



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

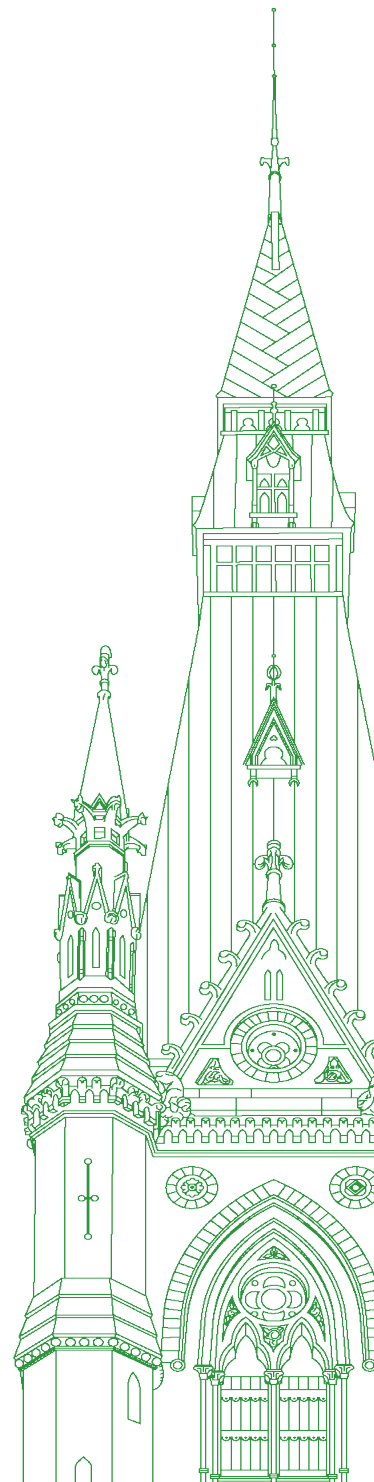
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 059

Tuesday, March 21, 2023



Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

• (1555)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 59 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 June 23, 2022. Members and witnesses will be appearing virtually using Zoom and with us here in the room.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name, and please address comments through the chair. You have the option of using the official language of your choice. If interpretation services discontinue, please get my attention. We'll suspend while they are corrected.

As well, I would like to remind all participants that screenshots are not allowed to be taken in the room or on the screen.

Also, for those appearing virtually, unless you're using an approved House of Commons headset that allows the interpreters to interpret your presentation, I will not recognize you to participate verbally, although those members of the committee appearing virtually will still have the option to vote.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, February 3, 2023, the committee will continue its study of Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

Tests have all been done, Mr. Clerk, on the connectivity and the equipment, so we're okay to go.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin our discussion with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by questioning. I would remind the witnesses that after five minutes I will advise you to conclude your comments so that members of the committee have time to question you.

Appearing virtually, we have the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance, with Hélène Gosselin, the chair; the Canadian Labour Congress, with Bea Bruske, president, and Vicky Smallman, national director, human rights, by video conference; and here in the room with us, we have Child Care Now, with Morna Ballantyne, executive director.

We'll begin with Madame Gosselin.

[Translation]

You have the floor for five minutes.

Hélène Gosselin (Chair, Board of Directors, Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance): Thank you very much. Good afternoon.

My name is Hélène Gosselin and I am chair of the board of directors of the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance, or AQCPE.

As an early childhood expert, the AQCPE provides leadership, representation, outreach and support of a quality system of educational child care centres and coordinating offices, commonly known as CPEs and BCs, for children aged 0 to 5 years. Thank you for inviting us to testify about Quebec's early childhood experience as part of the study of Bill C-35.

In 1996, Quebecers were asked to make a considerable effort. It was the time of “zero deficits”. However, then-premier Lucien Bouchard knew that to achieve his goal, Quebecers would need to be given tools to enable them to participate actively in Quebec's productivity. The rest, as they say, is history.

Today, recent events have served as powerful reminders of the essential character of child education services. The pandemic and the widespread labour shortage propelled what was considered “nice to have” to “must have”. This recognition can also be found in the preamble to the bill, which contains findings from the Quebec experience, as well as from the many longitudinal studies on the positive impacts of such a measure:

... the Government of Canada ... recogniz(es) the beneficial impact of early learning on child care and child development, on the well-being of children and of families, on gender equality, on the rights of women and their economic participation and prosperity and on Canada's economy and social infrastructure ...

This is welcome official recognition. Similarly, the guiding principles that led to the creation of the network of educational child care centres—affordable, inclusive and high-quality services—are also included.

Of all of these, our focus here is on the principle of quality. Why are we interested in quality services? Because it is not just a matter of work-family life balance. Taking care of toddlers means much more than just making sure they are looked after and safe. Trained staff working in the CPE/BC network are not extensions of the home. It is a real social fabric that we wrap around children and their families, enabling them to develop their full potential.

In some cases, it means overcoming a language delay to ensure better educational success. In others, it enables the family to break the cycle of poverty. There are as many examples as there are testimonials, but each has its significance and impacts our society. Child development professionals are able to recognize subtle cues, and to do so at several levels simultaneously. That requires adapted training, specific skills and abilities.

It is also referred to as “structural quality”: the settings, equipment and management that support educational staff, links with other organizations that work with families and links with the health and social services network. To achieve the objectives, experience has also shown us that only one model can fulfill this mandate. The network of early childhood centres was built on community-based, non-profit day care centres, a model for and by the community, managed by boards primarily made up of parent-users and independent of financial considerations, all exclusively for the benefit of children.

This structure directly affects the level of quality offered. Since Quebec implemented the mandatory quality assessment, we are able to rank the different models. A clear difference between for-profit and CPE models emerges. Even with identical funding, as is currently the case between CPEs and subsidized private day care centres, the difference is 30% in favour of CPEs.

However, the network has been driven by political trends and its development has been chaotic. This has led to the proliferation of models and in so doing curtailed the positive impact. Thus, we are reaching out to our counterparts in other provinces: You now have the opportunity to choose the model that will enable you to achieve your early childhood education goals. This decision must be clear, scientifically based and impervious to political interference.

Finally, the desire to secure investments in early childhood is, in our view, an acknowledgement of how important that funding is to people.

● (1600)

While respecting provincial jurisdictions, we see in this bill a bulwark against economic and political uncertainty. Quebec's experience and the many studies, both national and international, speak with one voice: It is a win-win situation when a society invests in early childhood, and we hope that you, parliamentarians, will move in that direction.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gosselin.

[English]

Ms. Bruske, you have five minutes.

Ms. Bea Bruske (President, Canadian Labour Congress): Thank you so much.

Good afternoon. My name is Bea Bruske. I'm the president of the Canadian Labour Congress, and I'm pleased to speak on behalf of Canada's largest labour organization, representing three million workers from every sector of our economy.

The CLC supports Bill C-35 as an important building block in the effort to establish a truly pan-Canadian system of quality, affordable, accessible, inclusive, public and not-for-profit child care.

Canada's unions have been advocating for child care for decades, and we know that it is good for families, good for children and good for our economy. We also know that it is essential for enabling women's labour force participation. If done right, it could be a very important source of quality jobs in a sector that has traditionally been dominated by women, and often Black, indigenous and racialized women, new Canadians and migrant women.

Unions were excited, quite frankly, when the long-term funding was established in the 2021 federal budget, and we were hopeful when the multilateral early learning and child care framework and bilateral agreements were reached with the provinces and territories. However, we know that the devil is always in the details and, along with others in the child care sector, we have expressed some misgivings that there were not enough teeth in these agreements to ensure the outcomes of the new system meet the very high expectations of the parents, workers and communities, and that there was some risk that the effort might result in the further entrenchment of our patchwork, market-based system.

We have a chance to get this right, and that's why this legislation is so very important.

Unions believe that everyone should have the right to the care they need, and that includes the right to early learning and to child care. We further believe that decent work for people working in the sector, whether they're early childhood educators, cooks, administrators, cleaners or others, is deeply connected to the quality of learning and the care that our children receive and our families depend on. We were pleased to see that references to rights are included in this legislation, including the references to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We also like it that the legislation clearly lays out the government's commitment to system building and to enshrining a set of core principles to guide the development of such a system, recognizing the roles of the provinces and territories, as well as those of the indigenous peoples, and the need for programs and services for first nations, Inuit and Métis children and families that are culturally appropriate and led by indigenous peoples.

We were very pleased to see the reference to public and not-for-profit early learning and child care, and we urge the committee to support this language. There is considerable evidence that public and not-for-profit programs and services deliver higher-quality care and better jobs for child care workers, and we do not believe that the diversion of public funds to private interests will help us build the affordable, accessible system that families have been waiting for.

We also support the references in paragraph 7(1)(c) regarding the need for “respect” and valuing “diversity” and meeting the “varying needs” of children and families. Although the text of the bill does mention “inclusive” programs, the need for programs and services that meet the needs of children with disabilities is not explicitly stated, and perhaps it should be.

We are glad to see the reference to a “qualified and well-supported” workforce in paragraph 7(1)(d). We believe it could be further strengthened by more specific reference to what “well-supported” might mean in practice, including decent working conditions, proper compensation commensurate with qualifications, experience, access to ongoing training and other measures necessary to recruit and retain workers. Child care workers have been sounding the alarm about the staffing crisis, and if the system is going to expand to meet the growing needs of families and the ambitious plans of government, a clear workforce strategy is absolutely essential.

We're also pleased to see the legislation enshrine the establishment of the national advisory council on early learning and child care. Ideally, we would like to see workers represented on this council as well. I don't believe that is currently the case; however, that could be something that could be addressed in regulation or practice rather than in legislation.

We would support any amendments aimed at making the functions of the council more concrete or more specific: for example, requiring meaningful consultations with stakeholders, including unions representing child care workers. The council could and also might be more directly mandated to assess progress and implementation of this legislation. Finally, the bill could be strengthened by a requirement for adequate funding to sustain the council's work.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bruske.

Madam Ballantyne, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne (Executive Director, Child Care Now): Thank you for inviting me to appear before your committee.

I'm a member of the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care, but I speak to you today as the executive direc-

tor of Child Care Now, Canada's national child care advocacy organization.

Early childhood education in Canada is far from what it should be. It's unavailable in many communities. Where it's available, wait-lists are long. The quality of programs is uneven. Although parent fees have dropped dramatically over the last year, licensed child care remains unaffordable for too many.

These problems result from the failure of past governments at all levels. For too long they refused responsibility for the provision of early learning and child care, relying instead on private individuals and organizations to set up programs on either a for-profit or a not-for-profit basis. This has meant unplanned, uneven and under supply.

Also, for far too long inadequate public funding has forced service providers to charge high service fees, putting licensed child care out of the financial reach of most families. At the same time, the parent fee revenue collected has never been sufficient to properly compensate educators for their work and to ensure decent working and learning conditions. This is why the child care sector has suffered from a perpetual problem of high staff turnover and it's why it's so difficult to recruit educators to the sector, especially graduates from early childhood education programs.

Almost always governments have responded to these problems ineffectively through short-term patchwork solutions such as salary top-ups, subsidies for some parents and inadequate operating grants of various kinds.

Child care advocates in Canada cheered when the Government of Canada proposed in budget 2021 to spend just under \$30 billion over five years to transform early learning and child care. We celebrated the funding agreements with the provinces and territories, and we welcomed Bill C-35 because it affirms the federal government's long-term commitment to fund early learning and child care and to establish with the provinces and territories systems that could eventually realize every child's right to quality early childhood education.

Going by the experience of other countries, it will take many years to reach the goal declared in paragraph 6(a) of Bill C-35, to have a Canada-wide early learning and child care system that gives all families access to affordable, inclusive, high-quality early learning and child care programs regardless of where they live.

It will take time and it will take spending federal money in the right way on the right things.

That's why in our written submission we propose ways to strengthen the principles in clause 7 of Bill C-35 that are intended to guide federal investments. It's why we also suggest ways to strengthen the accountability mechanisms in the bill.

Unfortunately, I don't have time in my five minutes to expand on our proposed changes, but I do want to take my last minute to emphasize what we don't want changed.

We agree fully with the language in paragraph 7(1)(a) that supports the expansion of early learning and child care operated on a public and not-for-profit basis. It is consistent with the Canada-wide early learning and child care funding agreements agreed to by every province and territory, and it fulfills the promise made in the 2021 budget that was adopted by Parliament.

Federal public funds should be directed to expanding the provision of high-quality early learning and child care, not to expanding opportunities to make private profit or to increasing the equity of privately held real estate and other business assets.

Also, evidence from Canada and internationally tells us that not-for-profit and public early learning and child care providers are generally of higher quality and are more reliable and that public and not-for-profit child care systems are better at serving low-income families.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ballantyne.

We will now open the floor for discussion, beginning with Ms. Ferreri for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Ballantyne, thank you for being here. I know you have worked in this field for a long time and I know you have pointed out a lot of issues we have in child care.

I guess right off the bat we just don't have the accessibility, right? We don't have access. We have so many people still waiting to access it, as you outlined.

I'm asking, I guess, if you're open to the idea that all sectors, specifically those that meet the provincial and territorial standards regardless of business model, have a role to play in providing high-quality accessible child care for Canada.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: The position of our organization is that existing for-profit providers—which I assume is what you're getting at—that are licensed should be able to access the federal funding.

We don't support the expansion of public support for unlicensed child care. We don't think the federal funding should be used to expand the for-profit sector. In this way, we would both recognize the contribution that has been made by those who have established themselves as providers and move towards the aim of a primarily not-for-profit and public system, which is particularly important as public funding for the system increases.

With a reduction in parent fees and the replacement of parent-fee income with public funds, we're seeing a system that will be almost totally publicly funded. We want to make sure now that every dollar that's possible goes towards expanding the provision of services, not to profit.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

I think that if we want to close the gap—because the demand has increased, and it's obviously going to increase tremendously with the affordability piece—what's still missing is the accessibility piece. Based on the numbers that you know, there's no way to close the gap without incentivizing all forms of quality, licensed or standardized care, care that meets the standards of the province or territory. Do you think that would be a good amendment to include so that we can meet the need of families across Canada?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: We fully support increasing access through the expansion of licensed child care. However, I would disagree with your premise that it's not possible to make licensed child care accessible to all without resorting to funding a for-profit sector.

We know from other countries that, in fact, it is very possible to achieve a universal child care system of a very high quality exclusively through expanding, in a very deliberate and conscious way, the provision of not-for-profit and public child care.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you.

I would strongly disagree because, right now, we have 200,000 children just in Ontario alone who are on that wait-list.

Ms. Gosselin, I think the Quebec model is a wonderful way for us to understand what we can do better moving forward. There are still 70,000 children on a waiting list to access child care. What can we do with this bill to ensure that we don't have that same wait-list so that people aren't left out in the cold, so that they have access to quality, affordable child care?

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Hélène Gosselin: Thank you.

Yes, the waiting lists are long in Quebec because we suspended development projects for a decade. If they hadn't been put on hold and we had continued to develop services rather than cut budgets, we would have been able to meet the demand more quickly, and that would have prevented people from ending up on a waiting list.

At the moment, we're facing accelerated development, but also a labour shortage, much like all employment sectors across society. However, there's a way to offer many services, and Quebec is making that plain. We're currently in accelerated development, and CPEs are part of that. Given Quebec's plan to develop services in prefabricated CPEs with high quality standards, we also have faster development projects that aim to provide more places for children who are waiting.

When the family policy was introduced in Quebec, things moved very quickly in terms of development as of 1998. However, things came to a standstill. If that hadn't happened, there wouldn't be so many children awaiting services in Quebec.

[English]

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much for that.

I think what we want here, as a lot of us have said, is to make this as non-partisan as possible. Child care shouldn't be a partisan issue. We want access, and that is the pillar of this bill.

I'm still not seeing the data. If we look at these messages, we see the following: "Even after-school care, my daughter has been on a wait-list for almost three years, and we still haven't gotten a space yet." There's another message from Katie that says, "My son has been on a wait-list for two and a half years."

I guess what I'm asking for is how we incentivize and not divide. This is for you, Ms. Ballantyne: How do we not divide the two sectors? They're both very important in providing that quality child care and access that we desperately need to reduce these wait-lists.

The Chair: Please give a very short answer.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: Well, we certainly don't want to decrease access. We want to try to maintain the current supply and expand on it, but when we're looking at how we expand, we have to think about the kinds of strategies that are going to work.

In the past, what governments have done is exactly what you're proposing to do: to hope that individuals will be incentivized, primarily through the profit motive, to set up shop. That actually has led to the problem we have now, which is inequitable access and the lack of child care in many communities, particularly in communities that can't contribute to making a business work, particularly for profit.

It's so much better to put the public money into expanding a public and not-for-profit system and to do it in a planned and deliberate way to address the access issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ballantyne.

Madam Saks, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

[English]

Ms. Ballantyne: I think I'll expand on where you got cut short on time, because there is a lot of concern about how we balance the demand for spaces.

I'd like to talk about the importance of non-profit care. In your opening remarks, you alluded to the evidence in systems that are built on a non-profit model. I'd like to give you the opportunity to expand on that a bit.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: Well, I think the other witness from Quebec, in her testimony, gave a very good example of what happens.

In Quebec, we actually have three systems. We have a government-supported not-for-profit system, a government-supported for-profit sector, and then a private system that is supported through tax credits by giving money directly to parents.

What we know from the evidence of research that's being done is that the quality is best in the subsidized not-for-profit sector, in what are known as "centres de la petite enfance".

Moreover, as the other witness said, it's not just a question of funding, because even where the funding is the same for the for-profit subsidized sector and the centres de la petite enfance, the quality is better.

The other thing that's really important is that if you have a publicly managed and publicly funded system it can be expanded in a way that really meets the public needs. The public interest comes first, and that's what has to happen.

• (1620)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I'd like to just pierce to points that we heard here today on that.

There's an argument that the private sector is more nimble in building out spaces. A simple yes or no: Would you agree or disagree with that?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: Well, the for-profit private sector has put at the top of their list the need to survive as a business entity, which means making a profit, so it will inevitably go into neighbourhoods and communities where that's possible.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I have a second question.

In terms of quality of care in the for-profit sector, there are some that say the for-profits can offer high-quality care, unique services, specific art space and so on and so forth. I know that in my riding of York Centre the Jewish community has a wonderful not-for-profit day care that's actually inclusive of the entire community, regardless of religion or background. What would you say to that in terms of quality of care and for-profit versus non-profit?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I would say that the not-for-profit and public sector is ideally positioned to give very high-quality care, because every dollar of public funding will go to ensuring that high-quality services are provided.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you.

I'd like to lean in a bit more in terms of ECE workers and the pay model. There's been much discussion about wage grids. Each province submitted one in terms of their agreement. This is sort of the last piercing of the debate that ECEs in the for-profit sector would be paid better or that there would be wage respect that currently.... There is much advocacy on that in terms of enhancing the wages of ECEs, but does the evidence show that a for-profit would pay better than the not-for-profits, or is it the inverse?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: This is my opportunity to reinforce that we need a lot more data. The research we have suggests that in fact wages on average are poorer in the for-profit sector, and I would also let you know that parent fees are higher.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you for that.

Moving along, we do have a lot of research, primarily from Quebec—I had the privilege of visiting the team at Ste-Justine when I was in Montreal earlier this year—about development outcomes in terms of a non-profit, accessible and inclusive system. I'm wondering if you could weigh in on the not-for-profit model in terms of children's development outcomes and where the data is from the models that we do have, both here in Canada and abroad.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I don't know if I'm allowed to do this, but I would really encourage Madame Gosselin to also answer this question.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Perhaps we'll split the time.

Madame Gosselin, you can also [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: What we know is the development outcomes are always better when the quality is higher. We also know that the working conditions and learning conditions contribute to high quality. If you have good working conditions and good compensation systems in place, the outcomes will be better development. As a result, the programs will be of higher quality.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gosselin, you have the floor.

Hélène Gosselin: Studies in Quebec show a major difference in service quality, because the level of quality in non-profit services is 30% higher.

This is somewhat related to the previous question. Non-profit child care is available across Quebec, including the more remote areas. However, for-profit child care providers set up shop in areas like Montreal or Quebec City with high population density, where they have a better chance of doing good business. Coming back to equal opportunity, if non-profit child care can set up shop anywhere, that will certainly bring better access to services and foster development for all children.

Why offer high-quality services? They allow for early detection of developmental challenges and intervention before those challenges become a real issue. Non-profit services are supported by health, social services and child welfare workers, which means we can secure truly equal opportunity for children and they can succeed later in school. Therefore, quality plays a key role in children's development.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gosselin.

Ms. Bérubé now has the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to thank the witnesses attending this meeting and the interpreters, who are doing a really good job.

Ms. Gosselin, you didn't mention this: How do you feel about the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care being created, and who do you think should be on it?

Hélène Gosselin: Establishing a committee is a good tool to ensure enforcement. That said, who should be on it? Organizations representing each province need to be on it. It's also very important to have researchers from various backgrounds to ensure that high-quality services are provided in all provinces across Canada.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You also state that the pandemic and the labour shortage have shed new light on the critical nature of child care services, particularly from an economic perspective, because without them some women would be unable to work.

What effect have the pandemic and the labour shortage had on child development?

Hélène Gosselin: Yes, we're currently experiencing the fallout. The pandemic has wreaked havoc on the most vulnerable families. Among other things, more incidents have been reported at the Youth Protection Branch. The pandemic has isolated families and children. We have families who use services to feed their children, and that's very important in this time of inflation we're experiencing.

When it comes to the labour shortage, it's a vicious circle. Take health services, for example. We don't have enough people who can work in the system right now. We need more workers, but they can't work because they don't have access to child care. Child care used to be a go-to solution when people needed to balance work and family, and now it's become a critical and urgent need to address the labour shortage plaguing all sectors of the economy.

Therefore, child care services don't just meet children's needs, they also help balance work and family, which is very important.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: In your presentation, you state that it's important to have quality child care services. We know that Quebec's child care services are an example to follow, because they do more than just care for children.

Can you tell us more about how quality services affect children?

Hélène Gosselin: The quality of services has declined. The earlier they begin working with children, the earlier they can recognize those who need language stimulation, for example. That means those children have access to language development services as soon as they begin to speak. This gives them better chances of success in school and of integrating better into the school system. Because the challenges are addressed earlier, the children can have better experiences.

Quality services are important across the board. Children who have stimulation needs because they come from vulnerable backgrounds have access to quality food as well as activities to help them develop all facets of their personality. When they enter the school system, they experience inequality less frequently and are more successful.

Quality services play a key role in ensuring equal opportunity.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You also seem to be saying that educators are better placed than parents to determine what's good for child development. Does that mean early childhood education should be mandatory, in your opinion?

Hélène Gosselin: No, absolutely not.

Based on what Quebec and the Accueillir la petite enfance educational program advocate, children are the prime player in their development, and the main responsibility for children's education lies with parents.

It's not our role to usurp the parents' role as educators. Rather, we have a collaborative and supportive relationship in educating children. Close cooperation starts to develop as soon as the child is entrusted to us. It also helps us fill certain gaps if the family is not able to work with their child or need additional tools, or if they need help in their parental role. Our role is to help parents and advise them.

So child care services shouldn't be mandatory. Parents remain the primary educators of their children.

• (1630)

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: For a long time, Quebec went it alone with its family policy and network of education services. In your opinion, why hasn't the model been replicated elsewhere in Canada?

Hélène Gosselin: Quebec had to move faster to close the gap between the male and female employment rates. At the same time, it needed to take action for certain disadvantaged groups, like single mothers.

When the children's educational services network was set up, Quebec very quickly saw an increase in economic productivity among single mothers. It was a societal choice.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Do you think it would be a good idea—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[*English*]

We will now move to Ms. Gazan for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

My first question is for Madam Ballantyne.

We've heard a lot in committee today about the crisis in the child care sector and about expanding it.

We know that the key crisis in the sector has to do with the workforce. That's making it difficult to create the new spaces that are needed to meet the demand to bring down some of the wait-lists that we're talking about. It's one thing to build spaces, but we need trained workers to staff them. What is causing this crisis and how can the federal government help fix it?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: What we have is first and foremost a crisis of retention. We're unable to retain qualified early childhood educators. They leave, most often, after three years in the workforce. They do so because the working conditions are so difficult and because the pay is so low.

We also have an impossible job trying to recruit educators who are qualified to replace those who are leaving.

It's not that there are no qualified educators around who have training; it's that they don't want to work in this sector. They're leaving for higher-paid jobs, particularly in the public education system.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I appreciate that, and I was actually one of those people myself.

Madam Bruske, it's good to see you again, and thank you for your comments on the rights of indigenous peoples. Certainly that's something, you know, that is near and dear to my heart.

That's one of the reasons the NDP is pushing the Liberal government right now to make amendments so that the bill will align with Bill C-15, which affirms that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has application in Canadian law, by including this commitment in the bill to ensure that the government upholds the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent for legislation pertaining to indigenous children. So, thank you for that.

I want to build on the comments by Madam Ballantyne.

We have a workforce crisis. Do you think that Bill C-35 should be amended to include an explicit commitment to decent work for child care staff?

Ms. Bea Bruske: That would absolutely be an amendment we would support because we know that we need a robust workforce strategy to make sure that we can address the recruitment and retention issues in the sector.

We know that making sure that folks want to come to work in the sector and can afford to stay to work in the sector is critical, especially when we know that the heightened need for child care in rural and northern communities is at an all-time high. Recruiting and retaining folks, not just in urban centres but also in rural and northern areas, is critically important.

Finding ways to come up with a workforce strategy for those regions has to be part of this particular discussion. Otherwise, you can build all the centres you want, but if you have no active hands actually taking care of the folks in your care, you still have a problem and are still not going to get any further ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Ballantyne, you know it's no secret that child care now is being pushed to prioritize expansion of not-for-profit and public child care programs.

My question is this, and we hear this debate around the table: What risk to a high-quality, national child care system does the expansion of for-profit care, as was recently announced in Alberta, pose?

We came out with a bill, and then two minutes later they announced over 20,000 for-profit spaces when we haven't seen an expansion of public not-for-profit spaces. What risk does that pose to the expansion of a high-quality, national child care system?

• (1635)

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: There are a number of risks.

One of the things I would say is that putting a lot of emphasis on expanding for-profit care is a real lost opportunity.

The other thing I'd say around risk is that what we know from the for-profit providers and what they have said publicly with respect to the Canada-wide system of early learning and child care is that they're concerned, for example, about the constraints that are put on them by holding down parent fees.

Also, they are concerned about being over-regulated and that it in some way is going to limit their profit margins, as I would suggest. Organizations representing the for-profit sector have said publicly that they want to end public funding, direct operational funding, and instead go back to giving parents money to spend for the child care.

We just know that hasn't worked, so if we allow for the expansion of the for-profit sector, we're going to actually increase the lobby to reduce regulations.

Am I taking up your time? I'm sorry.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have just one question for Madam Bruske.

We've heard these comments. Would you agree with me that the expansion of for-profit child care hurts workers, yes or no, and why?

Ms. Bea Bruske: For-profit absolutely hurts workers because the reality is that you can only get profit by either increasing fees or lowering wages. Having a public, not-for-profit system is the best in terms of providing the quality of care that our children need and in terms of recruiting and retaining the very workers you need to rely on to actually provide that care.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have only 10 seconds. Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Now it's down to five.

Ms. Leah Gazan: What are some ways you think the bill can be strengthened, Madam Ballantyne, to more effectively ensure a

long-term, stable and effective national child care strategy, based on your former comments?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: We've set out some very specific recommendations in our written submission. I can't do it in 10 seconds.

Essentially, we want to strengthen the guiding principles that would guide federal investments because that's what this bill is about. We want to make sure, for example, that federal funds explicitly go to addressing the workforce crisis, the retention crisis, the recruitment crisis. We also want to strengthen the accountability mechanisms in the bill, and those in the bill revolve around reports from the minister to Parliament. We think Parliament—and we say both Houses of Parliament—needs to continue to be engaged in this issue to ensure that the purpose, the declarations and the guiding principles are actually enforced.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

Mrs. Falk, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for their contributions today. As a mother of four young children where child care is an issue, I have lived it and not been able to access it. It is very frustrating, because I'm just one drop in the bucket of the parents who can't access it.

I believe that all parents should have access to affordable child care, but also high-quality care. That matters as well. We have to recognize that there is limited access right now. I believe this bill is picking winners and losers, and it is going to hinder access even more.

I come from a rural community. I represent communities that don't have public child care and don't have not-for-profit care. What happens in those situations when they don't have access to funding to expand? Some of these small communities are growing, because it's more affordable to live in a smaller community as opposed to an urban area. What happens to those children and to those parents if they already have limited access, but maybe their child care provider in that community, or a community farther over, doesn't fall under what the government of the day thinks is important?

Ms. Ballantyne, with regard to access in communities like the ones I've listed that don't have public or not-for-profit care, is it your suggestion that if there is a private day care it should be excluded?

• (1640)

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: No, our position is that if there's an existing for-profit provider, that provider should receive federal support for the best-quality program possible. We also think that wherever you live in Canada, you should have access to high-quality care. The evidence tells us that that means a not-for-profit or a public provider. In fact, it's interesting, on this issue about rural access, that there are small communities in Alberta where the only reason families have access is that the municipality has stepped up to provide public child care of really high quality.

We need to see a lot more than that. If we need incentives, they are incentives to get public employers, municipalities, and other public entities and the not-for-profit sector to help them make sure that every community is served with the highest-quality care.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Do you believe that the parent is the best person to decide what type of care their child receives when they are working or unavailable?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I absolutely think that parents need choice, and the best way to give parents choice is to increase the supply of high-quality early learning and child care.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: We have heard a lot about the labour shortage. I've spoken to lots of teachers as well who are finding it difficult, even in classrooms, just with anxiety and depression. A lot of our youth are struggling with mental health and behaviour issues, and that type of thing. Is any of that discussed in this research that is being referenced? Are any of those types of issues that these child care providers are facing reasons they may be leaving the profession?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: The evidence suggests that it's really about working conditions. I would say a lot of what you're talking about speaks to working conditions and learning conditions. It's a very difficult sector to really do your best and to have personal safety and mental wellness, for sure. The only way to address that is to actually increase public funding and to make sure that the workforce is supported in every way, not just in wages, not just in compensation but also in ensuring good-quality working conditions.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I just have one quick thing, Chair.

Can you please table for the committee this research and data you keep referring to?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: Absolutely. There are volumes of it, but I will.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: That's wonderful. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Falk.

I will remind members to please identify who you want answering a question, when you're questioning.

Mr. Coteau, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

I'm going to give two minutes of my time to Mr. Van Bynen. I know he has a question, so I'll take the first section, then pass it over.

It sounds to me, from what we've heard—not only from the witnesses today but also throughout this entire process—that the public system pays better, the outcomes are better and it ensures more diversity and equity. It also increases access. There are lower fees, so it's more affordable for parents.

Perhaps, Ms. Ballantyne, you could go over those key indicators for outcomes and success—the four or five I mentioned—and confirm that information for the committee.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: First of all, we're talking about both public and not-for-profit systems being better.

A public system of early learning and child care.... A public provider is a government. In most countries with fully developed early child care systems, local government plays a key part—either municipalities or what we know in Canada as school boards. One of the reasons why they pay higher wages is because they have a more secure base of funding. Public employers have that.

The same is true for not-for-profit, but the main difference between not-for-profit and for-profit is that we have to look at the budget and see where the money is being spent. As I said earlier, in a for-profit business, what you're looking at is the bottom line. It's paying your bills and also ensuring you end up with a profit. That's why you're in business.

Not-for-profits don't have that concern. As a result, they tend to spend their money on delivery of service and high quality. That includes ensuring better wages. They also want to make sure, as part of their not-for-profit mission—and this is also true for public employers—that they're accessible, so they try to keep their fees down.

The problem is that neither the for-profit nor not-for-profit sector can keep fees down if public funding is not sufficient. That's why we also call for more public funding.

• (1645)

Mr. Michael Coteau: It sounds as if, when you put the right type of infrastructure in place—stability and predictability, with the right type of funding—the issues the Conservatives brought up about accessibility can be tackled. If the system is funded properly, it creates more opportunity for growth. If it's stable, it creates better recruitment and retention, which addresses labour gaps that may exist. When there's co-operation among the different players, including government and program deliverers, and if that equation works well, it allows for expansion and addresses some of the concerns the Conservatives brought up.

I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Van Bynen at this point, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: He has one minute and a half.

Go ahead, Mr. Van Bynen.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Knowing that, I will ask one quick question of Ms. Bruske.

Quite simply, I will ask you to submit what you mean by putting more “teeth” into the legislation. Could you provide us with a written commentary?

I want to go back to Ms. Gosselin.

I want to talk about the issue of quality. You mentioned there are quality assessments. I would like to know about process, criteria and evaluation for these quality assessments, how often they're done and whether there are incentives for compliance, or consequences for not meeting the quality standards.

If you don't have enough time to do that, can you submit a brief?

The Chair: She has 45 seconds for the answer.

Go ahead, Ms. Gosselin.

[*Translation*]

Hélène Gosselin: In Quebec, external evaluators conduct quality inspections before license renewal, which occurs every five years for subsidized child care centres. Inspections are done on site. If the centre fails inspection or has areas for improvement, a support plan is proposed to ensure that those areas are improved and identify ways to do that. Failure to comply with the support plan and improve the areas identified will result in the centre's license not being renewed.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gosselin.

[*English*]

Mr. Van Bynen, your time is over.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Gosselin and Ms. Ballantyne, do you think it would be a good idea to include a clause in Bill C-35 that would allow Quebec to opt out of this program with full compensation and no strings attached, to avoid negotiations and bickering every five years between the federal and provincial governments?

Hélène Gosselin: Since child care falls under provincial jurisdiction, it sort of goes without saying.

The Quebec network's independence has helped it respond more adequately to needs, so it's very important that service organization remain a provincial jurisdiction. This will ensure that enforcement aligns with each province's realities.

• (1650)

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What do you think, Ms. Ballantyne?

[*English*]

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: We support the asymmetrical nature of the agreement that was reached with the Province of Quebec. We see nothing in this bill that would prevent another asymmetrical agreement from being negotiated in the future.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Ms. Gosselin, I'd like you to further define the benefits of our child care in Quebec, which, as you know, stands as a model.

Hélène Gosselin: Child care services in Quebec come in all shapes and sizes, because they were developed at random over the years. However, the quality of services provided by CPEs, which are subsidized non-profit organizations, has been proven over the years. When their services are evaluated, they must comply. They get very good results, much better results than for-profit child care centres.

Of course, when profit is not a concern, all the money is invested in services for the children, including highly specialized support services to ensure equal opportunity and that even the most vulnerable children can reach their full potential. So that's something that makes the Quebec model and CPEs stand out.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[*English*]

We now go to Ms. Gazan for two and a half minutes to conclude this round of questioning.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

I just want to follow up with you, Madam Bruske.

I asked whether for-profit child care hurts workers, and you provided an explanation as to why it does. We know that one of the biggest barriers to recruiting and retaining child care workers is wages that don't cover the bills. This is one of the biggest barriers. If we want to talk about wait-lists, we can't talk about wait-lists without talking about workers.

What should the federal government be doing to address this worker shortage?

Ms. Bea Bruske: As I noted earlier, we really need, as part of this planning, a robust workforce strategy that sets out prevailing wages in the various different areas across Canada, that sets out educational opportunities for workers to maintain their accreditation and to continuously have upgrading—which benefits children, of course, as well—and we need to really look at strategies to make sure we provide those spots in rural and northern communities. That might mean having some additional supports that workers might need to either relocate to those communities or to be able to stay in those communities and to find housing and to afford to live in those communities as well.

There has to be a broad-based approach. There are a number of nuances. We'd be happy to provide some additional details on what we believe would be contained within a very robust workforce strategy. We need the very workers who are providing that care to also be able to afford that care for their families.

Ms. Leah Gazan: If you could provide that information to committee, that would be wonderful.

Ms. Bea Bruske: We will do so.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Is there anything you would like to add, Madam Ballantyne?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: On this question, the only thing I would add is that it would be very helpful to have a national workforce strategy with respect to early learning and child care—of course, it would be important for every province and every territory to have a strategy, but it would be one supported through federal funding—and also to ensure that best practices in one province can be applied to another, where appropriate.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Building on that, are there any ways you feel the bill could be strengthened? I know I asked that before.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I'll just go back to what I said before.

There is a provision in the bill that requires the minister to report and make a public report on an annual basis. I think it's really important that the minister tables such a report with the Houses of Parliament. It's a democratic thing. Parliamentarians are the representatives of citizens. This is a national project of huge significance with large federal investments. It would be important for Parliament to keep a close eye on developments and hold whatever government is in place to account.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

That concludes the first hour.

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing today. We will suspend for a few moments while we transition to the next panel.

We'll suspend for three minutes.

• (1655)

(Pause)

• (1655)

The Chair: Committee members, if we have your attention then we will resume the second hour of this meeting.

Welcome, Andrea Hannen, from the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario; Martha Friendly from the Childcare Resource and Research Unit; and Maureen Farris from the Strath-MacLean Child Care Centre.

We'll start with Ms. Hannen, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Andrea Hannen (Executive Director, Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario): Thank you, and thanks for the honour of being with you today.

I'm Andrea Hannen from the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario, or ADCO.

ADCO represents independent licensed child care programs, both commercial and not-for-profit. Most of our member centres are run as small businesses, the majority of which are owned by ECEs, early childhood educators. Others are owned by Ontario-certified teachers, Montessori teachers or internationally trained professionals in early education. We also have not-for-profit member centres run by churches, temples and community groups.

In Ontario, there are only enough licensed spaces to support about 25% of children under five, so ADCO shares your goals of expanding access, making care more affordable and ensuring it's of high quality.

So far, we've heard a lot about the aspirations the government has for the Canada-wide early learning and child care program, or CWELCC. We haven't heard much about the challenges facing it though. ADCO is suggesting amendments that could help prevent these challenges from becoming systemic barriers to the program's success.

We need to keep in mind that although the federal government helps fund it, child care is a provincial responsibility. All Canadian provinces have well-established, highly regulated child care systems supported in part by provincial tax revenues, and within each province there's an existing network of licensed spaces. Already half of Canadian provinces have had to amend their CWELCC agreements. Staffing shortages are a big part of this, and few provinces can run their existing systems at full capacity.

In Ontario, many centres have closed entire rooms or shortened their hours because there's not enough staff. It's not just about wages and working conditions, although both are really important. It's that we can't pull ECEs out of thin air. Provinces can expand ECE diploma programs or work with the federal government to recruit more child care professionals from abroad, but that can take years, and families can't wait that long.

Families are eager for \$10-a-day child care, but there aren't enough spaces to accommodate them. Staffing shortages will make it hard to expand the sector fast enough to meet the needs of a growing population.

To address this, ADCO is suggesting changes to the bill to reflect the fact that families use a variety of child care solutions. Rather than trying to create a single funded solution that may not currently be available, the CWELCC could simply focus on supporting families. The bill could allow provinces to offer families more flexible funding that follows the child. This approach would not only help more families access care now but also reduce the administrative burden on licensees, giving them more time to focus on the children.

ADCO is deeply concerned that many of Canada's existing centres could be at risk of closure because they fall outside of the bill's preferred model. They aren't in the public or not-for-profit spheres, yet they're highly regulated for quality. While many of these centres are covered by the current CWELCC agreements, the language of the bill could make continuing to fund these centres difficult or impossible once the current agreements expire.

Paragraph 7(1)(a) of the bill needs to be amended to include all licensed child care. This is a matter of practicality, because the last thing anybody wants is for Canadians to wind up with fewer licensed spaces as a result of the government passing this bill.

The committee has heard a lot about the differences between not-for-profit care and care provided by centres run as small businesses or larger companies. However, within each province all licensed child care programs are bound by law to adhere to the same standards of quality, no matter what their incorporated auspice is. To suggest that there's a difference is to malign the hard work of the provincial inspection officials who devote themselves to ensuring that all regulated programs are delivering quality care.

My last point is about the costs associated with the bill being so specific about the types of care to be funded. It takes a tremendous amount of new government bureaucracy to try to transition Canada's existing systems to the single model proposed in the bill. While some people worry that taxpayer dollars could wind up funding undue profits, the bigger risk may be the creation of a program that delivers more government bureaucracy than actual child care.

In closing, I'd like to thank the committee for its work. I would also ask that you consider the amendments that ADCO and others have put forward to broaden the focus of the bill to support all families and all child care programs. Families are and always will be in the best position to know what will work best for their children.

Thanks.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hannen.

Now, Ms. Friendly, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Ms. Martha Friendly (Executive Director, Childcare Resource and Research Unit): Hello, I'm Martha Friendly. I'm the executive director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, CRRU. I think you have my written brief, which I submitted to the clerk. I'm just going to speak for five minutes, and it's going to be a small summary of that.

CRRU is a small child care and family policy research institute. It began at the University of Toronto in 1982, and it's been an independent non-profit organization since 2007.

I have been a policy researcher in child care for almost 50 years. I've written many papers, reports, popular articles and several books. I've worked on child care internationally. I've been a member of various government expert groups.

One of the main ideas that has guided CRRU's work is the idea that good policy-making needs a solid foundation of good evidence. That's been one of our guiding principles.

Since the earliest days, CRRU has urged governments at all levels to work together to establish an early learning and child care system based on the premise that child care is a public good. Thus, we've applauded the introduction of the Canada-wide early learning and child care plan, CWELCC, but we continue to point out ways that its implementation can be strengthened.

We all know that quality child care for all is essential in a 21st century society, but how it's set up and designed is especially and critically important. Why? It's because a well-designed child care system can meet multiple goals at the same time. However, a child care market with child care deserts or poor-quality services does not deliver the same results.

Bill C-35 is a key component as Canada begins to build its child care system. Legislation is important for setting out the high-level goals, aspirations, principles and objectives that we need to transform Canada's piecemeal child care market into a high-quality system, that is, a public good and part of our community infrastructure.

As a dedicated researcher, I find that the federal government's overall policy approach to child care is generally consistent with the best available evidence. That being said, though, I want to make several recommendations aimed at strengthening Bill C-35, and the rest of my comments are going to be about the recommendations that I'm going to make.

The first thing that I want to recommend is strengthening the language that sets out the division. The importance of early learning and child care for children, women, gender equality, families and the economy is quite well represented in the legislation's preamble. However, the Government of Canada's vision in paragraph 5(a) is inconsistently tentative. Thus, I suggest amending paragraph 5(a) to read, "the Government of Canada's vision for a Canada-wide universal, high-quality early learning and child care system that is envisioned as a public good," which, I think, would strengthen and make it more consistent with the principles in the preamble.

The second recommendation I want to make is to strengthen the rights-based language, which I was very pleased to see in the preamble, linking the new system to international human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, CEDAW and the social development goals. Therefore, I suggest amending paragraph 6(a) slightly to declare the Government of Canada's obligation "to support and ensure establishment and maintenance of a Canada-wide child care system". This would be consistent with the federal government's role as the responsible state party identified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the comments of UN committees reviewing Canada's compliance.

The third recommendation I want to make has already had a lot of discussion. I want to support the federal approach limiting for-profit care with regard to expansion while permitting existing for-profit child care to receive public funding on the same basis as not-for-profits, which is the government's approach at this particular point.

The legislation touches on this in paragraph 7(1)(a). I suggest strengthening this clause for at least two reasons. The first reason is that, as we've already discussed, there is abundant research showing negative associations between for-profit ownership and key quality indicators, including the number of qualified staff, their wages, working conditions and support, staff turnover and morale, and that observed what we call "process quality".

- (1705)

I actually—

- (1710)

The Chair: If you could, please conclude.

Ms. Martha Friendly: I ask whether I can table a paper we produced that summarizes all this research. I'd be happy to do so.

I want to mention the second reason why I make this recommendation. The reality is that child care, especially when there's public funding available, has become a favourite asset for international private equity firms—

The Chair: Ms. Friendly, I have to ask you to conclude your comments. You can table any documents you have. You'll have opportunities in the questioning round.

Ms. Martha Friendly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, please, Ms. Farris. You have five minutes.

Ms. Maureen Farris (Director, Strath-MacLean Child Care Centre) : Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the child care community. I'm grateful to be here, today, to share with you some areas of concern regarding Bill C-35 and the Canada-wide early learning and child care program from the perspective of a director, as well as others throughout the child care community, including educators, families and children.

I would like to start by acknowledging that the intention of Bill C-35 is an honourable one: a national child care plan that includes high-quality, accessible and affordable child care for all who need it. Bill C-35 is certainly moving in the right direction. However, there are parts of the bill that require refining, in order to meet the

core principles it initially set out to meet: affordability, accessibility, inclusivity, quality, flexibility and collaboration.

Bill C-35 sets out a vision and core principles for a national child care plan, and the child care community is appreciative that this committee and the federal government are working to build on the plan and improve it, in order to make it accessible to all Canadians. To do so, there is a need for the expansion of child care programs and improvements to compensation that values educators. We need trained early-childhood educators to make expansion possible.

Bill C-35 is intended to ensure equity and sustainability. In its current state, the Canada-wide early learning and child care plan, or CWELCC, is not equitable or sustainable. This program is terrific in theory, facilitating access to high-quality early learning and child care programs and providing funding to make child care more affordable for families. However, it is vital that the federal government look at the actual impact this program has on families, children, educators and organizations.

I would like to acknowledge that the Canada-wide early learning and child care program is fantastic for our families. These families have access to high-quality early learning programs that are now more affordable. This is incredibly important to the families we serve. However, as I mentioned, CWELCC is not equitable. It is not equitable for families on the wait-list that currently don't have child care. As the media continues to report on \$10-a-day child care, our wait-lists are growing daily, which leads to further inequities.

In Peterborough, which is where I'm from, we have approximately 3,500 children on the wait-list across the city and county, and that number continues to grow. While this may be a provincial jurisdiction, simply put, we do not have the educators or physical space to create more child care places. We cannot create access to affordable child care without qualified, well-paid educators. It's important to recognize there is no access without educators.

The Canada-wide early learning and child care plan is also not equitable for families with children in care but whose children are not all eligible, under the guidelines of the program. For example, in our organization, we have several families with a school-age child in our before- and after-school programs, for which they pay \$24 per child per day. These children have siblings in our preschool program, for which the family pays \$19.85 per child per day. The children in our before- and after-school programs are there for a maximum of four hours of care. The children in our preschool program are there for up to 10 hours of care and receive all the associated education and outdoor programming, as well as two snacks and a hot lunch daily.

As you can see, families pay significantly more for less programming and fewer hours of care for their school-age child. Where is the equity in that?

We also have families that, beginning in the fall, will have two children in our primary after-school program. One of their children will be in grade 1 and the other in junior kindergarten. The JK child is eligible for the CWELCC fee reduction, whereas the child in grade 1 will not be eligible. As a result, these families will pay \$17 for the child who is not eligible for a fee reduction, but only \$12 for the child who is eligible. These children are in the same program with the same educators, and with access to the same programming and snack. Everything is the same, yet families will pay \$5 more per day for a child who is not eligible. Again, where is the equity in that?

Furthermore, CWELCC is not equitable for educators. Bill C-35 states that high-quality early learning and child care programs will be provided through the use of a qualified and well-supported early childhood education workforce. However, in Ontario, at least, that is certainly not the case. While I again acknowledge that wage grids are a provincial and territorial jurisdiction, I would like to share, with this committee, some facts about the workforce in Ontario. As of January 2023, early childhood educators in Ontario are eligible for a wage floor of \$19 per hour. As that amount includes wage enhancement, the wage floor is actually only \$17 per hour.

• (1715)

Governments at all levels must focus on recognizing registered early childhood educators as professionals. They are professionals who educate our children, following a curriculum and a pedagogy routed in child development practices.

These professionals educate and care for young children, support their families and work collaboratively with other educators.

They are governed by the College of ECEs, as well as a code of ethics and standards of practice, while working within guidelines laid out in the Child Care and Early Years Act. ECEs are required to strictly adhere to all of these.

Our registered early childhood educators are not glorified babysitters. They need to be given the respect of a professional, which includes a professional wage—

The Chair: Ms. Farris, please conclude shortly. If you could, bring your comments to a conclusion.

Ms. Maureen Farris: Certainly. I'm sorry about that. Let me skip ahead.

Both the federal and provincial governments are promising to increase child care spaces. However, it's impossible to do so without the workforce to support and sustain this. Without adequate staffing, we cannot create more spaces.

As someone who operates two child care centres and sits on various committees, I can tell you that the biggest hurdle our child care community is currently facing is staffing. In fact, even the media is honing in on this. They admit that child care will be facing a staffing shortage and a staffing crisis by 2025.

I would argue that we're already in that crisis. What you may not be aware of is the incredible amount of pressure on frontline staff.

In spite of all the mounting pressure, Bill C-35 does not contain a clear staff retention plan. We need strong leadership in developing a workforce strategy. Otherwise, creating more child care spaces and, therefore, ensuring access to quality care are unrealistic expectations.

I have a lot more to say, but I will conclude, because you've asked me to do so.

It is my hope that the ideas shared at this committee meeting will help to refine Bill C-35 and the national child care plan so that they remain an excellent solution for families and their children, and that they are also equitable for educators, while being sustainable for organizations.

Investment in the early years is the best use of national funds. Every dollar invested in early learning and care is returned exponentially in our communities and the economy.

Bill C-35 needs to ensure that the focus is on the welfare of children, which is ensured through high-quality early learning and care provided by qualified early childhood educators.

It is truly my desire, and that of the child care community, that Bill C-35 does what it originally intended, which is ensure high-quality, accessible, inclusive and affordable child care for all who need it.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Farris. You'll get a chance to expand on that during questioning.

Before we open the floor to questions, I want to advise that I anticipate adjourning around 5:50. Before we do that, we need a few minutes to discuss our plans going forward, since we've had two meetings displaced because of other agenda items.

I will now open the floor to questions. We will begin with Ms. Ferreri for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much.

Thank you to our witnesses.

As the critic for this file, I've had the opportunity to listen to thousands of parents and families.

Ms. Friendly, what's really disheartening is that I feel, whether you intended to or not, that you're really pitting these home-based, entrepreneur, small-business-operated child cares against the public system.

My child went to a home-based child care. It was amazing. If you say that they don't have quality, I feel, as the critic, it is my job to voice that they are absolutely quality people who look after our children. I want that on the record.

I'm going to turn to Andrea, if I may call you that. In your comments, you mentioned the risk of creating a system that offers more bureaucracy than care. Can you explain to the committee what you mean by that?

Ms. Andrea Hannen: I would argue that it's already happening.

The data collection and the reporting requirements under the CWELCC program are pretty labour-intensive for child care licensees.

I've talked with a lot of licensees about this. The consensus seems to be that at minimum, so far, the CWELCC is taking about four hours of a supervisor's time every week, just for the paperwork related to the CWELCC. That's over 200 hours per year that could have been used to help support frontline staff or to work directly with the children.

I can quote one of our own operators about this. He said that the impact is that the time he would normally use running his day care is now dedicated to reading government memos and responding to demands for data and reports. It used to be that he would get emails from his staff with room inspections, playground inspections and so on, and he would either send them a quick note to thank them for keeping up the quality, or stop by their work areas to go over any issues they may be having. Now he can't do that. He doesn't have the time. He's stuck in the office, rather than interacting with staff and families and being able to monitor quality and equipment needs.

• (1720)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

I think it does take a village to raise a child, as we've said multiple times, and we need all all hands on deck here to work together.

The CBC recently reported that 16,000 kids are enrolled in the YMCA's 35,000 licensed spaces. That means there are 19,000 kids who don't get access to care in the YMCAs of the GTA. Every new centre that opens or gets renovation money to create more spaces seems to be sitting empty or is not at capacity. Do you think the quality is going to be compromised in combination with what Andrea has just told us about making this bureaucratic?

I would like to direct that to Ms. Farris.

Ms. Maureen Farris: Do I think that the quality would be compromised in what capacity...?

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: With the way the bill is currently written, do you think quality will be compromised for child care and accessing child care?

Ms. Maureen Farris: I genuinely worry about the ability to provide quality care if we don't have the workforce to support and sustain it. In all my commentary on this, I keep coming back to "it's all about the workforce". We are currently in a staffing crisis. We have an incredible shortage of staff in the area, and that's why we can't create spaces either.

Yes, I do worry about the impact on the quality if we can't get the staff we need to support these programs.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you.

Andrea, if I could go back to you, could you give an example, or is there an example, of another time when a government program designed to increase access to child care has actually resulted in centre closures?

Ms. Andrea Hannen: Yes, it has, actually. I would say that happened when the Province of Ontario rolled out its government-run full-day kindergarten program in public schools—FDK. Prior to that, a lot of Ontario families relied on licensed child care centres to provide kindergarten programming.

In the first five years of the full-day kindergarten rollout, which moved a lot of the kindergarten programming into public schools, Ontario lost more than a thousand licensed child care centres. Those centres provided child care spaces not just for kindergarten-aged children, but for children in all age groups. It seemed that the smaller not-for-profit centres were actually the hardest hit by that.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much, Andrea.

Ms. Farris, do you feel that with the way Bill C-35 is currently written it could create a two-tiered system of child care? Basically, those who are lucky enough or who win the lottery have a spot, but those who are waiting do not.

Ms. Maureen Farris: Yes, I definitely do have concerns. That exact system could happen.

As I've mentioned, there are so many children who sit on the wait-list and do not have a space, and there are operators who have chosen not to opt into CWELCC and can therefore provide or offer spaces to those families. Yes, that would absolutely create a two-tiered system. Families who could afford to pay for more expensive care would be able to do so, and families who can't may get sub-standard care, unfortunately.

I do feel that this bill has the opportunity, though, to support the not-for-profit sector in securing and building better spaces.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much.

I need a quick yes-or-no answer from all three of you. You can just shake your head. Yes or no, were you consulted by the government on how to improve or create a national workforce strategy to meet the demand of the labour crisis in early childhood educators?

For the record, Chair, none of them are saying yes.

Thank you.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ferreri.

We have Mr. Collins for six minutes, please.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses for appearing today.

I've had the opportunity to meet with non-profit care providers in Hamilton. I've also had the opportunity to read some recent information that was provided at my former place of work at the City of Hamilton as it relates to the progress we're making parochially in the city of Hamilton. I can say the legislation to date has been a game-changer for us in my neck of the woods. We're seeing 200 to 300 spaces a year that will be created over the next number of years. We've seen families receive reductions in their fees in the thousands and thousands of dollars.

But I do have some concerns I want to raise today. They're really about the implementation and the service delivery and about how the provinces are helping or not helping as relates to many of the issues that have been raised by witnesses.

Maybe I'll turn to Ms. Friendly.

First and foremost, as relates to the non-profit versus profit scenario that's been talked about and highlighted today, and certainly has in our past meetings with other witnesses, I heard something today that I had to scratch my head about, which was just that if somebody has a licence, a government licence, then it must be true that they're providing the same level of service across the board, whether they're a for-profit or a not-for-profit. I've been an elected official for a long time. I would point to the provision of long-term care services in the province of Ontario as an example of how just because you have a licence, that doesn't mean you're doing it properly and it doesn't mean there's the same level of service and outcomes.

Can I ask your opinion as it relates to some of the comments that were made previously about the provision of services in the not-for-profits and the outcomes of those versus those in the private sector?

Ms. Martha Friendly: A licence is supposed to be a floor. It has never been assumed that a licence, in other words being compliant with the regulations, translates necessarily into quality. Quality is above that. The Ontario government used to say that very clearly. I'm quite familiar with the research on quality of a whole variety of kinds. It is true that licensed child care centres actually have variable quality even if they're licensed. I think you have to dispel that myth. A licence is not the same as quality.

The issue of for-profit and non-profit child care has been with us in Canada for as long as I can remember. I've been working on child care since the 1970s, and the discussion is always the same. Putting that aside, it is definitely clear that the motivation to make a profit, which is usually the objective of a business—and this is not to say anything about anybody on the panel here, because I've never seen your centres, Maureen.... In general, research in a wide number of areas shows that the quality of for-profit child care is not as good as that of non-profit and public child care. A lot of it would have to do with the need to make a profit.

Most of the budget is for staff, so when you have a child care budget, 85% to 90% in a non-profit budget is generally for staff

compensation. If you're going to make a direct profit, that's the best place for it to come from. That's why wages are generally lower, turnover is generally higher and education is lower, because even in places, in countries or provinces, where there is a wage scale, you can hire lower on the scale so you get less-expensive staff.

There is other research that looks at things like decision-making and what impact that has on staff. If you think about what makes quality, it's reflective, well-qualified staff who have the latitude to make decisions about what they're going to be doing in their programs. Sometimes—not always, but sometimes—you find very intrusive kinds of decision-making from higher management. When you get into larger companies and you move out of owner-operated centres, very often you have decisions being made by a head office in another country.

So I think the picture of why quality is—

• (1730)

Mr. Chad Collins: Ms. Friendly, can I interject? I appreciate that answer. I have less than a minute now, and I'd very quickly like to ask you about what you're hearing from service providers.

When I met with service providers in Hamilton, I met with Wesley, St. Matthew's and Umbrella Family centre representatives. They talked about quality and specifically about wages. We've heard a lot about the province's floor that they've established here. It's hard to attract and retain people for \$18 or \$19 an hour. What are you hearing in that regard in terms of what the province should be doing as it relates to retention of and encouragement of people to get into the industry with higher wages?

Ms. Martha Friendly: Wages are kind of the core of the workforce issue. While they're not all there is to it, they're undeniably the core. I think in Ontario that wage floor, which is so low, and it actually is only of benefit in those instances where the lowest wages are already being paid. It brings them up to a low standard. I think a lot of people working in the sector are really offended by it.

I think coming out of the pandemic, when people working in child care worked really, really hard in difficult circumstances, it was their 15 minutes of fame. They were briefly essential. Now they're not so essential when it comes to paying them better, and even talking to this sector about what it is they want—career ladders, further education, and the opportunities you would get in better-paid work.

I agree with Ms. Farris about the workforce. It is absolutely central to the success of this program and it is absolutely essential to expansion, which is another really important issue we've touched on. I'm hearing that the workforce doesn't buy the wage floor and isn't going to come back for those kinds of wages in Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Friendly and Mr. Collins.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To all the witnesses, thank you for taking part in this meeting. It's important, because we're talking about the future of our young children.

Bill C-35 neither defines what child care is, nor does it give any indication of the age range in which children will be covered by the Canada-wide early learning and child care system. In your view, is that a problem and can you speak to the impact that will have?

[English]

Ms. Martha Friendly: If you're asking me whether I think treating it as an asymmetrical agreement is a problem and will create a problem in the program in the future, I've always supported an asymmetrical approach in Canadian federalism. I think it's critical to the success of this program that Quebec be treated differently. Quebec did pioneer a child care system that some elements of the proposed CWELCC are based upon.

Obviously, and I think people do realize it, Quebec itself has a way to go, but given the structure of Canadian federalism, which is a given, I think this is the only way to move forward. I really support it. I don't think it will harm the program in the future.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Ms. Farris, what do you think?

[English]

Ms. Maureen Farris: I apologize. I didn't hear the beginning of the question. My interpretation function wasn't on properly. Is it possible to have the question restated, please?

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Okay. Bill C-35 neither defines what child care is, nor does it give any indication of the age range in which children will be covered by the Canada-wide early learning and child care system. In your view, is that a problem and can you speak to the impact that will have?

• (1735)

[English]

Ms. Maureen Farris: Regarding the age in the CWELCC program, they're aiming specifically for children of ages zero to six. Any child over the age of six is not eligible for any kind of fee reduction. Obviously, we still provide care for those children, but they're not eligible for the fee reduction.

As I mentioned earlier, it results in a big inequity for those families who have school-aged children versus children who are in some of our younger full-day programs. There are even children who are in the same program where one child is in junior kindergarten and therefore under the age of six and thus eligible for fee reductions, and the family is paying more for the exact same care for their school-aged child.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

Ms. Hannen, would you like to add something?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Hannen: I don't disagree at all with what the previous panellist said. I think that is correct.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: All right.

Ms. Friendly, are there any other key items that should be added to Bill C-35? Do you have any concerns about the bill?

[English]

Ms. Martha Friendly: Are there any missing parts? I think there are things that could be further elaborated. The parts are there. I agree that the workforce is only mentioned; it really needs to be strengthened and elaborated on. I also think something that's missing is any kind of recognition of the idea of inequity. There's nothing to really ensure that low-income families, vulnerable families or families who are not in the child care picture as much now, will really have any opportunity to become part of it. I'd like to see that discussed a little more.

Some of the definitions and the principles could be strengthened. I don't see things that are missing, but I see a number of places that are quite important that could be elaborated on.

As for expansion, I'm not sure how to do this in a bill, though I thought about it. I would see much more of it...which is why I said there's an obligation on the part of the federal government to ensure that child care is available. That is something other countries have done, which has been quite effective, when you have the correct structure, in motivating expansion and structuring expansion in a public and planned way.

Those are things I see in there that are only touched on, but could be elaborated on.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What do you think, Ms. Hannen?

[English]

Ms. Andrea Hannen: Are there missing components to the bill? What I would be somewhat concerned about is that we have to be a little careful about inequities, in that there are very lengthy waiting lists. Right now, people who have a space, keep that space. However, we can't create spaces fast enough to serve all of the other folks, particularly the families who really need child care in order to put a roof over their heads.

System expansion, if we can't do it quickly enough, certainly leads to a level of inequity. I hate to hear reports already from operators that some quite well-off families are using the less expensive spaces almost as drop-in care, because the spaces have become less expensive under the universality element of this program. Really, they are using it as drop-in care and they don't actually need the spaces, yet there are other families who desperately need the spaces in order to go to work and support their children. There is some inequity, and I'm not sure how to solve that in the bill.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Bérubé.

Ms. Gazan, you have six minutes, and that will conclude this round.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

Madam Farris, in your jointly submitted brief, you described the wage floor of \$18 an hour set by the Ontario government as an insult to early childhood educators. As a former EC provider, I agree with this wholeheartedly. It's totally unacceptable and disrespectful.

What is the human impact of these inadequate wages and the lack of benefits on workers, on the children they're educating and on your ability to deliver child care programming?

• (1740)

Ms. Maureen Farris: It's very disheartening for the staff. Honestly, when that wage floor was announced, it was like a punch in the gut to our staff. Not only is the wage floor really low, but there also is a cap or a ceiling of a maximum of \$25 per hours—\$23 if you take out the wage enhancement. Again, our staff doesn't have any room for growth within their careers. They're going to hit that ceiling really quickly. Then there is also a lack of benefits in some organizations. There are no pensions.

I feel that a national minimum wage for early childhood educators would be a really valuable component to Bill C-35.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Would you agree with the statement that unless the deal provides workers with livable wages and benefits, we're going to continue to have waiting lists and a crisis in developing a national child care strategy?

Ms. Maureen Farris: Absolutely.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

I have another question for you.

Your brief says that you are “concerned that many larger corporations are now viewing child care as a profit-driven pursuit”, and that this is “not the system that we imagine for our community.”

How would an expansion of private corporate child care at the expense of not-for-profit providers like yours harm families?

Ms. Maureen Farris: In our small community we have two amazing for-profit centres. I just want to give them a shout-out because they are incredible and they really are concerned about quality child care.

However, in our small community, a big box style for-profit centre would definitely be detrimental to quality programming. It is because those larger corporations have a focus on profit over quality care.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I know in the child care legislation it says to prioritize not-for-profit public care. Knowing that there are a lot of good child care providers, do you think the priority should be public not-for-profit care?

Ms. Maureen Farris: I think that the priority should be public not-for-profit care, but I also think that we need to really focus hard on the centres themselves and the kind of quality they are providing.

As I mentioned, the two small centres we have here are like “mom and pop” style for-profit centres. They offer amazing, quality care. We have wonderful working relationships with those two centres.

However, the majority of care offered in this town is public not-for-profit care.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have a question for Madam Friendly.

What are some examples of countries that have gotten it right in their child care programs that Canada should emulate?

In the alternative, what are some cautionary examples for us to avoid, particularly regarding the role of for-profit child care?

Ms. Martha Friendly: Actually, the countries that always come out the best in international rankings by organizations like UNICEF and the OECD, are actually the Nordic countries, particularly Sweden and Iceland.

Are they perfect? I wouldn't argue they're perfect because if you talk to people from these countries, there are things that they don't like.

The countries that always do the worst are the countries where they have a child care market where they haven't developed....

In our one year that this has been in play.... This is only the first year. Those countries have been developing their child care systems for years. There are written descriptions of how they did it, what the setbacks were, what the pitfalls were and what they did right. There's a great one about Sweden and how it developed. It's not perfect; it goes up and down.

The countries that do the worst are the countries.... I will comment on the for-profit issue here. Australia is probably the best known example of a country that became dominated by large corporate firms, even before the private equity companies got into the game. New Zealand is in the news right now because private equity firms just want to assetize child care. They're not even child care companies; they just bought them up. It's a problem to have small, better-quality child care that can be bought up because that's mostly the way these large financializations have occurred in child care.

There's a very big study in the U.K. of how the money works—

• (1745)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Would you be able to submit other examples to committee in a brief?

That would be very helpful.

Ms. Martha Friendly: Absolutely. I'll submit some stuff in writing.

Ms. Leah Gazan: It's just because I have limited time and I have one other question for Madam Farris.

You mentioned in your brief that transparency is vital so that public funds are being spent wisely.

Do you support amending Bill C-35 to add stronger reporting requirements so that people know what advice an advisory council is providing the minister and for the minister's report to include a detailed summary of all information regarding how federal money is being spent?

Ms. Maureen Farris: All I can really confirm for you.... Yes, I agree that there needs to be the transparency for the money that is being spent. Right now, there are a lot of requirements on operators. We have to provide our audited financial statements annually to our CMSMs, and then those are eventually provided to the provincial government. I assume that they are then also provided to the federal government for their review as well.

We have a lot of paperwork, as Ms. Hannen pointed out, a lot of paperwork that we have to do on a regular, consistent basis for the CWELCC program. That is taking away from our time for being with the children and our families and our staff and supporting those people who are in our programs, but I do believe that we need to ensure our public dollars are spent very carefully so we can assure that quality care is still being provided to the children and their families.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

Thank you to the witnesses for your presentations before committee today.

We're still in public, so I'm going to use a few minutes to ask the clerk to give an overview.

The witnesses can excuse themselves from the meeting and virtually.

Again, thank you for your time.

We have a few minutes. As you know, committee members, we had two meetings displaced. House operations gave us three options. We said yes to all three. Then they came back and said, "no", "no" and "yes".

The one option we have currently is for next Thursday evening from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. As chair, I have scheduled a meeting for next Thursday from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. to continue with the committee, with witnesses that will be scheduled then.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): This is to make up for...?

The Chair: This Friday's meeting interfered with President Biden's visit.

We're still off one. We're still checking on resources, but I don't have anything to offer to committee at this time.

Mr. Wayne Long: For that week, it would be Thursday and Friday, then?

The Chair: Next week, we will be meeting Thursday evening from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Friday morning as regularly scheduled. Tuesday is budget day.

Ms. Gray, go ahead.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that information. I appreciate that.

At this time, I would like to move the following motion. I will say really quickly that this is a motion that everyone has had for a couple of weeks. This is our standard motion to call the ministers for estimates.

The Chair: My understanding is that the motion is in order.

Go ahead, Ms. Gray.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you very much.

I will read it really quickly:

That, pursuant to the Order of Reference from the House dated Wednesday, February 15, 2023, the Committee invites: the Minister for Employment, Workforce Development, and Disability Inclusion; the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development; the Minister of Housing, Diversity and Inclusion; the Minister of Labour; the Minister of Seniors; to appear for no fewer than 2 hours each regarding the Supplementary Estimates (C) 2022-2023 and the Main Estimates 2023-2024. That relevant department officials be invited to appear with the Ministers at the same meetings including the respective Chief Financial Officers; that these meetings take place as soon as possible, but no later than April 28, 2023.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you.

You have heard the motion. It is in order.

Recognizing that we are running short on time, is there any discussion?

Mr. Long, go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Long: Mr. Chair, I have some thoughts.

If you add it up and take a quick look at how many meetings we have left until the end of the year, I think we're looking at probably between 12 and 14 meetings. Time will move quickly on us, and we have a lot that we still need to do. I would respectfully like to suggest an amendment to MP Gray's motion.

Do you want me to read out the whole thing and then throw this in, or just the amendment?

The Chair: You have the floor. It's your option to make an amendment if you choose.

Mr. Wayne Long: It's to say, after the words "Minister of Labour; the Minister of Seniors", the following:

and for all ministers to appear during the same meeting with one panel composed of three ministers and a second panel composed of two ministers regarding the Supplementary Estimates...

and so on.

In past years, we have had meetings with four ministers in one meeting. To me, to take up five meetings with these ministers—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Wayne Long: What's that...?

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: For me to take up five meetings, that is, over 30% of our time for the ministers.... We've had ministers here—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Not on supplementary [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes, but regardless, I think we've had ministers available to join us at HUMA so far at a level that I've certainly never seen. I think their accessibility has been really good. Again, I think that instead of having five meetings tied up with ministers.... With my amendment, we have three and two for one meeting, and they'll appear no later than May 31.

The Chair: You have the amendment, which is up for debate.

I have Mrs. Falk on the amendment.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair.

I think there are other ways this committee can be more responsible with time, like doing scheduling and planning in a subcommittee. There are other areas that can be trimmed.

Through you, Chair, to Mr. Long, as opposed to skirting ministerial accountability, at minimum.... These are the main estimates. I don't see why we can't have time with the appropriate ministers on something that is specific to the main estimates.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Gray, did you have your hand up? I'll then see Ms. Gazan.

Mrs. Gray is first, and then it's Ms. Gazan.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As a reminder, these are the supplementary estimates and the main estimates, so this covers a wider range than just one of those. We have to remember, too, that, yes, we have had ministers here, but ministers have been relating specifically to legislation. That was appropriate. They came. It was their legislation. It made sense.

We also had a Liberal motion on housing. That was a great study that we did.

Everything that we've done here has been.... We had the estimates ministers, as well.

This is just normal practice. It's very reasonable to have them. This committee just happens to have this many ministers. There are other committees that might only have one. That's the way this is. Perhaps we can even look at scheduling extra meetings if we need to, but this is just a normal course of business.

I am open to an amendment to potentially move this to May 12 to give us a bit more time. Of course, we don't want to do anything to delay the work that's being done at the committee on legislation like Bill C-35, but that's something we can look at that would allow more scheduling time for ministers.

Those are my comments. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are in discussions on the amendment. The legislation takes precedence over anything else we do, so we will stick with that.

We have House resources until six o'clock, so we will adjourn at six if the discussions continue.

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

• (1755)

Ms. Leah Gazan: I will talk for five hours, Chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Leah Gazan: No, I'm just kidding.

With all due respect, this national child care plan.... Canadian families are waiting for it, so I feel really cautious about having all those meetings. I'd like to get this legislation done. I'd like to get it

off the docket. We know we have a limited amount of sitting weeks.

I think everybody's anxiously waiting for us to finish and get to work, so I would support the amendment posed by Mr. Long to extend that, so that we can get this legislation to the Senate in a timely fashion and back on the floor.

The Chair: I see Mrs. Falk on the amendment.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Chair.

Through you, to Ms. Gazan, the priority is government legislation, so that would happen anyway. This is just putting it on our working calendar, and it's a way for us to keep the Liberal ministers accountable for what they have in supplementary and main estimates.

The Chair: I see Ms. Saks on the amendment.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

While I am a visitor wt this committee, I know how often my minister is here to answer questions. I think it's a reasonable amount of time to have panels for pointed and targeted questions that, certainly, any member of this committee could ask.

At this time, I'd like to move that we vote on the amendment.

The Chair: Ms. Gazan had her hand up. If there's no further discussion after, we will go to a vote.

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: As a guest at this committee, as well, and somebody who puts tremendous value in research, I know there is a study on the financialization of housing. We have a housing crisis in this country. I think it's important that there be appropriate time to facilitate that study. For that reason, I would support the amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Seeing no further discussion, I will ask the clerk to call a recorded vote on Mr. Long's amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Mr. Chair, Mr. Coteau is in his car and he's not wearing his headset.

[*English*]

The Chair: He did indicate so. I recognized a vote. He can put his thumb up or down.

Mr. Coteau, do you want...? Okay.

The amendment was carried, so now we'll vote on the motion, as amended, Mr. Clerk.

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

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>