constituency office is. Today, I have left my staff and my community to come here to fight for them.

That's the amendment I'm moving. The subamendment to Mrs. Kusie's amendment is to prioritize having a meeting to discuss and prioritize the motions that are already on the floor for study so that staff can get working.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Madam Clerk, is that a subamendment to the amendment currently under discussion?

**The Clerk:** Mrs. Kusie also wants the floor, Mr. Chair. I think she wants to speak to it.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, go ahead.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Chair.

I have great understanding and compassion for the topics the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam is referencing, and I think we can accommodate her care and her concern for her constituents. I think we can do it formally as a subamendment, or we can agree that we will have the five ministers by the 18th, as outlined in the motion, with the understanding that at our next meeting—this Thursday, when I hope I'll be able to appear safely again—we could have that discussion of business priorities.

Recognizing the ministers are an absolute priority and will begin coming next week, we can make Thursday the priority day to discuss this. I feel we could do that outside of a subamendment with an agreement amongst us, but if Ms. Zarrillo would feel more comfortable, then perhaps she might want to suggest adding the specific date of...and that we have the...before the 18th, leaving February 3 as a discussion of priorities for the committee. That would be my suggestion.

My understanding is that my amendment includes the consideration of what Ms. Zarrillo is suggesting in her subamendment, but if she would like to entrench it with a subamendment to my amendment to Madame Chabot's motion, we can do that.

Thank you.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Kusie.

Before we conclude, I would like to have a vote on the subamendment put forward by Ms. Zarrillo—

**The Clerk:** Ms. Martinez Ferrada had her hand up, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Madame Martinez Ferrada, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to clarify Ms. Kusie's comments for my colleague Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Zarrillo's subamendment could simply propose that this week's Thursday meeting be about committee business, so that we can decide on the order of the studies. I just want to reassure my colleague by telling her that that is the intention of the committee.

I call for a vote on this subamendment so that we can move on to the amendment and pass this motion at the end of the committee meeting.

[*English*]

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, could I receive clarification regarding the subamendment from Ms. Zarrillo, to make sure I have the wording?

Could you repeat the subamendment, please?

**The Chair:** Ms. Zarrillo, go ahead.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you very much. I move that the prioritization of the studies—the motions that present the studies—happen at our meeting on Thursday, February 3.

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, is the subamendment in order?

**The Clerk:** She has added it to the amendment.

I currently have that Ms. Zarrillo has added the subamendment that prioritizes the list of studies on Thursday, February 3.

**The Chair:** That's the subamendment to the amendment by Mrs. Kusie on the main motion by Madame Chabot.

**The Clerk:** Yes.

**The Chair:** If there are no further questions from the floor, we will go to a recorded vote on the subamendment put forward by Ms. Zarrillo.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

• (1305)

**The Chair:** We'll now move to the vote on Mrs. Kusie's amendment.

(Amendment as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Now we are voting on the main motion put forward by Madame Chabot, as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Clerk.

Thank you, committee members, for your indulgence and discussion. I'm looking forward to seeing you on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.







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