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Chair: The Honourable John McKay





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• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)):** I see it's 11 o'clock, and I see quorum.

We've done all our sound checks and, in this particular instance, the weather check, which is part of the sound check. It is extremely relevant, as Mr. Fillmore is in Halifax digging out as we speak, so we'll probably see him around May.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** We are continuing our study on housing. We are fortunate to have Mr. Lick with us, who is the ombudsman for the military. We appreciate his regular appearances here.

I take note, sir, that not only are you appearing today, but you may appear for one of our other studies on the 12th as well. I hope you don't shoot everything you have today and have nothing left to say.

I understand you have made heroic sacrifices to be here. I'm hoping members will take note that he is under the weather and will not grill him to a piece.

Mr. Lick, you know the procedure. We look forward to what you have to say for the first five minutes.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** In comparison to my military members, it is not a heroic sacrifice by any means.

Good morning, committee members. I am joined by my director general of operations, Ms. Robyn Hynes.

During my time as ombudsman, I've completed 15 full-week visits to bases and wings, listening to members and families. Access to health care, child care, spousal employment and, more recently, the cost of living and housing were recurring themes during these visits.

I've heard from a member's dependent, who shared with me they had been homeless for five months. I've heard from families using food banks. I've also heard from some who are one paycheque away from not paying their rent or needing to make a hard decision between food and rent.

[Translation]

This situation isn't unique to military families. However, military families move three to four times more often than the average Canadian. Generally, this isn't by choice. Families have a limited window to complete the move and resettle. This means that they

must quickly find housing in a new community that they may be unfamiliar with.

[English]

What's the result? Families are sometimes pushed into either unsafe or unaffordable housing.

While members do not expect a lot from their barracks, I was shocked to see some deteriorating single quarters on base that are not acceptable for any human in any situation. This was not my experience in the eighties.

A formal wellness check by CAF leadership is the right thing to do, but may not uncover every situation. This committee must uncover what is behind the disparity. Are military families living in tent cities? Perhaps not. Are there military members and their families who are at significant risk of being homeless due to financial insecurity? Yes. Are there charitable organizations across the country helping to keep some of these members and their families off the streets? Yes.

When CAF members cannot secure military housing, there is a significant impact on their lives, as they must then live on the economy. This is not ideal when there is a lack of local, suitable and affordable accommodations in many areas in Canada. Military families may not be protected from rate hike limitations for existing tenants. At greatest risk are lower-ranked members and families with special needs or disabilities when they cannot secure affordable accommodations.

[Translation]

In January 2024, the Canadian Forces Housing Agency provided their annual updated statistics on military housing waitlists. For 2022 and 2023, we saw a continued increase in most areas. Today, we can see a 177% increase in Bagotville and a 261% increase in Edmonton.

[English]

Let's look at it another way. In Esquimalt, Halifax and Trenton, there are almost as many members and their families on the waitlist as there are total units. Here's another example. Some posted military families in Alberta lost up to \$100,000 due to housing market fluctuations related to oil patch financial ups and downs. This is unconscionable.

It would be unrealistic to see the government provide military housing for every member and family. Families should be able to choose their housing throughout their career, whether on base or in the local community.

[*Translation*]

An agile global strategy would help meet the needs of military members and could be adapted to the changing economic environments around the country.

• (1105)

[*English*]

All options need to be explored and properly resourced. The reality of military life often means that temporary spousal unemployment becomes permanent. Often, a spouse must take a break from paid work to settle their family in a new community. This unemployment and/or potential underemployment exacerbates the financial uncertainties for families and their ability to afford suitable housing.

[*Translation*]

Within the past year, I've noticed a real change in military families. We see more frustration and desperation. These family issues are the main reason that military members are leaving the Canadian Armed Forces.

[*English*]

No CAF members, nor their families, should ever have to worry about putting a roof over their heads or to wonder where their next meal is going to come from. This is a basic need that should not become their daily reality and impede CAF members' ability to keep Canadians safe.

Thank you. Robyn and I would be pleased to answer any of your questions.

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

Mr. Bezan, you have six minutes.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Before you start my time, Mr. Chair, I would like to give verbal notice of two motions.

**The Chair:** The time is running, Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan:** This is the first:

Given that the Minister of National Defence is increasing rent for Canadian military personnel this April, and at a time when the military is struggling to recruit and retain personnel, the committee report to the House that the government immediately cancel all plans to increase rent on military accommodations used by the Department of National Defence this April.

The second motion I wish to give notice of is as follows:

That, given the Ukrainian Armed Forces are in desperate need of more munitions, and the Armed Forces of Ukraine have officially requested Canada donate surplus CRV7 rockets to Ukraine to aid them in defending their sovereign territory from Russia's illegal invasion, and given the Canadian Armed Forces are in possession of 83,000 CRV7 rockets that are slated for decommissioning and will cost taxpayers' money to dispose of, the Committee report to the House that the Government of Canada immediately donate all surplus CRV7 rockets to the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

**The Chair:** You have five minutes left.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the ombudsman for joining us today and for his insight on the housing crisis we have.

I appreciate the statistics you've given. You mentioned in your opening statement that there is more frustration and desperation now. Is that from written comments you're receiving? Is this coming from members when you're travelling across the country and meeting with them?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Primarily, it's coming from the meetings with different members and families as we visit different bases and wings across the country. I'm hearing it a lot more, and when I bring up the issue and ask, "Do you know someone who is at risk of being homeless or at risk of accessing a food bank?", everybody nods. Everybody knows somebody.

We know that charitable organizations are providing money to families, sometimes through the chaplaincy, for them to afford rent and food. I've been hearing it a lot more over the last year and a half, yes.

**Mr. James Bezan:** If you're hearing about people living rough who are putting themselves into precarious situations to access housing, are couch surfing or are going to food banks.... We saw the reports coming out of Nova Scotia in December from the hearings held at the Nova Scotia Legislature by a special committee they had.

The Canadian Armed Forces said they did a wellness check and those comments were categorically false. The minister repeated that in question period on Thursday. However, you're hearing that members are in dire straights and are frustrated and desperate. You would disagree with the CAF's report that everybody is fine.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Certainly, as I said, a wellness check is the right thing to do. It's something I would have done as well if I were in that position, but you have to think: If you were homeless, would you have the confidence and comfort level to come forward with an embarrassing situation and tell people and tell your boss that you're homeless or that you have to access a food bank?

I think they trust us because we are a confidential service, but I think that while it was the right thing to do, the CAF is not going to find every situation. I think they have to recognize that it's not just me saying it. Charitable organizations are providing money. Chaplaincy is accessing these funds for different members and families. It's there.

**Mr. James Bezan:** You're saying that the Canadian Armed Forces should not have just offhandedly dismissed the allegations or the comments that were made through testimony at a committee in front of the Nova Scotia Legislature.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I think they did the right thing, but they have to recognize that they're not going to get all of the information just by asking people.

• (1110)

**Mr. James Bezan:** Then the characterization by the minister in saying that their reports are false would be misleading at best.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I think so, absolutely.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Okay. Thank you.

You talked about the wait-lists and how many people are waiting for residential housing units. You have experience as well with barracks from when you were a younger man. How do you visualize the status and condition of living accommodations and residential housing units now, whether it's barracks, PMQs or elsewhere, compared to when you were there 20 or 30 years ago?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Certainly, the RHUs—the residential housing units—on base are getting some updates, but more capacity and availability are needed. That's kind of the basic premise. Also, in a number of pictures of the barracks that were sent to us by military members, what I saw was absolutely horrid. This was not my experience. Yes, we weren't living in five-star accommodations 30 years ago, nor would we have expected to. At the same time, these pictures I saw were absolutely horrid.

We do hear from a number of military members—single members, traditionally—that the barracks and “shacks”, as they call them, across the country are not in the best condition. Absolutely, more resourcing and more investment are needed there to bring them up to proper living standards.

**Mr. James Bezan:** There have been comments—

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

**Mr. James Bezan:** Am I done?

**The Chair:** Yes.

Mr. Collins, you have six minutes.

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

Welcome to our guests today.

Sir, in your opening, you talked about members living paycheque to paycheque. You talked about the affordability issues they face.

When we start looking at the challenges of affordability, we see that many people at the municipal and provincial levels have talked about a universal basic income. They start to address not the expense side of the equation but the supports and the revenue side in terms of an individual's ability to pay for rising rents in this instance.

When we deal with the CAF, that would point to compensation. That would deal with how much the government is providing its members to pay for rising rents and address the affordability issues they, like all other Canadians, face when they go to the grocery store.

In December, we had a vote in the House of Commons to increase the pay for our members to try to assist with the affordability issues that you've raised today. It wasn't unanimous.

How important is it to ensure that our members receive the appropriate level of compensation to ensure they have the ability to pay for rising rents, the increased costs that they'll face when they go to the grocery store with their families and other expenditures that we're witnessing today in the Canadian economy?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** The simple answer is that, yes, they deserve the proper compensation so they can live and live appropriately.

There are a number of initiatives the CAF and the government itself have put in place to allow members to better afford.... They corrected the huge inequity and unfairness with the PLD, the post-living differential. It was a great idea at the time, in 2008, but if you don't update the rates based on the economic environment across the country as it changes.... In 2009, it became unfair, and it was completely unfair all the way along. At least the Canadian Forces housing differential now is focused and is supposed to be updated every year. That will go a long way, I think, in helping with this particular issue.

However, we come back to two things: supply and demand. Right now, there is insufficient supply out there, both on base and in the local community. Compensation does allow for the different benefit packages that mitigate some of these issues, but right now, without the supply there, costs are likely rising far beyond what the compensation can afford. We're seeing that when members access food banks and are maybe one paycheque away from paying the rent.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** I'll take my next question.

I'm very surprised that on the supply side, we don't have stronger relationships with the private sector when it comes to building new supply on bases or wings where we're short of supply, and that more importantly, when we speak to the relocation issue, which you referenced earlier today, we don't have signed agreements in major urban markets with private sector landlords to assist with a more seamless integration of our members when they move from community to community.

I've asked questions of other witnesses, and we haven't received many recommendations along the lines of public-private partnerships. Can I ask for your thoughts on forging partnerships with landlords in major urban markets or, conversely, with the private sector in order to build more supply in rural and remote areas, where it can be a challenge at the best of times?

● (1115)

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** In terms of supply, we should be looking at all sorts of different innovative practices in gaining greater supply. That could be public-private partnerships with various landlords or organizations to build supply or supply that supply. I think that would be ideal.

I think the main issue is that we have to be a bit more innovative in our solutions. We can't just say that there's some Treasury Board policy that maybe disallows some of those P3s, as an example. We have to get over that. For me, the main thing and the ultimate objective here is that no member should ever go unhoused and worry about a roof over their head. If a policy is in place that doesn't allow certain things, let's get over it and start moving forward with different solutions. One of them is greater co-operation with the private sector, absolutely.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** I think part of solving the problem of our housing challenges across the country is working with our municipal partners and our provincial partners. You've done the cross-country tour to look at the condition of housing and the supply issues. In terms of solving the challenges we have, the federal government certainly can't do it alone. Our government, instead of demonizing municipal mayors and councillors, is working with them. We're incentivizing new supply to try to get at some of the issues you talked about.

In your travels, have you talked to municipalities and/or provincial representatives about how we play a key role in working with them—and not just the private sector, as I referenced earlier, but other levels of government—in order to get at some of these issues for our members?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Absolutely. In every base and wing we visit in different communities across the country, we always try to visit with the municipalities, whether that's the mayor or different representatives, to understand what they're doing to make sure there's supply for community members as well as military families and members.

It depends on the different communities across the country, but there's a lot being done. Whether that's reducing the bureaucracy of permitting or promoting the different partnerships with a hotel organization, with hotel corporations or with developers, there's a lot being done out there, but—

**The Chair:** We'll have to leave it there, even if there is a lot being done.

[Translation]

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

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Lick.

My questions are along the same lines as Mr. Bezan's questions. They concern the Department of National Defence's response to allegations that homeless military members in Nova Scotia use food banks.

I understand that pride may be a barrier. People don't necessarily want to talk about the fact that they're homeless or in a precarious situation. However, does the department's decision to brush aside these allegations constitute an additional barrier for military members who want to speak out about their predicament, since they may think that the department doesn't take their situation seriously?

[English]

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** The Canadian Armed Forces is taking it seriously, but do they have all the resources and different partners to really, more than anything, build that supply? Do they get the attention of the Treasury Board in making sure the different benefit packages and compensation packages allow for proper compensation and allow people to live? I think the main issue is that they may not be listened to or may not be able to get their points across in terms of what's needed. That's my role, in many ways. It's to get out into the public eye what they may not be hearing and maybe get a better understanding of what we're hearing on the ground.

Certainly, CAF members and CAF leadership do hear it, but as I said, a simple wellness check may not be getting the full understanding. I think more than anything, when I talk to leadership, particularly the leadership level on the base and wing, I hear they are trying to do everything possible to make sure their members and families are well supported.

Ultimately, it is a resource issue. I think more than anything, they simply do not have the resources in various areas, including the infrastructure on base. In many cases they have great relations with the community, working on various innovative ways of getting greater accommodation and so on, but ultimately it is a resource issue. They need more resources in order to have the infrastructure necessary to support military members and families.

The way I always look at it, as I've said to you many times here, is that if your family is not well supported and you're always worrying about them, you can't do your job. That's what I think is fundamental here as well.

• (1120)

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** According to newspaper articles, the Department of National Defence didn't really confirm that there were homeless military members in need of food assistance. Instead, the department seems to want to sweep these allegations under the rug.

In this situation, is the department in the best position to ensure the well-being of military members, or should another organization be carrying out this type of check and asking military members whether they're okay, whether they have a place to stay and whether they need food assistance?

You said that the ombudsman, because he ensures that his discussions remain confidential, found it easier to obtain this information. Should the wellness check be carried out by an entity outside the department?

[English]

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I think wellness checks are something we would all do. If we had a family, we would do a wellness check, in a sense, of our smaller family. It is the right thing to do, but it is just one indicator.

You have to remember that groups like the chaplaincy—which is a confidential service like ours—and the military family resource centres and social workers there have a very good understanding of what's happening in the family and what's happening out in the communities. You can't simply rely on a wellness check. You have to rely on all your various sources of information, including our organization, which talks to members and talks to families. They have the opportunity to tell us various things that they may be too embarrassed or afraid to tell their leadership. They're probably embarrassed more than anything, because it's not a great situation, obviously. It's a very tragic situation.

Relying solely on a wellness check is not the right thing to do. You have to rely on all your sources of information.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

You spoke about the need for a global accommodation strategy for military members. We know that not all military members live in married quarters, single quarters or barracks. As you said, a number of them live in the community. In light of this, shouldn't there be further discussions with, for example, the Minister of Housing? Otherwise, is there a risk that National Defence and the housing department will work in silos on this issue?

[*English*]

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** That is my point. It is something they are working on. They are working on that global accommodation strategy.

When I ask their various members and various audiences across the country, everybody talks about one silo at a time. What is needed is a strategy that takes all of those various aspects together and is agile. Our economic environment across the country changes, and it is changing now across the country. The strategy has to take that into account.

If CFHD, in and of itself, is updated as it says it will be every year, that should go some way to making it more agile. PLD was not that at all.

I talk about an agile, global strategy that allows members to build equity if they want. Typically, most Canadians want to own a home. Their compensation package should allow for that. However—this is particularly for junior members—they're not generally going to be able to afford a house right off the bat. They should have access to housing on base or easy housing in the community—whatever it might be.

I think it's that total package that's necessary.

**The Chair:** We'll have to leave the answer there.

We'll go to Madam Mathyssen for six minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** I really appreciate your being here. You're providing great context for what's going on.

We know that the military is a microcosm of what's ultimately happening in the greater Canadian society. I certainly hear that from people trying to find housing in my own riding. Of course, we all do, but it is far more specific, complicated and required for the job.

In all of those responses that you think we need.... You just heard Mr. Bezan's motion to cancel the housing rent increase. Do you think that is a viable answer and part of the solution? What do you think about that? I'm interested to hear it.

• (1125)

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I certainly think it's a viable solution. Anything that can help members and families afford housing is a great solution.

We have to remember that housing on base—if it's available, which is another issue—is capped at 25% of their gross salary, which is a good thing. At the same time, if rents rise but it's still capped at 25%, where is the money going to come from to maintain that infrastructure on base? I come back to this idea that whatever it is, more resources are required to support the infrastructure on base.

I think at this point in time, even though it is a policy governed by the Treasury Board, the policy that the rent charged is equated to the average local rent in the communities is a bit tone deaf given what we're seeing across Canada for all families being able to afford housing. We have to understand, as I said, that military families and members are disadvantaged because they have to move more often and they don't always have that choice. I'd say they rarely have that choice. Therefore, they have to go into a community and find housing, and it may not be available. Sometimes, they get pushed into housing that is not safe. Sometimes, it's unaffordable housing, despite—

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen:** It's not accessible housing.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** It's not accessible housing for families with special needs or disabilities in the family. There's a whole range of issues there, but to be honest, I think it's a bit tone deaf right now.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen:** Speaking of that, your team published in 2022 the “Service versus Self” report. There was a special investigation.

What have you heard since that report in terms of the findings? Has the government put forward any of the recommendations from that report? Could you table it with this committee so we can include it as a part of this study right now?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Well, certainly we can table it. Everything is published now.

I think one of the main issues related to housing in that particular report was the idea of how there is a need to modernize the definition of “family”. We all know that families are changing since we had our 2.5 children and mother-father type of thing. Right now, we are taking care of more elderly parents. Also, it seems to be that we have more families with special needs children. There are various issues like that, and we do not always have a mother and father. The definition has changed.

What we did say in our report is that you need to modernize the definition of family but maintain some flexibility for decision-makers to make a fair decision. Don't try to create that 100% perfect policy that governs every situation ad infinitum. Make sure you give decision-makers the ability to make a fair decision based on other circumstances you may not have foreseen, but absolutely, you need to modernize the definition of family and have policies, initiatives and so on that accommodate the different definition of family nowadays.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** One of the things that Mr. Bezan touched on was a bit more vague. I'm hoping you can give us specifics. If you can't, I understand.

You talked about what members had sent you regarding the really deplorable, horrific living conditions. Can you be more specific with this committee? Are you allowed?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Certainly we're allowed because it was sent anonymously...or not so much anonymously.

I was sent pictures of different conditions in various barracks, whether it was in Trenton or other areas, that were horrid: toilet facilities not up to standard by any means, mould on various walls and ceilings and so on. There is more out there. Those were just a few pictures out there.

I have raised this with the deputy minister of national defence, and I will be having a conversation with the assistant deputy minister of infrastructure to speak about this particular issue. This was not my experience, as I've said, in the eighties. Yes, they are not five-star hotels, but at the same time, I don't expect that any member would live in those conditions.

• (1130)

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I really appreciate that, even considering just mould and what impact it has on anybody but kids especially. Trying to live in a safe environment is very key.

I wanted to quickly ask about this, and I have very limited time left. You talked about spouses working on base and their ability to do so. Can you talk about the CFMWS being on strike and what that has done to families currently?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I can't speak specifically on the latter part of your question. The issue for us is primarily around families who are posted and move around the country. It leads to spouses or partners not being able to find appropriate employment, and we all know that nowadays you need two incomes to live appropriately.

As spouses and partners move with their military members, they may not be able to find any job, or they may have to go to the great organization Tim Hortons and work there. We call it underemployment. It's the idea that perhaps as a medical professional they don't have the qualifications according to another province or territory, and they are underemployed.

**The Chair:** We're now going on to the five-minute round.

Ms. Gallant, you have five minutes.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, through you to our witness, I have had calls from soldiers saying that they have had to leave the military because the rent or mortgage payments were outpacing their pay increases.

What has been your experience in talking to veteran soldiers who have had to leave?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Well, as I said, the largest reason members are leaving nowadays—and that's according to the CAF survey itself—is military family issues, part of which is the cost of living, cost of housing, being able to access child care, being able to access a doctor and other various reasons. Over the last year and a half, as mortgage rates have gone up in particular and the cost of living has gone up, those have become bigger parts of why members have been leaving nowadays, and that's what we're hearing too.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** I have reports of lice-infested mattresses in barracks, and you mentioned the black mould. How long does it usually take to get that fixed as opposed to just painting it over, which has been the practice?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Well, I can't say how long it takes to actually fix it. What I will say is that in order to do all the maintenance required on the base, likely more resourcing will be needed.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Have you noticed a difference between contractors who were locally sourced and big companies that were sourced from out of province to come do the upgrades?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** No, I wouldn't say that so much. The Canadian Forces Housing Agency hires contractors to get the work done in residential housing units, and in different bases and wings they've had problems getting the contractors during different times of the year. I think at this point in time it's starting to get better, but whether or not they're able to attract contractors depends on the economic environment at the time. Cold Lake is the perfect example. When the oil patch is up, they all go to the oil patch to do maintenance there. When the oil patch is down, they come back to help on the base.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Of the 8,500 units disposed of from 1996 to 2013, what number has been replaced or what number has been surpassed?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I couldn't answer that question in that level of detail. That's a good question for the Canadian Forces Housing Agency.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** What amount has been set aside, if any—that you're aware of—for infrastructure costs related to the required electrical capacity upgrades to replace the present furnaces with heat pumps? I understand that most living quarters have 100 amps and the heat pumps require around 200 amps.



**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** That was an initiative they showed us in Greenwood. They were replacing some of the heating systems with heat pumps, but it is an issue of electrical capacity. I'm an engineer by trade, so I understand it. Certainly it will depend on the individual age of the electrical capacity in each of the houses. Again, it's a good question for the housing agency, which will have the details of that particular issue.

• (1135)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** With respect to the new electric vehicles that are being mandated, our fire chief told us the vehicles should be a certain distance from the structure to safeguard against the fires that happen spontaneously from time to time. To the best of your knowledge, have any provisions been made to make room for what is coming with the new vehicle requirements?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I'm not aware of the details of that other than what we saw at Greenwood, where there were some charging stations being implemented and installed. I'm not aware of the details of the distances between them.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Who's responsible for issuing the building permits? Do you know whether or not the barracks and PMQs have inspections at all?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Well, building permits for residential housing would be done by the community. As to those on base, that's another good question for the assistant deputy minister of IE.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Do you know how long on average it takes for the situations with mould or lice to be ameliorated? Have the soldiers told you directly that it's taking too long?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I don't know how long it takes per se, but they have told me it's taking too long.

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

Mr. Fillmore, go ahead for five minutes.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr. Lick and Ms. Hynes, thank you very much for joining us today. It's much appreciated.

Mr. Lick, is it true that CAF limits rent for members living on base to 25% of their income?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Yes, it's 25% of their gross family income.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** That means on-base rent increases would not result in rents that are higher than 25% of a member's income.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Yes. They do have a personal responsibility to demonstrate that income, and there's a process that goes along with it, but they have the ability to cap their rent at 25% of their gross family income.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Excellent. Thank you.

Is it true that it's the Treasury Board that recommends rent increases on base in accordance with the CPI as a matter of policy and not the Minister of National Defence?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** It's my understanding—Robyn will correct me if I'm wrong—that it is a Treasury Board policy for residen-

tial housing on base. In this case, it's government housing. It is basically approved by the Minister of National Defence.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** I'll go off base, then. Isn't it true that for members and their families who choose to live off base, salary increases that keep pace with inflation would be an important thing for rent affordability?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Yes, absolutely. The CFHD does mitigate some of that particular issue for members. We are talking more about junior members than senior members in that regard.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** I'll make a comment, and then I'll continue on.

I'm going to assume that you would agree that when members of Parliament, especially members of this committee, have an opportunity to pass budget votes that would increase CAF members' salaries, they should do so. You don't have to respond to that.

I would say to my colleagues that it's alarming and puzzling, then, that our Conservative colleagues were whipped to vote against the CAF member salary increase in December 2023.

Moving off of that, Mr. Lick, I think it was your testimony earlier in this session that you do not know of any CAF members living in tents. Is that correct?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I don't personally. I don't think we've received any complaints in that regard, but Robyn can correct me or confirm that. It's hard for me to say whether they do or do not just because I haven't heard it.

I'll come back to my earlier point that there are other groups separate from me and my organization—whether that's the chaplaincy, the military family resource centres or different charitable organizations, such as Together We Stand—that do support members. They will have another part to that story that I think is important to hear.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Thanks for that.

I just want to make sure that the record's clear here. When Mr. Bezan invited you to agree with him that the Minister of National Defence misled Parliament on the point that no CAF members were living in tents, you agreed with him that Parliament was misled. I just want to offer you a chance to clarify that if you'd like to.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** What I am hearing is that some members, at different points in time, have been or are homeless. I don't believe they've actually told me what they are living in. They are living in RVs or are couch surfing in some cases. One dependent told me that they were homeless for five months. They were living somewhere, obviously, but not in a proper home.

• (1140)

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Okay, that's fair enough. Thank you very much for that.

I'm going to shift gears.

The committee heard some testimony from one military spouse, Alyssa Truong—I think it's okay to say her name—regarding the challenges that spouses face during periods of relocation. She, in particular, raised concerns around spousal employment, which has already come up a bit today. Spousal employment can be made more difficult because of delays in the transferring of relevant documentation like drivers' licences, health care cards, professional credentials—those kinds of things.

I'm just wondering if you can share any solutions you might have unearthed in your work with regard to this issue of how we can better support the spousal side of the equation when spouses are required to move across the country.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I'll give you two examples.

One is on the medical qualifications side. Medical qualifications are governed or licenced—however it works—provincially and territorially by the different medical associations. There needs to be more work done to understand and provide equivalencies. This is even for all Canadians, not just for military members or families. If there was a better system of understanding those qualifications and providing equivalencies so that they were more easily transferrable, that would be a good thing for all of Canada, not just for military members.

At the same time, I think one of the things we have noted is the military spouse employment initiative within DND. It is a tool they market, but it is primarily marketed within DND. I think I've talked with Canadian—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to keep interrupting you at the end, but we seem to be rolling past—

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Can I finish this one point? It is important.

**The Chair:** I'm sure it is.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** In this case, they need to do better marketing outside, both to other federal departments and to provincial departments.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Thanks very much.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lick, I would like to touch on a slightly more technical issue. If you can't answer, that's fine.

In November, I asked Brigadier-General Virginia Tattersall to send me the market studies carried out to establish the separation expenses for military members on imposed restriction.

When I asked different people about this, I realized that the amount allocated to military members for housing has dropped in a number of places. In Saint-Jean, for example, the decrease amounts to about \$400. The same is true for Bagotville, where we know that there's a housing shortage.

Has this situation been brought to your attention? Are we right to feel that the Department of National Defence is sometimes a bit disconnected from the reality of the rental market around military bases?

[*English*]

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** In terms of the fees, Brigadier-General Tattersall probably brought that forward. I'm not exactly sure which fee she was talking about. We'll assume it was the CFHD.

In that regard, the CFHD was set up to accommodate or mitigate some of the issues with housing and the cost of housing in the community. At the same time, they recognized in the end that they needed to have a transition of that particular benefit. That's why there is a phased-in approach to that.

That may have been what she was talking about in that regard. The fees changed, but there is a transition.

As to the other part of it, I don't think the leadership is disconnected, but I come back to this idea that... When I talk to the leadership on bases and wings, they are not disconnected. They understand what's going on there.

To understand what is happening across the entire country, that is probably the bigger issue. As I said, you have to listen to all the various sources of information, and not just that formal wellness check.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** My question wasn't about the Canadian Forces housing differential, but about another benefit. In any case, I don't mind, but I gather that I won't have time to ask any more questions.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Good decision, Madame Normandin.

Madam Mathyssen, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen:** To go back to that expansion of housing stock around or near bases and having all options on the table, there is an ability to develop underdeveloped lands owned by the federal government. Municipalities have raised this concern. We could transfer some of those lands specifically to not-for-profit housing organizations and co-operatives that could develop them. There are all kinds of lower-cost and more affordable housing options.

In terms of affordable housing, can you elaborate on the initiatives you've seen, if any, or discussions you've had with ministry officials about that specifically going forward?

● (1145)

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** When visiting Greenwood, as one of the last examples, I talked with representatives of the municipality. They were looking for how to get in contact with the department to discuss—whether it was a transfer of land or not—using unused land to build affordable housing and have more housing available for military families and so on.

I put them in contact with them, because I knew some of the people in the department. I don't know the outcome of those discussions at all, but I put them in contact with them.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** On the one side, municipalities or those associated with them are very excited, but you haven't heard on the other side whether there's been a response or any kind of acceptance to move on that.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Because it's relatively recent, I haven't heard the outcome of those particular discussions. I think there's a lot of opportunity there. It may not be the same in every base and wing across the country, but some have a greater ability to do that than others.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Would you recommend to the Department of National Defence that it take advantage of these conversations?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** It's a recommendation to the government writ large. We have a lot of unused land that can probably help out in different ways with different solutions or different partnerships—whatever it might be. I would say there are a lot of opportunities to look at and implement various innovative solutions. Let's just keep looking at them.

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

Mr. Kelly, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Minister of Defence is apparently clinging to the wellness check system as proof that the Halifax emergency management coordinator and the Canadian Legion were not being truthful in reporting the homelessness of Canadian Armed Forces members in Halifax.

Do you believe the Halifax emergency management coordinator and the Canadian Legion that there are indeed homeless CAF members?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Well, as I said, I don't rely on one source of information either. I listened to that particular testimony, and what I hear from members and families is the same thing, so that's pretty clear to me.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Right. So not only is that testimony credible, but it's supported by other sources of information you have from the numerous discussions you have had with CAF members.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** That's correct.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** In fact, you said that everybody knows somebody within the CAF who is struggling with homelessness or access to food.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** It may not be today. It may have been yesterday. It may be tomorrow that they're one paycheque away.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Indeed.

In response to my Order Paper question, Madam Lalonde confirmed that for the last several years, more members are leaving the forces than joining the forces. There is a crisis of recruitment and retention that's resulted in 16,000 vacancies and 10,000 under-trained personnel.

Where does housing fit into this, and access to housing?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** As I stated earlier, the largest reason that people are leaving is military family issues. Over the last year and half, I've been hearing from various members and families on bases that the cost of housing and the cost of living are becoming more important. Access to a doctor, access to child care and access to spousal and partner employment still remain issues, but the cost of living and the cost of housing are becoming more important, as they are for all Canadians. We must remember that. It's not simply military families.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Indeed, but they're choosing to leave the military for these reasons.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** That's correct.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Mr. Fillmore seemed to go to some lengths to point out that the difference in responsibility between the Minister of Defence and Treasury Board Secretariat has resulted in increasing the rent for what you've described, I think, three times as, in some cases, "horrid" base housing.

Have you met any CAF member who cares which Liberal minister is raising their rent?

• (1150)

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I'm not sure how I would answer that per se, but I will come back to the point. I think given the economic environment out there and given the issues of military members leaving because of the cost of living, cost of housing and family issues, raising the rent, in my personal opinion, is not the right thing to do at this point in time.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Right. It's not the right thing. I would say that the Treasury Board versus the Minister of Defence is a distinction without a difference to a CAF member having their rent raised.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Yes.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Thank you.

Do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** You have a minute and 30 seconds.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** That's fantastic.

Perhaps we can come back to this. Three times you described the conditions of some housing as absolutely horrid. Could you give us some examples of what would render a living unit horrid?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** When I talk about the living units and the pictures I've been shown by military members, these are the barracks or shacks. They're not the residential housing units that I've seen. Those are different. They are two different things.

Certainly, these pictures were horrid. They were of toilets not working, toilets overflowing, mould on walls and ceilings, heating not working—all sorts of issues that you would not expect in a facility that houses the people who save our lives and defend our security. For me, it was shocking given my experience. My experience is still 30 years old, but that's no excuse.

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds, MP Kelly.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Okay.

What about the residential housing units, then? Are they much better?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** This would be a good question for the CFHA as well. I would say that, overall, they're not in bad condition. The residential housing units are better than what I remember, to be honest. We generally see the newer ones as they're getting updated—

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** They're building 20 a year, though, I understand.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** Yes. They're not building. As I said, I think there are more needed.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** There's a backlog of 8,000.

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** There are more needed.

**The Chair:** We'll have to leave it there. Again, thank you.

The final round of questioning is for Madame Lambropoulos. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Thanks, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Lick and Ms. Hynes, for being with us to answer some of our questions today.

The first question I'll ask is about somebody in an extremely desperate situation. You mentioned that a family member of a military member said they had been homeless for five months. If there are situations like this and someone reaches out, is there a way—a temporary fix or a temporary solution—for these people in a really desperate situation—for example, in Halifax right now they are experiencing a bad storm—to be helped temporarily by someone from the military?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** There are all sorts of ways this particular issue of not having a home and not having a place to sleep could be mitigated. As I talked about, there's couch surfing, RVs and various things. However, for the more, we'll say, tragic situations of domestic violence and things like that, which do tragically occur, many bases and wings have one or two different residential housing units where they can accommodate the family short term until they're able to resolve that issue.

I would say I'm very proud of the CAF leadership on bases and wings. If anybody came forward with an issue like that, they would take care of them. They would find a solution. I'm very proud of the CAF leadership in that way, but again, it all comes down to a resource issue. How do they get the resources sometimes to deal with everybody?

There is also a personal responsibility in this. We all know of people who may not have the financial literacy to properly manage a budget, a household and so on. There are issues like that too.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you very much for that response.

A report in October 2022 mentioned that there were 12,000 military housing units on bases across the country, that there are quite a few that are still needed and that there are wait-lists in different cities across the country at different bases. Are you aware of whether or not the department takes into account where there's a bigger need and there's a longer wait-list? Are there housing units

being built more rapidly in areas that may have a greater need? What does that situation look like?

• (1155)

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** I don't have the statistics in front of me for the construction of housing right now, obviously, but I think overall more is needed. There's no doubt about that. The wait-lists are always rising pretty well across the country now—that's factual—so more is needed. Again, it's a good question for the CFHA to get the exact numbers.

The issue, of course, is that as costs rise, they're capped at 25%, so where do the other resources for maintenance come from? They have to come from the government, so again, it comes back to more resources being necessary. If they're going to cap it at that level, somebody has to pay the difference. In this case, the government has to pay the difference.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Last but not least, there are rumours I've heard about people who were in tents or couch surfing, specifically in Halifax. The thing I heard was they were allowed to be on base during their training—one month of training, or however long that might have lasted—and then immediately after, they were told they need to find their own home. Obviously, if you're in a completely new place, it's very difficult to do that.

Is there any leniency? Is there anything you've heard in this regard about a situation like this? Do you know if anybody is working on a solution?

**Mr. Gregory A. Lick:** There's certainly some leniency in terms of where they can find housing, how they find housing and so on, but the end result is.... There's limited capacity on base to house people. Generally, it's full. There's really no opportunity other than in the community to find housing. They get into this situation where there's simply not as much housing as is needed, not only for all Canadians but also for military families in the communities they serve, and again, it comes down to needing more.

**The Chair:** Madame Lambropoulos, that brings our time to a close.

Mr. Lick and Ms. Hynes, I want to thank you for your contributions to this study.

Mr. Lick, you're always a welcome witness at this committee, and apparently you'll be a welcome witness next week, as well, on yet another study.

With that, I'm going to suspend while we go in camera to review a number of things for the committee.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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