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Social Services**

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Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development
Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

Chair: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA

Vice-Chair: Joedy Wall, MHA

Members: James Dinn, MHA
Jeff Dwyer, MHA
Paul Pike, MHA
Scott Reid, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Bobbi Russell

Appearing:

Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development

Hon. John Abbott, MHA, Minister

Cynthia King, Director of Income Support Policy and Programs

Sharlene Jones, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Performance Improvement

Susan Walsh, Deputy Minister

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

Hon. John Abbott, MHA, Minister

Doug Jackman, Director of Finance

Julia Mullaley, CEO

Melanie Thomas, Director of Policy, Housing and Homelessness

Mike Tizzard, Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Services

Also Present

Hon. Pam Parsons, MHA, Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality

Hon. Siobhan Coady, MHA, Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board

Hon. Bernard Davis, MHA, Minister of Environment and Climate Change

Paul Lane, MHA

Perry Trimper, MHA

Carlson Young, Researcher, Official Opposition Caucus

Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party Caucus

Susan Walsh, Constituency Assistant, St. John's Centre, NDP Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Pam Parsons, MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, substitutes for Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Siobhan Coady, MHA for St. John's West, substitutes for Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Bernard Davis, MHA for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

The Committee met at 5:30 p.m. in the Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): Okay, are we ready to start the Estimates of Children, Seniors and Social Development?

I call the Estimates to order.

We just want to start out with the minutes from the previous meeting of June 1, 2021. I would like to ask for a mover for those minutes.

J. WALL: So moved.

CHAIR: So moved.

The minutes have been accepted. That was MHA Wall who moved the minutes.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: At the previous Committee meeting, there was a decision made that the Official Opposition would take 10 minutes of questions; the Third Party, 10; and then we would come back again and then back to the Third Party again; and that the independent would get a total of 20 minutes during the full period.

So is everyone okay with that?

AN HON. MEMBER: Do you want me to table that? That's their agreement, I think.

CHAIR: Sure. This is just the motion to the Estimates Committee regarding the speaking times that I just spoke about.

Newfoundland and Housing Corporation is going to do theirs first and we'll take a break then before the remainder of the department comes on. Then, if it keeps going too long and we need another five- or 10-minute break, we'll decide and see where we are with the questions.

The substitutes for this evening are: For the Committee Member for Mount Pearl North, Lucy Stoyles, we have Minister Davis substituting down there in the back for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville; for Burin - Grand Bank, MHA Pike, we have Minister Pam Parsons from Harbour Grace - Port de Grave substituting; and for St. George's - Humber, MHA Reid, we have Minister Coady from St. John's West substituting. Those are all the substitutes for this evening.

I'm going to go around and ask everyone to introduce themselves and then we will give the minister a few minutes to speak before we start.

We'll start here.

J. MULLALEY: Julia Mullaley, CEO of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

J. ABBOTT: John Abbott, Minister Responsible for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

D. JACKMAN: Doug Jackman, Director of Finance, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

M. TIZZARD: Mike Tizzard, Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Services, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

M. THOMAS: Melanie Thomas, Director of Policy, Housing and Homelessness, NL Housing.

J. DWYER: Jeff Dwyer, MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue and Committee Member.

C. YOUNG: Carlson Young, staff of the Official Opposition.

J. DINN: Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

S. FLEMING: Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party caucus office.

J. WALL: Joedy Wall, MHA, Cape St. Francis.

S. COADY: Siobhan Coady, MHA, St. John's West.

P. PARSONS: Pam Parsons, MHA, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. LANE: Paul Lane, MHA, District of Mount Pearl - Southlands.

B. DAVIS: Bernard Davis, MHA for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville and (inaudible).

CHAIR: Going to miss the game tonight.

We'll start off with the minister.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's my pleasure to be here this evening. As Minister Responsible for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, I'm pleased to be here this evening to discuss this year's Estimates for the corporation.

Before we begin, I would like to express the profound sorrow that I and many, many others are feeling upon learning of the discovery of the buried remains of 215 children at the site of a former residential school for Indigenous children in British Columbia. This revelation is extremely heartbreaking and has shaken all of us.

I join with the Premier, my colleagues in Cabinet, the entire Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation and others in expressing our deepest regrets. Our thoughts are with the families and Indigenous communities throughout our province and the country who are coming to terms with this tragedy.

Now I would like to take a few minutes to highlight key *Budget 2021* investments in housing, an issue that impacts all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It is well acknowledged that access to safe, adequate and affordable housing, and the supports necessary to maintain that housing, are important social determinants of health. Through *Budget 2021*,

our government is pleased to provide an investment of almost \$47 million to NLHC, leveraging significant federal funding and enabling the delivery of vital programs and services that address a diverse range of housing needs throughout the province.

This past year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a fall 2020 budget, there were savings in home repair programs. These savings are being reinvested into these programs in '21-'22 – we'll explain that as we go through the Estimates – reducing the required grant from the province. Funding received under the federal Safe Restart Agreement to support emergency shelter operations further reduced the provincial grant requirement. With less than one per cent change from the previous year's budget, NLHC's overall budget for '21-'22 is \$123 million.

I just want to talk about social housing. *Budget 2021* supports the maintenance and operation of the corporation's public rental housing portfolio that provides homes for almost 12,000 low-income clients. Last week, along with the Premier and the hon. Seamus O'Regan, I had the opportunity to tour eight newly constructed NLHC homes on Froude Avenue here in St. John's: four that are fully accessible, with the remaining four incorporating universal design features. The homes were also designed to exceed the energy performance requirements in the National Building Code and meet the provincial Build Better Buildings Policy. These important energy efficiency features will provide a comfortable home and reduce heating costs for these families.

We also had the opportunity to announce a cost-share investment of over \$17 million dollars for the repair, renovation and modernization of our public rental housing in '21-'22. This includes almost \$7 million to complete major repairs on units, some of which had been vacant for an extended period of time and now will once again become homes for families in need.

Through *Budget 2021*, government has continued its investment of \$8 million to further support housing affordability through the provision of heat subsidies to our tenants. Additionally, \$1.5 million will continue to support the important programs and services of the community centres in our neighbourhoods –

which the Member for St. John's Centre spoke to earlier today.

Over \$6 million is also provided to support operations of partner-managed and co-operative housing providers throughout the province, which started in Mount Pearl. These housing providers offer subsidized housing options to over 1,400 households with low to moderate incomes.

The Rent Supplement Program: *Budget 2021* also invests \$11.4 million to support the corporation's Rent Supplement Program with private landlords, expanding available housing options and assisting over 2,000 low-income individuals find safe, affordable homes, of which 50 per cent are provided to seniors.

In terms of our home repair programs, our government recognizes the benefits of aging within our homes and our communities, and having the supports to live independent, active and fulfilling lives close to family and friends. *Budget 2021* provides \$11.5 million to provide such needed financial assistance to over 2,200 low-income homeowners throughout the province, most of whom, again, are seniors. This includes funding for the Provincial Home Repair Program, to address needed home repairs; the Home Modification Program, to improve accessibility; and the Home Energy Savings Program, to make energy-efficiency improvements and reduced heating costs.

Through *Budget 2021*, government has provided \$4.8 million to provide emergency accommodations, food, transportation and supports to almost 1,000 individuals annually throughout the province who are experiencing homelessness. The budget also provides funding of \$8.8 million to 10 transition houses throughout the province to support over 700 clients on an annual basis. These transition houses provide safe, short-term accommodations, services and resources to support women and their children who are vulnerable for, at risk of or have been subjected to intimate partner violence.

Again, *Budget 2021* continues its investment of \$7.6 million to the Supportive Living Program. This program provides funding to over 20 non-profit community-based groups throughout the

province to prevent homelessness and provide individualized supports to foster long-term housing stability. In the most recent year, over 700 individuals were housed through this program and over 5,000 individuals were supported that were at risk or were experiencing homelessness.

Before we get to discuss the Estimates, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to highlight the budget investments designed to address housing and homelessness issues in the province. Our government recognizes that safe, stable and affordable housing is essential to the social, financial and physical well-being of individuals, families and our communities. We will continue to work in partnership at all levels of government, along with our Indigenous and community partners, to ensure all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, wherever they live, have a place to call home. I now welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Abbott.

Just a couple of things before we do start. Just a reminder that according to COVID-19 guidelines you can remove your mask to speak. I ask that you wait for your tally light to come on. If it doesn't come on, I will identify you up here. I ask that you identify yourself before you speak.

I ask the Clerk now to call the first subhead group.

CLERK (Russell): 1.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 carry?

J. DWYER: Thank you.

Under Grants and Subsidies, last year there was \$398,000 more spent than was budgeted. What was the reason for that?

J. ABBOTT: Thank you for the question.

When you look at the budget – just as a start – we are showing a minor increase in spending for the year past. That was largely monies that we had to provide and spend on severance payments

and other separation costs for employees for that past year. That was a significant part of that. At the same time, we had funding for temporary low-barrier emergency shelters, namely, The Gathering Place. That was offset by savings to the Home Energy Savings Program. So all combined, we have a net increase in cost of \$398,000.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

Also last year, the department spent \$4,001,400 more than what had been estimated this year. What factored in to this Estimate?

J. ABBOTT: I'm not sure if I follow your question.

J. DWYER: There was \$4 million – there is a difference of \$4,001,400 more than what you have estimated this year.

J. ABBOTT: Oh, I'm sorry.

J. DWYER: Yes.

J. ABBOTT: As mentioned briefly in the comments, the main reason for that is we had to – could and did reprofile some federal funding that we didn't spend this past year, largely because of COVID, just from a cash flow. We were able, then, to carry that federal money over. As a result, there was less requirement to call on the provincial government in its grant. But, as I said, the actual spend this year, between '20-'21 and '21-'22, is roughly a million dollars.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Are we only doing one header at a time, or can I go on to –?

CHAIR: It's all in one for housing.

J. DWYER: Yeah, right. Okay. That's what I was (inaudible). I just wanted to make sure.

CHAIR: Yeah.

J. DWYER: Under the Revenue - Federal, can the minister clarify the revised balance of '20-'21 of \$124,100?

J. ABBOTT: So on the revenue side it was largely due to a decrease in revenue from the Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund. Given the overall budget, we had some small fluctuations in that program. That was the main difference there.

J. DWYER: We were given \$518,000, but we only used \$124,000 of it and we're budgeting to save that \$426,000. Am I clear in saying that?

J. ABBOTT: Well, I'm going to just – maybe, Michael, if you want to answer that.

M. TIZZARD: The revenue you see there from the federal revenue is related to our Home Energy Savings Program for oil-heated homes. What happened last year, due to the pandemic we didn't see the uptake that we'd normally see. We had budgeted \$518,000 in revenue, but because the uptake was lower we were only able to bill back \$124,000 in our actual. So when the minister alluded to we're going to carry forward the money, we'll pick it up in the following year.

J. DWYER: Okay.

M. TIZZARD: Yeah. That's all we were able to do, from a utilization perspective, in the billing.

J. DWYER: Okay. Perfect.

What's the reason for looking at it – we budgeted that we would be putting out \$518,000. Why do you think it'll be \$426,000 this year?

J. ABBOTT: In terms of my response to the previous question, I apologize, because I referenced the wrong program. In this case, we are, again, changing some of the cash flows on the federal programs. That's the main difference. Our spend is going to be, as I said, roughly what we spent last year in the overall program for the corporation.

J. DWYER: So do you feel that the program will be picked up more this year with lesser COVID?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Okay.

What is the current wait-list for a rent supplement by region? Do we have that breakdown?

J. ABBOTT: We don't have the wait-list by rent supp. Now, we do have a wait-list for our applications, whether it's a rent supp or a housing unit that we own and manage. A person would make an application; then, depending on what becomes available, they are offered the choice. We have now, roughly, just over 1,500 people on the wait-list.

J. DWYER: What is the current wait-list for the Home Repair Program?

J. ABBOTT: Again, we do that on an annual basis, so we will – depending on the budget what we spend and then they would have to reapply in the subsequent year.

J. DWYER: Okay.

To stay with the Home Repair Program, right now the cap is at \$5,000 for an extensive repair. COVID has shown us that obviously materials have gone up and stuff like that. Is there a propensity to increase that dollar amount?

J. ABBOTT: Not at present.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

What is the current wait-list for a unit itself, for a turnover for somebody to go into a unit?

J. ABBOTT: Well, in terms of turnaround, I think this year – and I stand to be corrected – we had around 700 families that would have come through the program. Do I have that right number, Julia?

CHAIR: Julia Mullaley.

J. MULLALEY: That's correct, Minister. That's how many were placed. When you asked about the wait-list, from a perspective of a wait-list it can vary quite differently from person to person, depending on the circumstances.

Generally, on average, it's about a five-month wait-list for families. That's really if you have a pretty wide area of selection. If you open your areas of selection, it's about five months. If it's

very concrete and very specific areas, it can be up to a year generally.

J. DWYER: Okay.

J. ABBOTT: I'd like to just add that we're in negotiations now with the federal government. We're hoping that we will be able to bring more units on, in terms of the rent supp, over the next several years. If the – quote, unquote – wait-list was to stay the same, we would be able to drop that down by over a third within a couple of years.

J. DWYER: Is there a propensity with some of the aging units that we would look to sell those to build new units?

J. ABBOTT: No. I've had some discussions with the CEO and others on what units would make sense to do that, because in some cases the repairs: one, are just very costly; and, two, they're not the location and size. People now want one or two bedrooms, ideally on one level. So we'll be looking at all our portfolio when those opportunities arise and subject to the availability of capital funding to do it. That's certainly where my head is as the minister.

J. DWYER: Good. I appreciate that.

Has the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation given any thought to doing a pilot on communal or shared living? For example, two single-parent families sharing a four-bedroom unit.

J. ABBOTT: There have been some conversations and I don't know if we've done any pilots on those, but I know I've been talking to different individuals over time that we talk about that. We're open to looking at that.

One of the things we'll be doing over the next year – or hopefully even in a less period – will be coming up with a housing and homelessness plan for the province. We will be doing consultations to get those ideas and see what ones we can support. I know there's some of that that's in and around the St. John's area. It's been seen as quite successful, but we haven't incorporated it as part of our programming.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

How many units currently in the province are fully accessible?

J. ABBOTT: We have – again, depending on fully accessible – about some 280 or so, but we have another 500-plus that meet various degrees of accessibility. They may come in at one level; the electric fixtures may be at the appropriate level, door handles and those kinds of things.

As we move and renovate our units, we're certainly trying to update those. Any new units will be based on the universal design concept, which are the new units we opened up on Froude Avenue. I encourage anybody that is interested to – I don't know if people have moved in yet, but they are state of the art. That's really the new standard that we now need to foster right across the province.

J. DWYER: That's why I asked about getting rid of the old inventory for the new. I heard they're pretty nice. That's the thing; it gives people back that dignity of having a place to stay.

Were all of the funds allocated to the Home Repair Program spent last year?

J. ABBOTT: Did we spend the full?

J. DWYER: Is that what you reference about the 124? Or was that the home heating?

M. TIZZARD: We committed all the funds from the previous year. We had some funding leftover, but as the minister talked about, we'll take that into the next fiscal year.

You mentioned is there a wait-list for the Home Repair Program earlier. No and we anticipate the program to be open for the full fiscal year, based on the budget we have.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

How many new affordable units were created last year?

J. ABBOTT: Just the ones we've now built on Froude Avenue, which is eight.

J. DWYER: Okay.

J. ABBOTT: In terms of new.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

J. ABBOTT: That was a rebuild on an existing site due to a fire there several years ago.

J. DWYER: Right.

How many units are vacated currently? Is there a plan in place to expedite their fixes?

J. ABBOTT: There are just over 300 units that are vacant. Then, within that, we are trying to get some tenants in. So we're roughly down to just about over 140 that are, I would call, truly vacant. They're the ones that we'll be looking to make sure we can repair, modernize and get families in. Labrador West is a case in point where we have tenders out to reconstruct those units.

J. DWYER: Okay.

What's the average length of time that a unit sits vacant while waiting for repairs?

J. ABBOTT: I don't know if we have an average but – and Julia mentioned there in terms of trying to get people in, once there's a vacancy – it could be a couple of days to, in some cases some units have been vacant for over a year or two because we just don't have the dollars available to do the major repairs. If we go in to do major repairs, you're talking \$100,000 to \$200,000 and probably even higher, given current costs. We just juggle that as we can based on the budget.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can you provide an update on the Home Energy Savings Program? Were all the funds allocated at that point?

J. ABBOTT: That is a successful program; we've had lots of interest in it. We're expanding, even this year, with some federal dollars.

In terms of actual spend last year, Michael?

M. TIZZARD: Last year, we spent \$1.1 million out of the \$2-million allocation, so we will carry forward the balance into this fiscal year. Also,

it's not an NLHC program, but there's a rebate program this year for conversion of homes from oil heat to electric in the provincial budget.

There's also a new federal program out that was just announced last week, where people can have an energy audit completed of their home. There's eligibility for a \$5,000 grant for things like doors, windows, insulation, air sealing, heating upgrades, those kinds of things. That federal program is open now as well.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Does the department do any inspections, site assessments or period visits to these homes?

J. ABBOTT: A good question. In terms of looking at, for anybody, grants, yes, there is an assessment of what work gets done for that grant. One of things that we will be looking at going forward for rent supplements is that any and all landlords, their units will be inspected before we now enter into agreement with them or through our clients. That's going to be a major departure and improvement, in my view, as we move forward.

J. DWYER: I think it's a big step forward, to be honest, yes.

Can I get a detailed list of the salary Estimates?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR: Your time has expired.

J. DWYER: I was just going to say I think my time has expired. That was actually the end of my questions.

CHAIR: We'll move on to MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I apologize if I ask some of the questions that have already been asked. I'm trying to keep track of them here.

Just to follow up on one that my colleague mentioned earlier on; it had to do with if we sell off units depending on their status or their state

of repair. Do we sell off units? Does it come to that point when we sell off stock?

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Dinn, I may say I probably misspoke in terms of selling off. Really, what I intended to say is that because a lot of our housing units are in multiple units, it would be – which one site up on Froude Avenue when there's, I'll say, an unfortunate circumstance, but an opportunity then to rebuild on the site. That was really what I meant to say there.

On occasion, we may have one or two homes that are stand alone in the community that are no longer in use and there's a community group or others that may want to use it. We're doing that up in Nain, for instance. We will sell that at whatever the going market rate or less, depending on what the circumstance is. We do still have some units that are outside our social housing mandate, but we don't have any plans for any change there either at this point.

J. DINN: My concern that I understand is that if a block of houses were indeed sold, what would the alternative be? Would there be a rebuild, would they be replaced or would we be going towards rent supplements?

J. ABBOTT: We see it based on the need. We are going to either rebuild or make sure we have additional rent supplements in place.

J. DINN: Okay.

J. ABBOTT: So that there is – from a cost-benefit, in some cases, it may not make sense to rebuild a unit because there is not a market there. Then we would look at what other options we have.

J. DINN: So let me ask you a pointed question then: Will there be a policy to look at selling off units in favour of rent supplements, do you think?

J. ABBOTT: No.

J. DINN: Okay. No, I appreciate that.

Most of the questions are general; one or two have already been answered. In the bilateral agreement with the federal government as part of the National Housing Strategy, we have a

commitment to expanding the social housing stock by 894 units. Can you give us an update on the progress towards that milestone?

If I may, if any of these questions are – you can certainly send the information to us so that we ...

J. MULLALEY: We can provide a little bit more detail to you afterwards, but from an expansion perspective right now, there have been some units, like the Froude Avenue would be an example of that. You recall the low-barrier shelter and we do have the proposal call out for a permanent shelter for 40 beds. So that 40 beds would also be included in that expansion number as well.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

The most obvious figure in the Estimates is the decrease in the province's operating grant to NLHC of a little over \$3.5 million. Why was that money cut? Has it been made up before in some other revenue source, such as a federal transfer? I think you might have mentioned something along that.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DINN: Yeah.

What is the total amount of money allocated to Supportive Living? I think it was if I have my notes right, \$7.6 million correctly. Is there any breakdown of how much will be going to each region of the province? Specifically, what kinds of solutions to homelessness will this fund?

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Dinn, in terms of the \$7.6 million, we have 20 non-profit community groups that we provide funding for. So we can provide that breakdown to you, as well as sending other detail. Within that, then, there are different clients for each of those organizations.

J. DINN: Okay.

J. ABBOTT: I think I was given one number, in terms of actual people, that we've engaged in. We're talking over 5,000 people that are being supported in one way or another through that funding. It just speaks to the necessity for whatever housing programs we look at now and

going into the future – and we're seeing certainly because of the need for shelters and the like – is having supportive housing supports in place. Just providing a home, in some cases, obviously is not sufficient.

My previous work with the Canadian Mental Health Association – that was an area that we were moving into because we saw the need there. There are lots of agencies and interest groups across the province that are seeing the need for that. When we look at our homelessness plan going forward, that's, I think, where we'll probably see a bigger emphasis.

One of the things I'm involved in right now with the Housing Corporation is that we want to look at all the agencies that are involved in housing, however broadly defined. Let's make sure we all know what we're doing but, more importantly, because we know there are still gaps and we have a finite set of dollars to focus the appropriate solution. So we will be doing a lot of work in that area over the next months to try to get that right, or at least if not right, a whole lot better than we're currently doing.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

Is it possible to have an update on the staffing numbers by region? Have there been any positions eliminated through attrition?

J. ABBOTT: Well, we have all that information available. There have been some small changes in staffing over the past year, but through retirements or attrition.

J. DINN: How much of the NLHC budget this year goes to paying the salaries of its employees?

J. ABBOTT: Percentage-wise the salaries budget.

J. MULLALEY: It's 21.3 per cent, collectively. It's 6.2 per cent in the maintenance and 15.1 per cent in other salaries.

J. DINN: So 6.2 per cent of that 21.3 per cent is in maintenance?

J. MULLALEY: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: How many maintenance people would that represent?

J. MULLALEY: It's 94 maintenance staff.

J. DINN: The breakdown, would it be possible to have that broken down by how many maintenance people by region, if that's all right?

J. MULLALEY: We do, yes.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Staying at home and aging in place can save costs in both the senior citizen and on government. I think you mentioned the home repair subsidies that are – I forget the exact amount.

I don't know if I need to ask it, but I'll say it anyway: Could you provide us with an overview of the home repair and other subsidies available to seniors to help them stay in their homes? I think you've talked about – well, we looked at it here – everything from home heating to Home Repair Program. \$11.5 million for \$22,000 income, that would be that (inaudible)?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

Mr. Dinn, I think you will be getting a copy of our Estimates book, and that's all broken out there for you.

J. DINN: What's the definition of low income in this case? What would be a low-income person?

J. ABBOTT: Depending on which program, so it could be \$32,500 up to into the low 40s. There's a variation for Labrador residents.

J. DINN: Okay.

J. ABBOTT: Depending on the program.

J. DINN: Okay.

I'm thinking of a specific person earning \$20,000 –

J. ABBOTT: Then they would fit in any of our programs.

J. DINN: Perfect. Excellent.

How much money is paid to non-profit organizations for housing and how much is spent on emergency housing? This might be the more detailed one: Could we have a list of those non-profits and the amount of money awarded to each?

J. ABBOTT: Yes. That's, again, all contained there.

J. DINN: Perfect. Excellent.

By the way, I do support the whole notion of funding non-profits for housing. I think that in many cases the bang for the buck is better. That's just from my own experience with them.

How much money is paid annually or monthly to private emergency shelters and how many private emergency shelters are operating? Is it possible to break this down by region? If I remember correctly, we're sort of moving away from that.

J. ABBOTT: Yes. Again, we have that information here.

One of the things that we've been successful in is working with other community agencies to get away from the private emergency shelter concept, because we know the weakness of that model, if I can put it that way. The work we're doing with The Gathering Place and others here in the St. John's area has certainly reduced the need for that. Our objective would be to get that down to zero.

J. DINN: Excellent. Thank you.

CHAIR: The MHA's time has expired, so we will move back to MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Thank you very much.

Earlier you referenced \$7 million was going to be spent on units, whether it's new units or repaired units. How much is allocated for the metro area and how much is allocated for – I guess we'll refer to it as outside the Overpass?

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Dwyer, we don't have that material in front of us, but we can make that available.

J. DWYER: Okay. I'd appreciate that.

If you are sending out some of them Schedules to the Third Party, I'd like a copy as well because some of the questions he asked for, I'd like to get that information as well.

J. ABBOTT: It will be shared. Obviously, our briefing book will be made available, but any of the supplemental information as well.

J. DWYER: Okay. Perfect.

I'd like to get the breakdown of units by region as well, just for the simple fact that I know – I think there are a couple of pockets that are really deficient, where other pockets are really thriving here in the province. I think Labrador is going to be a big issue going forward. Marystown is actually a big issue for us and Bell Island is an issue for us. Based on the amount of units – and these are nothing to do with the metro area and I know we have great needs here in the metro area as well, but I just want to make sure that it is not all focused because it is the higher concentration of people.

What happens outside the Overpass is, kind of, that you get disparaged because you are so spread out, right.

J. ABBOTT: Yes. And part of it, dare I say, is the legacy we've inherited of these housing units and homes built in the '50s and '60s. Of course, populations change and family sizes change and all of that, so it proposes a real operational challenge for us. That is why, with the rental supplement program we have more flexibility and the tenant/client is given a lot more flexibility.

I had a case recently where I received a call from a gentleman, and they felt they needed to move and they substantiated that reason. The solution was a rent supplement and it suited their purposes. They were very appreciative of the flexibility of the Housing Corporation to be able to meet that. That is really what we are trying to do here, and the more we can do on that the better, obviously.

J. DWYER: With a lot of clients, I find that if they are in need of housing and stuff like that, they probably have some underlying issues medically and stuff like that. Is the Department of Health and Community Services brought into the picture when somebody is making that application, and does that move them up on the list or anything like that as a priority when we know there are special circumstances in place?

J. ABBOTT: Yes. That's one of the things, and people will say: Where am I on the list? Well, yes, you're on the list, but these other circumstances for some – their neighbours or other clients and future tenants – come into play.

I'll either ask Melanie or Julia just to talk about that process.

J. DWYER: Okay.

J. MULLALEY: Yes, so there is a priority wait-list code. For example, victims of violence are number one on our list. Then we have unsheltered and homeless, and medical is under that. There is a variety of wait-list codes that are prioritized. When there are issues from a medical perspective, there are often support letters from physicians, occupational therapists and others. That all helps us to prioritize clients' needs.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

J. ABBOTT: If I may, just to continue on there, obviously, the aging demographic of society, the high percentage of our tenants and applicants under many programs are seniors. We know, to allow them and support them to age in place, we're going to end up having to do more – and should do more – to support them. That's why the redesign and wherever we can to make these adaptable for long-term use is going to be a real critical part of the work we do going forward.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

The reason I brought that up about being referred to other departments – and I understand the priority – is because I know of a case actually in Marystown where a young lady was approved for \$600 for a unit. Consequently, she found the unit for \$650 and was told that she

couldn't have that extra \$50 a month. I've given you this story already.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Anyway, they found a unit in that budget, actually, in Grand Bank, which is about 40, 45 minutes away from Marystown itself. To keep a roof over her head, I guess, she agreed or whatever, but then we're paying \$3,000 a month to get her back and forth from Grand Bank to Marystown for the methadone program.

That's why I want to make sure that we're doing a holistic approach, because there are many special needs for many different people. We don't know what they're going to present, but I would rather that we look at them holistically than just putting a roof over their head. If we're going to give them a hand up and we're going to help them, then that's the approach, a wraparound service, we'll say, kind of thing.

My colleague asked for staff by region. How many vacant positions are there now? I think I asked that before but I just wanted to – can I get that in region? I can wait on it, that's fine.

J. ABBOTT: Yeah, we have all that.

J. DWYER: Okay, perfect. Thank you.

We're talking about new units. I know that we put a six-unit shelter there in Labrador. What is the propensity to put another shelter there? Because it's already overwhelmed.

J. ABBOTT: It will be based on truly community need. We're working with whatever community we're in, working with all the agencies and advocates to make sure we know what is happening, what the need is and, then, where we can support that. That's really the basis of anything we do there.

What we are seeing in Labrador, whether it is Central, in terms of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, you know the pressures there. We have a lot of people coming in from the coast and we're trying to make sure – they're transient so making sure we can support them. We heard the Member for Labrador West earlier today talking about the need there because of what's happening in the economy. We're assessing that

each and every day, and then we will work with the community to find the solution.

Here in St. John's, for instance, emergency shelters, long-term shelters and supportive housing is identified as a critical need, so we're working with The Gathering Place, as an example, we're working with the Salvation Army and others to make sure – because depending on which populations you're working with will determine what needs are in place.

The thing we've learned is that we have to get it right, as best we can, at the start. A shelter can mean many things to people. Some of them view it as just a short-term accommodation, one or two nights; others will see that as a solution for the long-term. You have two sets of service requirements based on that. We know we have to be careful when we do that. At the same time, if anybody needs true immediate shelter, then we'll use whatever resources are available in the community, whether it is hotels or other accommodations, to support those individuals.

J. DWYER: Okay.

I think I've asked for this already but can I get a breakdown of units by region so that we understand. We can then further break it down to availability, what needs to be repaired and all that kind of stuff.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Then that would be probably our next meeting, type of thing. Do you know what I mean?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Okay.

I'm good there, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Dinn?

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Would you maybe be able to repeat the number of people who are currently availing of rent supplements? I think you mentioned 50 per cent

of which were seniors. Maybe you didn't say a number, but I thought –

J. ABBOTT: No, I think there are just over 2,100 – oh, 1,800. Okay, sorry.

Roughly, 1,800 right now, Mr. Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

When was the last time the rent subsidy cap was increased? Has there been any – a two-part question – consideration given to committing landlords to a rent cap agreement when they agree to take on a rent supplement recipient or tenant?

J. ABBOTT: I don't think the cap has been changed lately, but we are looking at that going forward, based on market conditions. We want to make sure that the units we are renting – or I'll say renting on behalf of – are at the low to middle end of market, so that they are appropriate and meeting current standards.

We know that the price of rent – certainly on the Northeast Avalon – has gone up. On a go-forward basis, we will be looking at adjusting the rents, but there is a cap from what we would be able to subsidize.

J. DINN: Is there any attempt, especially with the larger organizations, to have that as part of the agreement – if you're taking on our clients you're getting guaranteed rent – to commit them to maintaining a rent cap for them?

J. ABBOTT: Yeah, that would be part of the rental agreement.

J. DINN: Okay.

J. ABBOTT: Again, we can only subsidize up to a certain level, but we recognize that we have to adjust that number. It's not going to be a huge increase here.

J. DINN: No.

J. ABBOTT: But what we also want to move to are more portable arrangements, so that we are subsidizing the individual, not the landlord.

J. DINN: Right.

J. ABBOTT: So that's the direction which we plan to move and that's where the federal government is moving. We're in negotiations with them right now around those details.

J. DINN: Where I'm going with that is the group I was with, we have a six-unit affordable housing unit, but there's a cap on what we can charge them as rent.

J. ABBOTT: Yeah.

J. DINN: That's part of the agreement, no issue with that. But I'm just wondering if something like that can be arranged for – and I'm thinking of large corporations like Killam and others.

J. ABBOTT: Exactly. Yeah.

J. DINN: What is the government's timeline for approving the Canada housing benefit? How many additional rent supplements will this result in?

J. ABBOTT: I'm saying we're close to the end of those discussions and negotiations. We would hope to be in a position to announce in the next month or two, at the outside, the results of that. If everything goes to the current plan, we will be able to implement that this fall, at the outside.

J. DINN: Do you have any idea of how much additional funding this could unlock?

J. ABBOTT: It's going to be between \$30 million and \$40 million.

J. DINN: Thank you.

We brought this up when we met with you. We certainly appreciate the time when we first met you and your staff. This has to do with the real estate income trusts, the REITs. I'm just wondering, out of the money paid out in rent supplements, how much of it actually goes to REITs such as Killam and Northview?

J. ABBOTT: We would know in terms of the landlords that we're dealing with, so we can provide you with that information. Now, how they're structured, I'm not as conversant about. Obviously, that would be there in their corporate filings. It is that model that we want to move away from so, then, it would be the tenant who

will seek their apartment. We'll obviously support those who need that support. The landlords, then, will be like any other landlord; you have to meet the needs of the tenant, not the payer.

J. DINN: If we have 1,800 who are availing of rent supplements, if a thousand of those are actually living in REITs themselves, then it gives us an idea of where the – because that money is just going straight out of the province.

J. ABBOTT: Yeah. Well, as I said, maybe your pension plan might be invested in it.

J. DINN: Oh, listen; I'd be the first one to say get out of it. No issue with that; ethical investments.

There has been a lot of talk, including some mention in the Greene report, about wraparound services. Disproportionately, the clients that NLHC serves actually have a number of issues and complex needs that must be addressed, along with the lack of housing.

When they're in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, who would provide these services in partnership with the NLHC?

J. ABBOTT: We have housing officers and we also have social workers. In some areas, we have our supporting community centres, such as Buckmasters Circle. They're the kind of supports that we have to make available. Then we would call upon if there were other community resources that can and should be made available.

J. DINN: Okay.

J. ABBOTT: But as I said at the outset, we recognize less, I'll say, in our own programs, but when we're working with community agencies that are really on the ground working with people who need real supports, need shelters, need what have you, that's where we are spending a lot of time. That's why the government, over the past couple years, has moved all housing-related programs and services to the Housing Corporation so that we have a broader vision but, more importantly, we have the broader view as to what's going on right now in the communities.

That one-stop shop for the community now, when it comes to government, will come to NLHC and say here is what we think is our housing need. What can we do together, who else can we bring in to help so that where CMHC – which has been a great partner. The federal government has certainly been putting a lot of money into housing. They see it as we see it; we're just trying to get more of those federal dollars into the province. We're having a lot of success in Labrador where we're working with the Indigenous governments and organizations on their housing needs, so there is a lot happening. We need to bring all that together now, in our housing and homelessness plan, so that we have a plan, a vision for the next three to five years.

J. DINN: That's good to hear.

One group I have worked with here is End Homelessness St. John's, but I'd like an umbrella group – and I've spoken to Julia about this a number of times too. The whole notion of an umbrella group, so that there is a coordination of services, makes perfectly good sense to me.

Is there any system for analyzing, evaluating or measuring the success of interventions by community organizations that provide these wraparound services? The other part is: Are the organizations that we refer to in this discussion able to keep up with the demand for their services for NLHC?

J. ABBOTT: It is a two-part question there. In terms of accountability for outcomes, the Minister of Finance referenced in her Budget Speech the need and desire by government now to enhance the transparency and accountability arrangements we have with all agencies funded by the government. We will be doing that.

I would argue that the NLHC is probably one step ahead, because that's something they have been doing. We will make sure that we can build on that. I've already had those types of conversations with some of the agencies that we're dealing with.

In terms of the agencies themselves, we need to make sure that they're responding the right need to the right client. There are a lot of good intentions there. Housing and meeting those

needs is an expertise and skill set that is not prevalent right across the spectrum. We want to make sure we bring the evidence and the right resources to those solutions.

The last thing I want to see is that we have competing organizations – and there's a bit of that at times and there's duplication at times. We want to make sure we deal with all of that going forward. End Homelessness St. John's has been very active. They started that in the St. John's area, but there are a lot of other players as well. As I said earlier, we need to bring all this together.

Then, what we do here in St. John's will be one thing. What we do in the Northeast Avalon, what we do out in Central, the West Coast and Labrador, obviously, will be different. But it's ideally focused on that same objective: to meet those housing needs right where they exist.

J. DINN: Coordination is good. I certainly appreciate it.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Lane.

P. LANE: Thank you.

Minister, I just want to just stay a little bit on the topic you were just talking to with my colleague – or our colleague, I should say – around wraparound services and so on. I think it's a very significant issue. It's one thing to provide someone with a shelter to put over their head, but if they don't have the supports that are required, you're kind of setting them up for failure to a great degree.

I know at one point in time, going back many years ago, we started emptying out institutions, people with mental health, and we said we were going to put people back in the community. Some of the stories I've heard over the years, it's kind of like they were put back in the community, but they never had the supports.

It's fine to put them in a house, an apartment, a shelter, whatever, but if you don't have someone who's going to be checking on them regularly, making sure they're taking their medications – that's a big issue for some people, depending on

how severe the mental illness; issues around medications and all these things, and security and safety – then we're only sort of half doing what we need to do.

In terms of your wraparound services that are being proposed and that you're moving towards, in addition to the housing are we also having supports, whether it be medical, addictions, mental health issues? Are we also incorporating food security issues?

I know I can think of a couple of people in my district who I've dealt with. I don't have near the amount that our colleague from St. John's Centre would have, but I know of one family, for example, that I've been delivering food to them personally every couple of weeks from the food bank because it's a single mother, three kids and no vehicle, so no way of actually getting the food. As a person who's actually delivered the food, I can tell you the food they get for two weeks – I know the food bank is doing their very best, God love them, but I don't know how they feed the family on what they get.

There are a lot more issues than simply a rent supp or a Newfoundland Housing unit. I'm just trying to get a sense of when we're talking wraparound services, is it encompassing all those issues? Is that the plan? Is that how it will work?

J. ABBOTT: Well, I think it's a good segue into the ministry as a whole. The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, along with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, its focus – and in my mandate letter from the Premier – is to really get at all of these issues. By moving Income Support into the ministry, we have that vehicle because we're able to talk to people and get their needs right up front. If they have income and food issues, we can deal with it there. If they have housing issues, we can now address it.

In talking to both the CEO, Julia Mullaley, and the deputy minister, Susan Walsh, that's really what we will be focused on now as we move forward. When I look at the Poverty Reduction Strategy renewal, I'm more interested in not coming up with globs of money for new programs, what I'm interested in is exactly what

you said, Mr. Lane: What are the needs right at the front line here?

If you look at the example you're using, yes, they have housing, but they don't have food or access to food or they don't have transportation. Where is the community? Where is, then, government to support those in the community that want to address those needs to keep people at home in their communities? Other than that, they're going to come in our system somewhere and probably in the emergency room at a hospital in a year's time. That is where we have to move out.

We're seeing the work that our community centres, which are here in and around St. John's, for example – Mr. Dinn made reference to Buckmasters Circle earlier today; a true success story. They know their community, they know the families, they know where the kids are, what they're doing and they have seniors. But they've also talked to Eastern Health about getting some health services – a Public Health nurse practitioner. That's a primary health care model that we've been talking about. It's in action right now and we have it up at MacMorran. I see that kind of model then being replicated in your community and others where we can meet the needs right on the front line.

We need to engage our municipal councils more often, because they tend to stand off to the side. They know their communities better than we know them, but we have to make sure they're engaged. There is a lot of work that needs to be done and that's where we see the new department taking on those issues and moving forward. This is not a money issue; this is a coordination-of-service issue and making sure that we have the right professionals supporting the people at the right intervals. I see there's a lot of opportunity to do that going forward.

P. LANE: Thank you, Minister.

I totally agree. There are an awful lot of moving parts. We have to focus on the individual and all their needs or all the families' needs, and not just one aspect here and somebody in a different department dealing with something else. In my experience, there has been quite a disconnect over the years – I'm sure you've seen it in your former role – from one department to another on

a lot of issues. That's good. I am glad to hear that because that's a very important issue, I think, for us all.

Minister, I'm assuming it will be in the briefing book that you have that we can have, and I know that this particular – perhaps the budget, I think it has been done this way every year. But when you look at it from the perspective of asking questions and so on, if you didn't have experience knowing about all the programs that exist and the issues that exist, just looking at this document you'd never know what's what. I'm not seeing any breakdown. We have one number, Grants and Subsidies, \$46,943,400. But, as you know, that's housing, that's rent supps: that's all these other programs that we talked about all lumped into one budget line.

Just on a go forward, I don't know if it's something that could be changed in next year's budget to give us more of a breakdown or, if not, because this is just the way it is. Perhaps in the future we can have even like a little cheat sheet or something with a little bit more of breakdown would be helpful. I just wanted to point that out.

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Lane, I'll have that discussion with the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, because I know she has indicated, again, in the Budget Speech, that she wants to see all our agencies come before the House. We'll have to look at, obviously, the process there, but what budget material then is presented.

I understand the point you make. For me, there would be no particular challenge in having the full budget and then just showing what the grant is for the department.

P. LANE: Yeah.

J. ABBOTT: The same thing if we deal with Memorial or the health authorities.

P. LANE: Yeah, well, it's no different if we ask about – if we have the Home Modification Program, if we have the Provincial Home Repair Program, whatever, then I could clearly see last year you budgeted this much for this program, here's what was spent and here's what you're budgeting this year. Looking at this, there's

nothing to look at, so I just wanted to throw that in there.

I'm running out of time here very quickly. Another issue that's an important one in my district – and something that I hear about quite often and have over the years – is the availability of affordable seniors' accommodations. There are a lot of private businesses out there that are selling condos for \$300,000, or \$400,000 or whatever, but there are an awful of people where that's not what they want or what they need.

There are lot of subsidized units at Masonic Park; the best spot in my mind. It's probably one of the best spots you could have, up at Masonic Park, those cottages. But we need twice as many as what's there now because the wait-list is, I think, 15 years or something. If you put your name in now, they say you might get a call 15 years from now or something because of the demand. There's not enough of that.

Now, I know there are programs where a developer can build a big condo; you give them \$400,000 and then he reduces the rent by \$350 a month for 10 years and so on. Again, that's still not really where we need to be at. I'm wondering, are there any plans, whether it be in Mount Pearl or anywhere else, to sort of expand upon what I would consider the success at Masonic Park?

J. ABBOTT: I certainly know the model that you're referring to and it's been successful. We've had that, again, across the province.

There are two things; one is, obviously, we're engaged in ongoing discussions with the federal government through CMHC and looking at, under the national housing benefit, how any new monies could be spent for new construction and those kinds of things and where they're prepared to support that. We will be looking at those options.

The other thing, where you started, is as we develop our Housing and Homelessness Plan – and that's where we need, for me anyways, to target, in terms of seniors and seniors who are on very low incomes – what are the housing needs right across? When you do the projection out, of course, that demand is going to outstrip any supply in very short order.

P. LANE: Yeah.

J. ABBOTT: No, most people cannot afford \$300,000, \$200,000 condos. They have to be suitable; they have to be ideally one level.

P. LANE: Yeah.

J. ABBOTT: That's where we need to go.

There was, back 20, 30 years ago, a lot of housing cottages and seniors cottages put around the province. We've inherited the management of those. A lot of the health authorities got involved in that to meet their needs and realized they weren't in the housing business, so they obviously transferred responsibility over. But that's the kind of thing I see us looking out over the next year as we do the plan, and then map this out for the next several years – well, more than several, obviously; it's for the next 10, 20 years, really, doing good assessment of need.

The private market is very strong and robust, but it's not always going where we need at different points in time. I have no problem encouraging the federal government, because they have the bigger levers – to really encourage, through their financing and tax instruments, to get more of these builders to go in this direction, because we won't be able to do it alone, obviously.

P. LANE: No.

Thank you.

CHAIR: MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The only two things I have there is that in listening to your response to my colleagues, it's impressive that we would get municipal governments on board, because then we can open it up to understand the need even better. I appreciate that.

The last thing I'll ask is – I'm not sure if I did ask this directly – can I get a copy of your briefing notes sent to my office?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

You've touched on this, I think, in relation to another question in your opening. Is it possible to provide us an update on the wait-list; in other words, by age, bedrooms required, accessible units in the region. We note that a lot of the calls we get – sometimes outside of the district – have to do with people trying to be matched up, who are overhoused or underhoused and so on and so forth.

If we could have an update on that now, great. If not, that's something that we –

J. ABBOTT: We'll provide that as best we can in terms of whatever breakdown we have, in terms of what we use to plan for those units.

J. DINN: You've mentioned, I think, also – I think it was in answer to my colleague from Placentia West - Bellevue – that there are currently 300 vacant units. If I understood it correctly, there are 140 that are truly vacant. They are the ones that are in need of some major repairs, I understand. Would that be correct?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DINN: What are we looking at? When we talk about major, are we talking about in the order of \$100,000 to \$200,000?

J. ABBOTT: That would be the average, yes. Again, you're talking roofs, windows and then the interiors. Are they up to standard? Electrical, again, knowing that a lot of these are 40, 50 or 60 years old now.

J. DINN: I was speaking to Ms. Mullaley about this before but there's a housing unit on Anthony Avenue – actually, it has an extra tenant in that a bird has made its nest there for the last few years.

J. ABBOTT: We're not charging rent.

J. DINN: No, I know. That's the thing. He's freeloading.

I'm just wondering though – and that one, if I understood it, is being taken care of this year, so that's on the list. I'm just wondering – you may not be able to address it now but to give some timeline as to when these will be repaired. Often, a lot of calls that we get there are major repairs. We often try to come up with an answer. Even if we say, look, you're on the list this year, it will be done or next year, but we can tell you that it's on the list.

While that may not always be the best answer, sometimes it gives a tenant – okay, good. We know where we are in this and what we're coming with.

J. ABBOTT: That's the kind of discussions we have. I've had some calls myself in the past week or two, the same question, but we were able to give them an answer to say, yes, within a month this repair is being done.

To your bird nest, I was a friend's house just recently at the high end of market, and he, too, had a bird's nest in his house.

J. DINN: This one pecked his way through the siding.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DINN: That's great.

We asked last year and we would like this year, again, a list of companies that do subcontract or maintenance work, if any, for NLHC. How are these contracts awarded then? Would they be through tender or is there a list of companies that you have that you go to preapproved?

J. ABBOTT: Do you have an answer?

J. MULLALEY: It is a mixture. Depending on the threshold, sometimes it is through public tender. We also have some requests for proposals. As well, we also do solicitation out to suppliers, even for our home repair programs. They're published on our website for homeowners so that they can then contact those as well. It's generally through the public procurement process.

J. DINN: Okay, good.

Regarding last week's funding announcement in conjunction with the federal government – and I think we have that one answered: How much is being provided by the provincial government? That one's taken care of.

How many units will be repaired or upgraded with this \$18.5 million? I don't know if I got that. I was trying to track down a few –

J. ABBOTT: It would be, Mr. Dinn, over 200 units –

J. DINN: 200 units.

J. ABBOTT: – in terms of major repair. Then, up to 4,000 units could get some level of repair over the period as well.

J. DINN: Will that be over this next year? Will that be one year?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DINN: Excellent.

Will all that work be done in-house through the – because you only have maintenance staff, I think it was 94. That will be contracted out?

J. ABBOTT: It will be both our staff and contracted.

J. DINN: Through the RFPs and –

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay.

When these repairs and upgrades occur, will we have the same number of housing stock units as before? Now, I note that in the units that were replaced on Froude Avenue, there were 12 units there before; it has been replaced with eight. I would assume, then, part of that goes to an assessment of the needs as to whether we needed 12.

J. ABBOTT: That's right.

Again, the cost-effectiveness of the repair. As I said, there's a threshold where we recognize that in some units it won't be worth doing it. So we want to make sure we use that money wisely in

either a rebuild, which may mean – because once we rebuild, there are usually less units. That's why we're being very careful of that.

J. DINN: I know the demand in the area is significant, but would it have made better sense to replace it with another 12 unit, versus an eight unit. That's where I'm going with it.

J. ABBOTT: Well, then it's the cost.

J. DINN: Okay.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

J. ABBOTT: Oh, yes. No, we were saying we replaced – Julia, can you ...?

J. MULLALEY: The Froude Avenue ones, there were eight displaced by the fire and eight replaced.

J. DINN: Oh, so it's not 12? I understood there were 12 replaced. So it's eight.

J. MULLALEY: Yeah.

J. DINN: Okay, that's good. That clarifies that.

J. MULLALEY: Yeah.

So with the more major repairs again, we'll continue to keep the stock at the 5,575.

J. DINN: That's why, Minister, I had my constituency assistant research too, to keep me on the straight and narrow.

Back in 2019, the province entered into a bilateral agreement with the federal government under the National Housing Strategy for 10 years, a \$270.6-million cost-match relationship. How much have we put forward so far under this agreement? Will we ultimately avail of all the federal money available to us by the end of this agreement?

J. ABBOTT: That would be looking at the cash flows per year. So, yes, we're calling down every federal dollar we can. As we mentioned last year, in terms of our ability to spend was because of COVID, but the dollars flowed and we were able to bring them forward into this year's budget. There are additional programs

being negotiated, such as the rent supplement program. The federal government, in its last budget, was putting in more money and we're availing of all of that.

To their credit, they have been responding to our needs. So, yes, it is a national program, but we're saying, look, this is how we do business here in this province. They have been very receptive to meeting our requirements and allowing us to use some of our existing funding to match the federal dollars, as opposed to us having to look for new dollars.

We are, in some respects, ahead of where they are in terms of programming, such as rent supplements, supportive housing and those kinds of things. They're recognizing that they can come in and support us with their dollars.

J. DINN: We're using provincial dollars that have already been allocated.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DINN: Would it be possible to have a breakdown of that. Are we putting any new money towards it then?

J. ABBOTT: In the short term, very little. Then, as we get dollars freed up we'll be – but then they will be provincial dollars going to some of this programming where we can add more value.

J. DINN: Okay. Is it possible then to look at a breakdown as to what we've been contributing to that? There's a fear here that we could be leaving federal money on the table.

J. ABBOTT: No.

J. DINN: But as I'm hearing, there's a commitment.

For me, that is it. Thank you very much for the answers. We look forward to a copy of the briefing notes and the other questions that we asked.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you.

CHAIR: MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: All I wanted to say, just in closing, was thank you very much to the minister for your answers. Thanks to the Table staff for your professionalism. Thanks to your staff for the work they've put into making the province better for housing and people with those needs.

Thank you very much to you all.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you.

J. DINN: I'll just add we wouldn't be able to do the work in St. John's Centre without – I tell you, Ms. Mullaley and staff have been always open to our phone calls. I tell you it's made our life easy. Well, I shouldn't say easy but a lot more efficient.

Thank you.

CHAIR: MHA Trimper has indicated that he wishes to ask some questions. I just want some clarity from the Committee: If it's 20 minutes in total for the entire department, or for Housing, 20 and then CSSD, 20?

AN HON. MEMBER: Total.

CHAIR: Okay, so it's 20 in total.

P. TRIMPER: Oh, I see you're stopping it at (inaudible).

CHAIR: Yes, we're just doing Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation now and then we'll go into CSSD after.

I'll ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 1.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 1.1.01 carried.

CHAIR: I shall ask the Clerk to do the final total for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

CLERK: Total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation carried without amendment.

CHAIR: We'll take a break right now for 10 minutes to regroup for CSSD.

Recess

CHAIR: Okay, folks, we're going to call the meeting to order again. The minister has a few comments he would like to make, then we will introduce the department and then we'll go right into questions.

Minister Abbott.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good evening, again, folks. Let me begin by addressing the tragedy we have learned of this week after the bodies of 215 Indigenous children, some as young as three years old, were

discovered in unmarked graves at a former BC residential school site.

Certainly, on behalf of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, we acknowledge the role that child welfare plays in the continued trauma experienced by Indigenous children, youth and their families in this province. We remain committed to working closely with Indigenous governments and organizations to address the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care and to improve outcomes.

Just to give you a quick overview in terms of the department, we have what we refer to as 11 lines of business and our Estimates are structured along those lines. We have Child Protection. Within that, we have In Care and Adoptions, Youth Services, Youth Corrections and Adult Protection. We deal with and support persons with disabilities. For those who might not know, today is national Red Shirt Day for accessibility and inclusion.

We deal with poverty reduction through the Poverty Reduction Strategy. As a result of restructuring in government, with my appointment we have two new areas of Income Support and responsibility for the community sector. We believe this integration, as I mentioned earlier, aligns with our social development approach to well-being for the whole population.

It will certainly assist us as we advance the renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy and review of our Income Support program this coming year. Further, this alignment will enhance a fulsome social development plan in response to the recommendations of the Premier's Economic Recovery Team report and the Health Accord NL under the auspices of Sister Elizabeth Davis and Pat Parfrey.

We have, again, a variety of programs, services and policies that focus on supporting individuals, children, youth, families and seniors, persons with disabilities and persons experiencing poverty, as well as working in partnership with the community sector. We'll be talking more about that tonight. Again, the focus of this new department is on early intervention

and prevention. That's the theme that we want to foster on a go-forward basis.

I have other notes here. In terms of our services, we have regional offices throughout the province for delivering on our child welfare and protection program. We also have offices that run and oversee our Income Support, which though they're located outside the Northeast Avalon, do provide, really, provincial services for the department.

One area that we are certainly focused on right now is the *Adult Protection Act*. That's something that falls under our department. The purpose of this legislation is to protect adult residents of the province who are at risk of abuse, neglect and/or self-neglect and who do not understand or appreciate that risk. We started the five-year statutory review back roughly in 2019. We are hoping to have that work done this year and that we will come in with new legislation to protect those adults needing that protection.

Seniors and Aging is a significant part of our work, albeit a small budget, but a significant part of our mandate. We provide funding to different organizations throughout the province. We'll talk more about that tonight.

We have the Disability Policy Office. That's working closely with persons with disabilities and organizations, and we have our provincial advisory group, which we're working with. The main initiative that they've been working on over the past year or two is on new accessibility legislation. That will be an overriding piece of legislation, once introduced and passed by this House, to support persons with disabilities and, really, all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to be engaged fully in our society. I suspect that will take a lot of discussion and interesting debate here in the House.

From a policy perspective, again, the Poverty Reduction Strategy is subject to renewal. As I mentioned earlier tonight when we're dealing with Estimates for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, we see the need to really broaden our approach there and look at all the variety of social determinants of health that can be addressed through the Poverty Reduction Strategy. We're going to build on

work that has been done and the work that Sister Elizabeth Davis is doing. That really will inform what we do in that review. That's going to be, I think, very significant to allow the health reforms to take place.

The biggest program area, in terms of funding, is certainly for Income Support. We're spending over \$220 million on that program here in the province. I will be looking forward to the questions around that program. In terms of a new initiative in the budget, we were able to get additional funding for the Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement. That has been incorporated into our budget this year.

To conclude on just some of my comments, in partnership with other government departments in the community, we are focused on prevention and early intervention with a goal of improved well-being. So, too, we have a responsibility for the protection of some of the most vulnerable people in the province; we're talking children, we're talking adults and we're talking seniors.

This is an important mandate and the power of collaboration and partnership is critical to achieve it. We will continue to strengthen all our program areas to improve outcomes for the people we serve.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Abbott.

I shall ask the Clerk to call the first subhead grouping.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive carry?

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I would like to say thank you to the department and the representatives from the department. I know you don't have an easy job. Like the minister alluded to, this is a very vulnerable sector of our province. I appreciate the work that you all do and for preparing this budget and presenting it today. I appreciate that.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, speaking to the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development and persons living with disabilities, I, too, want to express our condolences to the 215 Indigenous children that were found in a mass grave in BC. Very unfortunate and I think as a society we can be better.

You touched on Red Shirt Day. I appreciate that, because having a little boy with a disability, inclusion is something that we struggle with every day. We're not the only ones. In the meantime, this department – I'm living it, as the Chair is as well. It's a day-in, day-out approach that we take as parents, but it's nice to see you allude to the proactiveness of this department going forward, as opposed to the reactiveness. For that, I really appreciate that. Thank you very much.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Sir.

J. DWYER: Getting into our questions here, can I obtain a copy of your briefing notes at the end?

J. ABBOTT: Absolutely.

J. DWYER: In this budget for the department, are you applying zero budgeting?

J. ABBOTT: Yes, we are.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Are there any errors in the published Estimates book?

J. ABBOTT: I certainly hope not, but the answer is, no, there are none.

J. DWYER: Can you please explain some of the changes from last year? For example, early intervention and prevention are now included in Children, Seniors and Social Development. From which department was it transferred?

J. ABBOTT: That was within, I'll call it, the former department. We realigned some roles and responsibilities and reporting within the department, as we incorporated Income Support division from the former department into the

now existing department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

J. DWYER: Which is something that I actually applaud, because I think as we talked about previously in the last session, this holistic approach, I think it kind of includes to have Income Support in this department as well. I know it adds a lot of work for all of us, but I think it does give us that wraparound service.

J. ABBOTT: Yeah and we're seeing the benefit of that already when we have clients – and I've just seen it in terms of my own constituency point of view where now we can say all right, you actually have a series of issues going on here, now we can look at those issues together. I think it's starting to pay dividends already.

J. DWYER: Perfect. Thank you.

How many employees are in this department?

J. ABBOTT: We have 981 positions right now. Of that, we have, I believe, 175 vacancies.

J. DWYER: How many retirements were in '20-'21?

J. ABBOTT: (Inaudible.)

S. WALSH: Susan Walsh, Deputy Minister.

S. JONES: Sharlene Jones, Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services and Performance Improvement.

C. KING: Cynthia King, Director of Income Support.

S. WALSH: We had three retirements last year.

J. DWYER: You did say that you had 75 vacancies. Is it possible to get a breakdown by region of where those vacancies lie?

S. WALSH: One hundred and seventy-five and, yes, you can.

J. DWYER: Oh, 175? My apologies. Of the 981?

S. WALSH: Correct.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Is it possible to get a breakdown of that by region? Thank you very much.

Were there any positions eliminated?

S. WALSH: We had 13 positions eliminated.

J. DWYER: Fifteen?

S. WALSH: Thirteen.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

How many layoffs?

S. WALSH: No layoffs.

J. DWYER: Okay.

How many were hired last year? How many positions were filled?

S. WALSH: New hires, people who had never worked in the public service, 10.

J. DWYER: Ten.

How many short-term employees and are there any positions to fill?

S. WALSH: Yes, we do have positions to fill. Sixty-nine of the 981 are temporary contractual positions; 918 are permanent. Obviously, with 175 vacancies, we have a number of positions to fill. All of those positions are either under recruitment. Most of our positions are at the regional level, because that is where most of our positions in the department sit. For some of those, we keep them open until filled.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. WALSH: Social workers for sure.

J. DWYER: Did the department receive any monies from the COVID fund? No.

With the addition of other programs under your department, will it result in any savings or job losses?

J. ABBOTT: There would be no job losses. In terms of savings, one of the processes we're going through right now is how we integrate the different staff. They are two different groups of staff, so we're looking at where there may be some efficiencies, certainly, on the financial management side, the IT side, those kinds of things. Right now, we will be running three financial systems, for example, so we have to look at can we migrate to one or two at some future date.

It's fairly complicated. The Income Support program, which is the biggest piece of this right now, has all their own systems; very discrete roles and responsibilities. We're not seeing a significant opportunity here, but we're going to be looking for those where we can. It's certainly at the headquarters level, for sure.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

How many employees in the department are currently working from their residence?

J. ABBOTT: I'll just let you know, and then – may have the specific number here. In terms of our Income Support, pretty well most now are working from home. They have done that through the whole pandemic. That's working quite well. A discussion we need to have internally and with the Human Resource Secretariat and the Cabinet eventually is what changes we should make: bring them back, leave them out, those kinds of things.

In Child Protection, with our social workers, sort of a fifty-fifty split here now over the past year. Some are working from home, but they will come into the office at times to retrieve files and, obviously, speak with their supervisor, but are working at home. That's, again, working quite well. A credit to all staff that after the first week or two, once people knew the new routine and we were able to supply them with the supports – particularly computers – to work from home, that's gone quite seamless.

One of the first questions I asked when I arrived in the department was basically that question. I was concerned or interested to see how – because I didn't observe any noise in the public about missed services and wondering if that was the case or not. In fact, that was the case. They

weren't missing a beat. Again, it's a credit to all our staff to meet their professional responsibilities to our clients.

J. DWYER: I appreciate that.

You must have read my briefing notes because there's a few more on that one later.

J. ABBOTT: Well, if you're going to get mine, I should get yours.

J. DWYER: Yes, that's right.

Is there any plan to review the pros and cons – obviously that was something you kind of just answered – of working from home and possibly consider continued work from home?

J. ABBOTT: Yes. One of the ministers in Cabinet raised that concept and the discussion. As a department, we're very keen on seeing how that could work because we've seen the benefits.

J. DWYER: Perfect. Thank you.

Was the budget prepared based on pre-pandemic expenditures? Was there any consideration given to savings during COVID?

J. ABBOTT: I think when we go through we'll be talking on the specifics. This budget was based on last year's budget. You will see the budget last year and the budget this year; there's not much deviation. But what we actually spent this past year, there was a deviation. What you will see are two things right throughout the piece: savings because of COVID, because we didn't need to spend on meetings, transportation and those kinds of things –

J. DWYER: I think transportation is the biggest one.

J. ABBOTT: – and then we didn't need to hire or rehire during the pandemic to the degree we thought we would, so we've had some salary savings. The savings then went to – because you asked in the first question about any COVID money, we had to fund all of the computers and everything out of our own budget.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Your time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to pick up on a question my colleague asked regarding zero-based budgeting. As I understand it, zero-based budgeting, from my first stint here, is building from the ground up as to what you need, looking at what you need. How will that work in terms of balanced budget legislation?

I would assume that the whole purpose of zero-based budgeting is to keep expenses, the budget, to exactly what it needs. Now that the Budget Speech is promising balanced budget legislation, it sounds like they could butt up against each other very quickly.

J. ABBOTT: Well, I wouldn't necessarily see that they would butt up. Actually, zero-based can reinforce a balanced budget approach, because then we are all – each department, each agency then is focused on what are their, literally, minimum requirements are to deliver the services they want. You add that up right across the boards, the departments and agencies, and then you say, look, here is what that number is.

Then the challenge, obviously, for the Minister of Finance is: All right, do we have the revenues to go against that. If not, then you just back down through each of those – quote, unquote – heads of expenditures to say then you need to reduce. Then the Treasury Board will have a better idea where to focus those reductions, if needed, at any future date.

J. DINN: So where I'm going with this in some way is that zero-based budgeting hasn't worked. I would've assumed that we wouldn't be in the situation we are if we had it, but at the same time, we're looking at bringing that back in. I'm concerned that in your department when you do zero-based budgeting the needs are great.

J. ABBOTT: Right.

J. DINN: The people that we're helping – and I taught for 32 years, I can tell you that when you're dealing with people, that alone is stressful, no matter how good they are.

J. ABBOTT: Sure.

J. DINN: I understand you're looking at people who have a lot of needs. My fear is that with zero-based budgeting you've looked at here's what we really need; now with the spending with balanced budget legislation, if you're forced to peel that back, you're actually – that's my concern.

J. ABBOTT: Yeah, but then there are trade-offs that will be required within a department or across departments. That's really the role of Cabinet to make those decisions and then, obviously, present them here to the House.

J. DINN: Yeah. I just have to say that concern because I wouldn't want to see the – if anything I'd be arguing here this is a core service of government that should be.

J. ABBOTT: Sure, understood.

J. DINN: Okay, with regard to the 981 positions, 175 of them are vacant and 13 positions have been eliminated. Of those 175 that are vacant, what would be the breakdown of the types of the job classifications? How many would be social workers, how many would be maintenance, that kind of thing? Is there a breakdown of just how many positions are left?

J. ABBOTT: I'll just come at this in a couple of ways. In terms of our management, non-management group, 16 are management and 159 are non-management. Then, within that, if you look at our vacancies, if you look at our social worker complement, there are 71 vacancies. Then, I'll call non-social workers or supports to them are 34. Then there are some others throughout the other programs.

If I may, just on the social work one – and those are numbers as of the March 31. We've been successful over the past couple of months to increase the hiring of social workers, but it's probably one of our bigger challenges as a department to meet the needs that we have. We can talk about that a bit more.

J. DINN: Is there much turnover with the social workers?

J. ABBOTT: There's not a lot of turnover. We have people moving within our system. We are constantly recruiting.

J. DINN: Because I can imagine that's a high-stress job.

I'm trying to remember how it was explained to me. When it comes to caseload, there are a number of social workers that are – each one is responsible for a certain number of cases. They're under the supervision of a – so I'm just wondering, then, if you could just refresh my memory on that. Then, how does the impact of 71 vacancies affect the caseload?

J. ABBOTT: In terms of our mandated ratio, we have one social worker for 20 files or 20 cases. How many for a supervisor? Six? So six social workers would report to one supervisor and then to the local or regional manager. We are very focused on trying not to disturb that ratio.

That being said, because there are vacancies, that ratio has gone up to one to 22, one to 23, particularly the higher ratio being in Labrador. As a result, we're working very hard on looking at how we can support those social workers with other help in terms of administrative support, paraprofessional support and any other supports that we can provide while we're still in the process of recruiting.

That's our challenge. We're talking to the school of social work. We need more graduates.

J. DINN: Yeah.

The reason I asked that – and I didn't mean to take up time on this. I ask this in terms of a constituent I've been trying to help, whose issue I brought to one social worker who has now moved out of the department, out of that position. Now, my first thought is, yes, I can understand why because there has to be some stress, especially if you're dealing with people one-on-one or one-on-20. My concern is, is the turnover or the people moving on related to the fact that this ratio is probably creeping up a bit and the workload is intensifying?

J. ABBOTT: Again, it will vary by office, by region and then throughout the province, but we're very mindful of that. That's why, in relation to the supervisor, they will have a close watch, shall we say, on those files as well, particularly the ones that are more complicated. We try to make sure that a social worker has a range of cases, but it is probably the most difficult work that anybody can undertake –

J. DINN: Agreed.

J. ABBOTT: – certainly in the public sector, if not elsewhere.

Over the past year, to Susan Walsh's credit and others, they've reached in to work with NAPE, Jerry Earle and his people on how we can look at the situations we do have control over in the workplace so that our social workers are supported. We just put out a release, because there is a joint committee in place, and we put out a status report there last week. So there's progress being made.

If social workers are on the road, we make sure they have phones and they can be monitored wherever they are, particularly if they have to go into homes that there are concerns about safety and those kinds of issues, making sure that they are supported at the workplace and what other recruitment and other activities we can, as management, put in place to support them. That's been a success story because I think, probably, both sides were not sure how this was really going to work and could we really find common ground, but we have.

I have to compliment NAPE for their participation and leadership on this because they are seeing that they need to work with us, as we need to work with them, and that doesn't always happen.

J. DINN: Okay.

With that in mind, is it possible, then – two things here, first question: So right now there are no cases that anyone who's a client, or a constituent or a person, for a lack of a better word, there's no one without a social worker?

J. ABBOTT: No, that's right.

J. DINN: Secondly, is it possible to have, then, a list of where these 71 vacancies are? Also, I don't need names, but I'm just trying to get the number of currently active social workers, where they are and their caseloads. If there are 20 vacancies in St. John's Centre or the St. John's metro area, I'd like to know that. If there are 10 social workers within the St. John's area but they each have 25 – I'm just looking for the ratio, the breakdown per unit. I don't need to know names or anything like that, but I'm trying to get a handle on what are we looking at here. I know the workload that comes with us. I can only imagine what it means for your people on the ground.

S. WALSH: Absolutely, we can provide you the vacancy information and where the vacancies are. We can do it probably by office, certainly by region for sure.

It would be very difficult to give you the ratio per. We can certainly tell you per region that the ratio of social worker to caseload is 1-23 or 1-24 depending on the region. But as the minister spoke about, if I'm on a team of six and one or two of the positions are vacant, it's not necessarily that I'm covering these other vacancies. So to be able to run data on that – I might have a couple of those cases; my partner, one of the other social workers has a couple of the cases while we're looking to fill, so it's a little harder to get down to workload at that minutiae.

J. DINN: That's a good start. I'll take that for now. That's a good start.

S. WALSH: Okay.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Looking at 1.1.01 in the Minister's Office, why were salaries \$10,000 less than estimated in the Minister's Office?

J. ABBOTT: Not being there, but it was – actually, that one was the minister of the day did not avail of allotted automobile or vehicle allowance.

J. DWYER: Okay.

J. ABBOTT: That was the main reason.

J. DWYER: Why were Employee Benefits zero in 2020-2021?

J. ABBOTT: The Employee Benefits – and I’m just going to read from here now – as a result of – normally we would avail, as minister, of some activity. Of course, with COVID nothing was happening, so those benefits were not required.

J. DWYER: Transportation and Communications, \$54,100 less than budgeted last year. I assume it is because of COVID.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: But for 2021-22, you’re budgeting the same as last year.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Why is it necessary to budget the \$54,100 more for ’21-’22.

J. ABBOTT: You’re going to see that throughout. From a budgeting policy, I think, pretty well right across government, because this was an uncertain year – or last year, I should say – and not knowing exactly where we’re going to be this year they said: Look, we’ll leave the budgets as the same; however, if you don’t need it, you’re not to spend it. Here we are in June and we’re not travelling, so we’re in the same period. I expect when we look at these numbers in a year’s time, they will be pretty well close to where we are in the current year when it comes to travel and communications because we’re doing all our meetings by Zoom or Skype.

J. DWYER: So you just answered my next question. I was going to ask if budgeting was based on pre-COVID amounts, but that would obviously be a yes.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: You managed to carry on business in 2020-21 with substantially less spent in travel. Are you considering a reduction in travel based on the new techniques used and realized in 2021-22?

J. ABBOTT: Absolutely. When we talk about zero-based now, in essence we are in that time where we now will look at all of that and we will – now, I think travel will be the total exception going forward. If I may, the only ones that are really doing any travel and have to travel are our social workers visiting families and court – those kind of things. In terms of meetings, conferences, that’s almost passé now.

P. LANE: So going forward, we would probably use a little bit more on Zoom and Skype and stuff like that?

J. ABBOTT: Yes. And that is minimal cost.

J. DWYER: Yes.

I can move on to 1.2?

CHAIR: Yes.

J. DWYER: I just wanted to make sure. I didn’t want to step on your toes.

In 1.2.01, Executive Support, why were salaries \$37,000 less than budgeted?

J. ABBOTT: Again, we had vacancies we did not fill.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Again, Transportation and Communication were down by \$19,200 as budgeted, and this year you are increasing the budget \$5,000 more than budgeted last year. What’s the reason behind that?

J. ABBOTT: The additional \$5,000, if I can go there for the moment, we have some training that we’re doing. We have a contract there to do that and we’ve committed to doing that. That being said, the overall budget there – in terms of the first, the \$30,000 – will be a lot less.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

So looking at 1.2.02, Corporate Services and Performance Improvement, again, Executive and Support, for last year services were budgeted at just over \$7 million and we only used \$6.5 million. This year, the budget is \$7.075 million

again. If there were savings of \$500,000 last year, why is it budgeted \$20,000 less this year?

J. ABBOTT: I'm not sure if I'm following. Which line was that there?

J. DWYER: Heading 1.2.02.

J. ABBOTT: Yeah, okay.

J. DWYER: It says there in the total. For 2020-2021, the total Executive and Support Services were budgeted at \$7.0962 million, and only \$6.5021 million was spent. This year the budget is \$7,075,600. If there were savings of \$500,000 last year, why is the budget only \$20,000 less this year.

S. JONES: Just for the minister's benefit, he's adding up all three activities. In Corporate Services alone, we actually had salary savings of almost a half a million dollars last year. That was a result of short-term vacancies. So there was a little bit delay, of course, in recruitment last year, but most of them have been filled and will be on a go-forward basis. It was a one-time savings. That's why you won't see it carried over into the new year.

J. DWYER: It's still based on pre-COVID budgeting?

S. JONES: Mainly, yes. So that was 90 per cent of it. For example, in Corporate Services, for our T and C, we actually reduced that number by almost \$30,000 because of the fact we were expecting less travel because of some of our training.

We've already decided during the budget that we would do it in the beginning of this year through various means – whether WebEx, Skype, those sorts of things. We did make a couple of changes, as we go throughout, a couple of times to take advantage of that.

J. DWYER: Okay, perfect.

In talking about the staff, do we know the percentage that we are retaining from our own school of social work?

J. ABBOTT: We recruit any and all that are coming, but there's (inaudible) competition with

our other public services, primarily the regional health boards. They are hiring more social workers. Sometimes their classifications of pay are a bit higher than ours and there's a shift into the health authorities.

J. DWYER: Okay.

For somebody that's applying for a job, I'm kind of looking at two sides of it: one is management and one is front-line staff. Are there rules around applying the same? Let's say if somebody wanted to apply for a management position, they can take a leave of absence to apply. Is that the same situation for front-line workers?

J. ABBOTT: Susan?

S. WALSH: Yes, we follow the NAPE contract as it relates to any leaves of absence for any particular reason. Employees can apply for a leave of absence for other positions. We've been very consistent in approving those, actually.

J. DWYER: If they're not successful in retaining the job, they can go back to their old position as a front-line worker?

S. WALSH: That's correct.

J. DWYER: And not lose any seniority, no nothing?

S. WALSH: That's right.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Why is there a budgeted amount for Supplies this year, yet you spent less than the budgeted amount last year?

J. ABBOTT: That would be we didn't need the supplies; because of COVID, we didn't have the demand. This is a bit of a chicken and egg here, as COVID subsides and we bring the staff back on, as Sharlene and Cynthia have been successful –

J. DWYER: You might not have to. If there are savings, keep them home.

J. ABBOTT: But then whatever supplies they will need, again, I expect there will be a savings from what we budgeted.

J. DWYER: In talking about Supplies, as people were staying home to work from home, did they purchase supplies from the purchasing? Did we give them supplies or were they reimbursed for purchasing supplies?

J. ABBOTT: If they needed supplies, they would come in and we would make that available to them. But if they're using their own computers at home, they use less paper, less photocopying, those kinds of things.

J. DWYER: Okay.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Some general questions first. What is the status of the review and update of the Working Relationship Agreement with the Innu Nation?

J. ABBOTT: A couple of things. I give credit to Susan Walsh and her team. They have been and are working very closely with the Innu Nation, the two communities, Natuashish and Sheshatshiu, in terms of making sure that we – in terms of the work we are doing and certainly our social workers and the training we're doing in terms of cultural sensitivity. That is starting to show significant improvement and dividends in terms of our ability to work with the Innu and the Innu accepting us as true partners in working in those communities.

I have met with Chief Hart and also have spoken to him since I have been in this portfolio. He has been very complimentary of the progress that he has seen and has been very supportive of our department and our social workers. There are issues of culture, there are issues of language and there are issues of acceptance. Of course, what we said at the outset, there's a big trust factor here that we have to really overcome, given the experiences of how we administered the program in the past.

I have been very pleased and optimistic of the progress that I have seen. I've been involved in this program before in my previous life and the new legislation that we have fosters this. Again,

credit to Minister Dempster and others who brought that in.

Then we were working with the federal government under their new legislation. We are proposing some amendments to our legislation to go hand in glove with the federal legislation to the degree and as fast as we can to devolve to the Innu, to the Inuit communities and to the Mi'kmaq here on the Island. That's where we're headed.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

What is the status of agreements with the Nunatsiavut Government concerning child protection and placement?

J. ABBOTT: We're working through all of that, those processes. The agreement is in place and we are really trying to make sure we understand their needs and can resource it. Again, that's one of the challenges, is these are growing communities, more children, more children in need and there is a shortage of qualified staff. We have to work with Nunatsiavut and others in how we share those resources and build again those partnerships.

I know the deputy minister, Susan, is in constant contact with the Nunatsiavut Government on a monthly basis to make sure we are talking the same solutions.

J. DINN: Thank you.

How is work progressing on implementing the recommendations highlighted in the Independent Review of Child Protection Services to Inuit Children?

J. ABBOTT: That's definitely in progress. It's certainly a priority for the department. We're in constant contact with the Advocate, as well, as we are implementing those recommendations. We're hoping to be in the position in the next week or two to table a report that will give you an indication of what we're doing on one of our key recommendations, as well as addressing the others. The report came out in 2019. We are working through all her recommendations. We're pleased with our progress, but we know there's a lot more to be done. We'd like to be able to move faster, but the intent for our

department is to meet all those recommendations.

J. DINN: Thank you.

What expenses were incurred by splitting income support off from Immigration, Skills and Labour and moving it over to this department?

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Dinn, as I said earlier tonight, we're seeing that as a very positive move by the Premier and the government in bringing that particular program into our orbit. We're a Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development really focusing on the social development side of things. As we deal with clients now, we have a broad range of programs and services and policies that we can look at and apply to address their needs.

We'll be in a really good position as we move forward with the Poverty Reduction Strategy because again we have those elements, income and housing and other supports that are at play. In responding to obviously the work that Sister Elizabeth Davis is doing for the Health Accord NL, outside of the health response most other issues are going to probably fall within our mandate to address. The income support piece is going to be pivotal to that, because what we want to focus on going forward is prevention and early intervention.

We want, to the degree possible, not to bring – quote, unquote – any more people into that program than we really need to because we want to support them where they are in the community, what their education and training aspirations are and what their employment aspirations are, and that's where we're going to be focusing our efforts going forward.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I'd like to move on to 1.2.02, if possible. The first part of our question was answered with regard to the decrease in Salaries, but we noticed here that Employee Benefits, though, was far higher than anticipated in last year's budget. What was the reason for this?

J. ABBOTT: In the benefits side there was some Law Society fees that we paid on behalf of the lawyer that's working within our department.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Why were expenses on Purchased Services and Professional Services far lower than expected in the last fiscal year?

J. ABBOTT: Again, it was some of the things we had planned but, because of COVID, were not undertaken.

J. DINN: Thank you.

What was purchased last year under Property, Furnishings and Equipment?

J. ABBOTT: All right. Sharlene, do you have answer for that one?

S. JONES: Just to clarify, are you looking at 1.2.02?

J. DINN: Yes, 1.2.02, it increased by about, oh, \$10,000.

S. JONES: Okay. That overrun was actually a result of laptops that we had to buy for employees during COVID.

J. DINN: Thank you.

How many laptops would that have been? Not many for \$10,000, I assume.

S. JONES: No, because that would've been only for some provincial office staff. Overall, you might see the cost in regions as well. We purchased, I believe it was, 411 laptops in total; as well as we borrowed almost 95 from others just to have over 500 available during COVID.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That concludes my questions on the first section.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

MHA Trimper.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to this department.

I think, as others have indicated, I wanted to start by saying a very sincere thank you to this

department. As the MHA for Lake Melville I can tell you just how many times – sometimes late in the day, sometimes late on a Friday, sometimes on the weekend – people that report to you have responded, have guided myself and my staff in a way to truly and sincerely save lives. I can almost get emotional here just thinking about it. There are a few people that I would love to be there at their retirement and just say thank you very much to them.

I'm not going to talk too much about money. I really wanted to talk about policy. I had a little chat with Ms. Mullaley earlier and I do find her responsibility, of course, intertwines with much of the interest that you're dealing with here. We've made a commitment to get together in the next few days. I look forward to that. I just wanted to bring up a few questions.

I wanted to explore a little bit more on the caseload. I've had some exposure to some of these answers that I'm going to seek some years ago. I just wondered if I could get an update. What percentage would you say of the caseloads for income support, maybe some of the other departments that you deal with would be in Labrador versus the rest of the province?

It's a variety of programs, I know, but I'm aware of some – just checking to see if the numbers are still consistent.

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Trimper, first I want to acknowledge and thank you for your compliments of the staff. That's what we and they are here to do.

Then we'll break it down in terms of your question in terms of what we do on income support and how we deliver that, Island versus Labrador. I'll ask Cynthia if she can respond to that and then maybe Susan can answer then on the child protection side.

P. TRIMPER: That would be great, thank you.

C. KING: The Income Support Program is delivered in a little bit of a different way in terms of how our staff are located versus units of work. For instance, all applications for the province are processed in Stephenville. People who live in Labrador are able to call the Stephenville applications unit. We don't have

actual caseloads in that way. We have case maintenance units and people can call into our case maintenance unit.

There are about 600, approximately, income support households in all of Labrador. The services are provided by whichever unit they are seeking the services from.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you.

I guess, as a politician, community leader you're often challenged about investing in Labrador and support and so on, with such a small population yet, I would suggest, a great preoccupation of your department. It's just one of the conundrums that we struggle with. That's what is on my mind.

The social worker caseload, you spoke about that earlier. I'm well aware of some of the challenges we have, not so much with regional turnover versus loss to the department as a whole. I wonder what efforts might you be considering to try to encourage more – I always believe that probably the best solution to finding people who will really embrace and live and thrive in Labrador would be to find Labradorians who have been there. I wonder do you see any particular initiatives – especially yourself now, Minister, coming new to the department, with all your experience – what you might envisage could be a solution there.

J. ABBOTT: I'm going to get Susan Walsh to give you more detail, because we have had some conversations since I have joined the department. But, again, familiar with that from previous work with government and elsewhere. Your premise, I agree with it, obviously. We are working with the various Indigenous governments and organizations to help build their capacity, and there is ongoing training and everything we're supporting. We are seeing that is truly paying dividends right now in those communities because actually our numbers of children coming in care in those communities are coming down because we are starting to break through the barriers that were put up by us.

Then, secondly, we are obviously working with the school of social work to make sure that they're seeing the need to support the students

from Labrador and that they come and study but return to Labrador. That is what's going to be critical. We know they need to increase their capacity and we need to be able to support that.

Because in the past, whether it is NAPE or others who are saying: Here is what you are doing wrong, department or government. Now we are engaged in a process and they are helping us find solutions. We're also looking at any of the types of benefits and the housing arrangements and fly-in arrangements and all of that. That is starting to stabilize our workforce. Whatever the – quote, unquote – tools in the toolbox, we're trying to find the best of the best to apply in Labrador in particular.

But, Susan, there be more that you can add.

S. WALSH: In addition to what the minister listed – because, certainly, obviously, that is all very relevant – we do work very closely with the school of social work at Memorial University with the idea of how do we try to get social workers to go to Labrador, work in Labrador and, hopefully, stay in Labrador.

In the last, probably, two years now we've introduced social work placements in Labrador. The first time ever was, I think, two years ago, we started. We've had six students do their social work placements: four in Hopedale and two in Natuashish. Of the six, three actually, upon graduation, took employment with us. It was a success and we hope to continue that.

We also, as the minister said, work very closely with our Indigenous partners, really looking at how we support social workers who may not be from the area to learn the culture better, participate in the communities in a way that they learn and are better accepted and those kind of things. We've certainly supported both the Nunatsiavut Government and the Innu to develop prevention and early intervention resources, funded through the federal government, for the Innu, for sure. So then, it's a collaborative approach in terms of how we approach our intervention with families. We find that has helped, not only in terms of understanding the culture and the work, but as well, it makes the social work role a little easier, too, because it's a better acceptance in the community.

Also, as the minister spoke of earlier, we have a lot of work happening right now with NAPE and with the Department of Health and Community Services. We're looking at workforce planning with the Department of Health and Community Services, NAPE, the school of social work and the College of Social Workers as well to determine the number of graduates that are required and, through that, where are they required.

To your initial question, while the greatest number of cases certainly would be on the Island, the complexity of cases in Labrador can't be understated. In terms of supervision, and even when we can recruit, we keep our ratio sometimes even under the 20 where we can because of the complexity of cases, which is also another way in which we try to support the social workers, in their interest, to work in that area.

We also have expanded our fly-in, fly-out model for our Innu communities. We had a fly-in, fly-out model for Natuashish. It was very successful. We saw the caseloads reduced because the consistency in social workers, knowing your families better, those kinds of things and interventions. We expanded that to Sheshatshiu a little over a year ago now and we brought the caseload down. Right now, overall in Labrador, the caseload is 1-26. It had been 1-30, 1-40 at times, so we have seen some success in that, too. We added a couple of extra social workers to that fly-in, fly-out model so that they would be available to work on the Coast and in the NG communities where there are vacancies and there was a need.

We have looked at a number of ways to go about this. As the minister talked about the NAPE committee – I'm realizing I'm over time now – the NAPE committee certainly. We really hope to work now a little more closely as well with the College of Social Workers and with the school of social work on matching where students are coming from in terms of their interest into the program. Of course, we can't control that, but we can certainly have good discussion about it.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you. We got two questions in.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: That was pretty much my questions for the Corporate Services part. The next is 2.1, which is the next header. I think we have to ask the questions.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, do you have any further questions? No.

I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.02 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next group.

CLERK: 2.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 carry?

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: So now, we're looking at the Children, Youth and Families portion. Why were the salaries less than budgeted and increased in this fiscal year?

J. ABBOTT: In terms of the reduction – I should say the reduction in the revised from budget for the past year – again, it was just the difficulty in recruiting – I'll call it the difficult-to-recruit positions, which mainly were social workers. We have planned that we will try to recruit those over the coming year. Again, we budget from budget year to budget year. We have been successful already in the first two months of this year to recruit. Will we use the full amount? Don't know, but we have budgeted for that.

J. DWYER: Okay.

With Transportation and Communications, do you think we'll return to pre-pandemic times of how the office is run? Do you think that because of some of these cost savings we can do things a different way in the next fiscal year?

J. ABBOTT: As I said in the earlier response to an earlier question, the answer is yes, but in this year probably I'm going to say less so because the social workers are right now working from home. They will come into the office as needed.

Right now, I think we're less than 50 per cent at home. Will we get down to zero or somewhere in between? That's something we'll be assessing over the next while. We're certainly open to being flexible, because I see it if they don't need to come to the office but can go to the family, visit and come back to their own residence, that's fine. A lot of the files and consultations will be taking place with their supervisor in the office.

I can see more of drop in; they may not stay the full day shall we say. That's the kind of model we're going to be looking at. So the professional office model where you can come in, when you need to, to meet your supervisor, other than that, yes, you can continue to work from home as long as you feel safe. Again, if you have other challenges working from home, then we'll try to work through those.

Personally, I see that we're going to save money right throughout the piece here.

J. DWYER: That's what I'm thinking too. That the new model, if it's working, there's no sense of fixing something that's already working, right?

Supplies are more than doubled and you're reducing the budget amount less than last year. What's the reason for that?

J. ABBOTT: We had to buy a lot of PPE and what have you. We won't need that on a go-forward basis.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Property, Furnishings and Equipment, almost triple the amount budgeted. Why was that?

J. ABBOTT: That was the personal computers.

J. DWYER: Okay.

So then the Child and Youth Advocate report, you reference to that, about 20 per cent of the recommendations haven't been satisfied. How long do you think it'll take before this list is exhausted?

J. ABBOTT: Well, we're very active on all of the recommendations. We haven't put a specific time frame on those, but we are committed to – and certainly in next yearish – to make sure we meet those.

There have been subsequent reports. We have another set of recommendations in two recent reports that we're also trying to meet those recommendations – all valid. Those that are urgent and immediate, we're on to those; those that have both a medium- and longer term time frame, then we're taking the time to do those.

COVID has, again, sort of reared its head, because staff were not available on other priorities through the piece. So we're working to make sure we can get all those done. We're keeping in close contact with the Advocate to let her know exactly where we are on all of those recommendations. If she has a particular concern or a particular recommendation that she wants us to act on now, then we'll re-prioritize our work to make sure that's done.

J. DWYER: That's good.

The last question I will ask on this heading is about the PRIDE program. I think that in the last Estimates I had asked if that was going to be prevalent in Labrador as well. I guess my thing was to try and – my thinking was more along the lines of Indigenous communities. That way, they'd be able to stay with an elder, an aunt, an uncle, whatever, and then be able to stay in their own community and keep their own heritage and things like that. Is that program now fully available in Labrador since the last time we did Estimates?

S. WALSH: A few things to be said there in terms of your question. Yes, PRIDE is and has been running in Labrador for a number of years. We actually have an adapted PRIDE, given recognition of Indigenous. We also partnered with Indigenous partners to deliver it. This past year it's been a little slower because of COVID. We've had some communities we were unable to go into because communities were shut during the COVID period for travel.

We actually just introduced our PRIDE to be online, but we've heard from our Inuit Indigenous partners that they still want it to be in person. That's fine; we're going to continue to do that. We're anticipating that will be the answer from the Innu as well, so we'll continue to do that. We've also entered into a partnership with the NG, \$200,000, for them to hire a couple of social workers so that they are actually able to recruit, train and make recommendations around approval of foster homes. That's helped in terms of working together for PRIDE training.

We have a number of family members who care for children who are not foster parents; they're caregivers. They don't have to complete PRIDE.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. WALSH: That is actually one of our very significant areas in our Indigenous communities because they have a lot of family members who are prepared to step up, which we're more than pleased. That is our first piece; we always go to family first. So then, PRIDE is not required in those circumstances. Sometimes they like to complete PRIDE and we'll certainly work with them. They're invited to PRIDE trainings, but they don't have to complete it.

J. DWYER: The last thing I will ask is what's the time frame now for somebody coming in to a foster home. If they express interest in becoming the permanent family, what's the process? Have we sped up the process at all?

S. WALSH: There's a really good news story around foster parent adoptions is what you're referring to. A child who comes into care with our department, our first goal is always to get that child back home with their birth family. There's a period through our court process that if we can't get the child back home, you're

looking at a period of time – it's tied to the age of the child and the time frame with the court to get in and out and those kinds of things. That dictates a couple of years for sure.

If the child can't return either to their birth parents or to family members – again, which would be our second step – they do remain in the foster home and become continuous under our legislation, in continuous custody. Then, we absolutely consider foster parents who may wish to adopt. I'm happy to say we have 100 children currently who are being adopted by their foster parents in this province.

J. DWYER: That's great news.

Thank you.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Just two questions. Spending on Purchased Services was higher than anticipated last year and for 2021-22, there's a further increase to the budget for this item. Why are expenses increasing?

S. JONES: Last year for our projected revised you'll see that it's gone up by \$29,000. That was a result of during the beginning of COVID and there was a community lockdown, some of the First Nations emergency response team had delivered child protection services on our behalf. That would have been a purchased service that we hadn't anticipated in the budget.

Then, when you look budget over budget, we also increased the budget due to different operating expenses for different staff housing as well some potential moving costs as we have a number of tenders that are in process or about to go up with TI just because our current space, we've basically outgrown it, so we know we're going to be moving; therefore, we built that in.

We had used zero-based budgeting to move some operating money around to avail of those funds because no new money was added.

J. DINN: Did you say that's for staff housing in communities?

S. JONES: Yes.

J. DINN: Finally, what is the source of federal revenue and why was the money collected in 2020-2021 lower than anticipated?

S. JONES: We receive federal funds on behalf of the federal government on delivering of various child protection services and supports to our Indigenous communities, in particular Natuashish and Sheshatshiu. We bill back our maintenance and our operating costs. Last year, our final quarter was submitted on time; however, the federal government wasn't able to process and get the money to us by the year-end and it's just recently come in. Although that \$5 million wasn't received, it has been received by government since. You'll see next year an extra \$5 million. That is the revenue we get.

You'll see a slight increase for next year because some of our projected delivery costs to some of those Indigenous communities and they're offset by the federal. We have a little bit of an increase in some of our expenditures above, and the offsetting revenue is right here.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it for me, Chair.

CHAIR: Okay. Any additional questions?

MHA Wall.

J. WALL: Thank you.

It's not a question, but I just wanted to say before we finish up that this was certainly educational for me this evening. I do appreciate the thorough responses and the level of education from the minister on the responses here this evening. I learned a lot – and from the staff as well, of course. As a first-time MHA doing this, I appreciate all this this evening. It's quite a learning lesson for me.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you.

J. ABBOTT: As the first-time minister doing it, I appreciate your (inaudible). Thank you.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to recall the group.

CLERK: 2.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 2.1.01 carried.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to call the next group.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.1.03 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.1.03 inclusive carry?

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: These are a couple of really important, I guess, sections for me in this department because it's very much a vulnerable sector that, as I explained to the minister, I would rather take care of out in the hallways as opposed to asking questions in the House. We have that respect for each other. It's the same as I had with Minister Dempster and Minister Warr. I'm not ever going to put it out into the public eye if it doesn't need to be there is what I'm trying to say, because being a vulnerable sector, it's easy to fear monger and it's easy to not have a full answer that they would be looking for. Therefore, anybody that wants to call me, they know that my lines of communication are open and I would certainly bring it to the department on their behalf or anything like that. I'd like to continue to that relationship and I'd appreciate us looking out for our seniors and aging and people with disabilities.

That being said, 3.1.01, Seniors and Aging, Salaries, \$27,900 less than budgeted in 2020-2021 and this year you budgeted \$1,000 less than last year. What's the rationale?

J. ABBOTT: The first part was that we had vacancies and we saved money. Our recruiting

has been successful; the director has been recruited, so based on our estimation of the Salaries, we've adjusted the budget accordingly.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

For 2020-2021, again, Transportation and Communications was substantially less. Again, I would hope that the department is going to look at new ways of doing things, if that Transportation cost can stay lower due to Skype and stuff like that. I know we're friendly people and we love to socialize in person, but if they are working to better the coffers of the province, I would like to see that continue and you have my full support for that continuing.

Why was only \$100 spent on Supplies in 2020-21 and you're budgeting the same for 2021-2022?

J. ABBOTT: Well, as I think you mentioned in some of the responses earlier, one, this is all because of COVID and whatever, that's all we needed. Budget over budget, we only use what we need. Again, if we staff up to the degree that we plan to, we will need more supplies than, obviously, this past year.

J. DWYER: Less than 50 per cent of Purchased Services was spent in 2020-21 and this year you're almost doubling the amount spent last year. Can we explain that?

J. ABBOTT: Part of it, again, is we have a Provincial Advisory Council and they would meet and we'd have Purchased Services – hotel rooms, things like that and conference rooms and the like. We will be talking to them as to how we meet on a go-forward basis, but right now, we budgeted from the previous year. We will be talking to them on how we can use Zoom. I have already met with them this year on Zoom. Normally that would be a meeting in person.

J. DWYER: One of the biggest things, I think, that is facing our seniors and aging right now is accessibility to the Prescription Drug Program, for auditory help, ocular help and obviously teeth. Is it a propensity of the department to come up with a solution that we can keep people – to be quite honest, I think out of the three it is hard to pick one of those three, but teeth is

probably the biggest one because it affects your health so much more with digestion and confidence and just a little bit of everything. We readjust and we can readapt if one of the others starts to lower on us, but when we start lowering the amount of teeth in our mouth, then it makes a big difference. Is there a propensity for the department to go forward?

J. ABBOTT: A couple of things here. One is in terms of this role here, because it is really a policy office – it works with all other departments and agencies on these types of issues that you mentioned – then we would be engaging Health and Community Services in terms of how they can improve their program. A lot of this is based on incomes. Obviously, we have income support now. Then, when we look at the poverty reduction, all the things you talk about are usually people – very low incomes, poverty – who can't meet their essential needs as you identified. I think that is going to be part of our work this year, how we can redefine some of these programs, how we reallocate dollars – because there are no new dollars, at least in the short term – to meet those needs. That is going to be a pivotal role for this department going forward.

J. DWYER: Okay.

One of the things I was going to ask – and where we have some control over what we allow with government employees – let's say if my parents weren't able to avail of these services and I'm getting my salary or whatever. I'm not saying to put any more expenditure on the government, but if I chose to add my parents to my policy, can we look at that going forward? That might eliminate a lot of the people that are on the list that are falling through the cracks. A lot of people do retire with benefits, whereas some people don't. They may have a son or a daughter that may be in a position to say, for the extra \$200 a month I can have my parents on my insurance.

J. ABBOTT: Well, I understand what you're saying. It obviously would be complicated. For us as employers, here as government and our employees, we would have to negotiate that both with the employee reps – the NAPes of this world – and with the government. Then, what the cost would be and would the insurer be

prepared to take it on, I have no idea how that would play out.

Many of us would have policies where you can have your child – as long as they're in university, you can keep them on for a certain period of time and then they, obviously, would drop off. To be honest, I don't know of – let's say there is (inaudible) out there – any policies that would allow that, but, again, something we'll note and check around to see if there's anything happening in that regard.

J. DWYER: I'm not saying that's the silver bullet, but what I am saying is that I'm trying to think outside the box and trying to do probably a little bit more for the people that got us to this point in our lives. Do you know what I mean? I think we owe a debt of gratitude to every senior, no matter their income or their retirement base.

J. ABBOTT: We have our provincial Drug Program, which, again, is targeted to seniors at various income levels. Our housing programs and repair programs are targeted to seniors, but there is: one, do we have enough money in some of those programs and then, secondly, it's those at a certain income bracket that can't avail and don't have enough funds to meet their needs I understand.

J. DWYER: Okay, that's it for 3.1.01.

Looking at 3.1.02 in the Disability Policy Office, Salaries are 65 per cent of the budgeted amount and you are budgeting 98 per cent of the previous budget. Why is that?

J. ABBOTT: Very similar to your previous question on that. Again, recruitment was down. People left. We are in the process of recruiting for a new director for this unit. We think, based on the estimated salaries, they will be a bit lower than budgeted previously.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you very much.

I know that we have a Seniors' Advocate and a Child and Youth Advocate. What's the propensity of the department to introduce a disabilities advocate?

J. ABBOTT: In the mandate letter I have from the Premier, he has asked me, on behalf of the

department, to work on that concept. We are just in the early stages now of conversation and consultation with the stakeholder community. We have a provincial advisory council so we'll be seeking their advice and then other different agencies around the province.

One of the issues is – I know we chatted about this in my office just recently – what mandate that office could or should have. Will it be individual advocacy, will it be systemic advocacy or will it be some combination. What is it the disability community really wants? That's where we're going to be consulting far and wide to get it right and see what other jurisdictions have done, what the experience of the Seniors' Advocate has been, the Citizens' Representative has been and hopefully come up with the right model.

J. DWYER: Do you see that there is – when we go from one in 15,000 to one in 57 of children with autism, we know that we are on the upswing of numbers. I just want to make sure that all vulnerable sectors have advocacy and it doesn't just rely on the department and politicians on this side as well. In the meantime, with that being said, I am in full support of introducing a disabilities advocate.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

CHAIR: We will move on to MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 3.1.01, Seniors and Aging – it is in your mandate letter, Minister. You were asked to address the issues important to seniors as identified by the Seniors' Advocate. Have any consultations with the Office of the Seniors' Advocate taken place yet? I'm assuming yes. Which issues were identified as priorities and how are they going to be addressed?

J. ABBOTT: You answered your first question for me. Yes, we did meet with the Seniors' Advocate before her retirement. I want to congratulate her for her years of service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: She has trail blazed that role. We did talk about her different set of recommendations. We didn't get into that degree of which recommendations are – quote, unquote – more important than the other. I think she has certainly laid them out that they all need to be addressed.

I know Suzanne has preached, advocated – whatever word you want to use – on the whole concept of ageism, that we, as a society, be certainly more respectful of our aging citizens and that we encourage and support them in continuing to contribute to society and to the economy. Anything she's advocated around that in her recommendations is to support that and it's certainly something that I firmly believe in.

We need to get the right societal views here so that we really encourage people to not look at seniors as a – quote, unquote – cost to the public system and to government, but that they can and should be supported. Any of the organizations that I've talked to and any individuals, that's where everybody wants to be. It's going to be important on the work we do over the next year and years to support that.

J. DINN: Thank you.

The Auditor General released a report back in April to measure compliance with the recommendations from an audit back in 2017. This report recommended that the department “ensure that an assessment of future impacts of an aging population is completed on its operations related directly to seniors and related to its role in providing expertise and knowledge to departments on seniors and aging.”

I'm just wondering: What work has been completed since 2017 on this front and what remains to be completed?

J. ABBOTT: Well, let me ask Susan Walsh to respond a little bit more to the specifics, but there is work under way in our department and across government around this topic. We know intuitively what's in store; we have a lot of statistical data that we can call on. I think the PERT report speaks to the numbers and the challenges. We have an opportunity to get this right and that's where we're focused.

Susan?

S. WALSH: We have an interdepartmental committee that the director for Seniors and Aging co-chairs with the Department of Health and Community Services focused on both the AG report and recommendations, as well as Dr. Suzanne Brake's first report and looking at all the recommendations. There is a working committee; they've been reviewing the recommendations.

From a departmental perspective, because our Seniors and Aging Division is a horizontal policy shop, as the minister has alluded to, we certainly review every Cabinet paper that comes forward from the perspective of seniors, aging and demographics, the issues that we lead as a department. We also provide consultation across government to any department that are all looking at these issues. So we provide support and advice on those pieces, and to the community, if required and requested.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In November 2020, the department began accepting applications for the Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Communities Program. \$95,000 is available, \$10,000 for help to form a committee and \$15,000 for actual initiatives. Is it possible to provide a breakdown of the successful applicants that receive this funding and the number of committees formed versus the number of initiatives funded? Is the grant provision in this budget as well?

J. ABBOTT: Sure, yes we can.

J. DINN: Good. You don't have any general ones right now, though, do you?

J. ABBOTT: I have some here, but I'd rather give you then the full list.

J. DINN: Perfect, thank you very much.

Would it be possible to have a list of initiatives funded under the Grants and Subsidies? If you have a few examples right now that'd be helpful; otherwise, we'd like to have a list of those as well.

J. ABBOTT: Yes, we will provide that as well, Mr. Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

Under section 3.1.02, how is work proceeding on the new provincial accessibility legislation, and will there be any changes to the accompanying regulations and, if possible, when was the last time that these were updated?

J. ABBOTT: The accessibility legislation is sort of a broad directional piece of legislation that would promote accessibility and inclusion in its broadest sense right across the, I'll call it, the public domain, as well as the private sector. We, as a department – and Susan has briefed me on this since I arrived here in the department. That legislation, we've done all the consultations, been working with the Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. That's been very, very helpful. We are at the stage where we will be able to present to Cabinet in the very near future, with the idea of introducing that legislation this coming fall.

Part of that would be that we would have to develop a set of regulations to bring that legislation into force. Then we have building accessibility legislation, which is another piece in the Department of Digital Government and Service NL.

J. DINN: Okay. And the last time that they were updated?

J. ABBOTT: Now, there have been some amendments over the years. I couldn't tell you the latest one, but there are, again, some policy issues that they're working through as well.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

Expenses on Purchased Services were far lower than expected. Was that spending deferred?

J. ABBOTT: Yes. That was largely to support the advisory council for its meetings. They would normally meet in person. Again, hotel and conference room costs and simultaneous translation, those things. We didn't need that this year.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In November 2020, the department began accepting applications for the Capacity Grant Program, which supports the removal of barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities. \$250,000 was available; maximum individual allotment is \$50,000. Is it possible to provide a breakdown of the organizations or projects that received this funding? Is this grant provisioned for in this budget as well?

J. ABBOTT: Yes and yes.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Is it possible also to have a list of the initiatives funded under the Grants and Subsidies? If you have a few examples, they would be appropriate as well.

J. ABBOTT: We'll be making that as available as well.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 3.1.03, both actual spending and budgeted spending for this year have increased under Salaries. Have there been any new hires?

J. ABBOTT: Again, we've been successful right now, literally in the current year, of recruiting. We had some vacancies there for a while and we've been successful in doing that. We expect that we'll probably spend that full provision this year or a good portion of it anyway.

J. DINN: Last quick question here before time runs out: Spending on supplies is lower than anticipated last year. Why was that?

J. ABBOTT: Again, we didn't have the staff in place to consume the paper, the photocopying, et cetera.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's my time.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: The only question I have on 3.1.03 – my colleague actually asked my first three questions, which I appreciate.

J. ABBOTT: Don't tell me you're thinking alike?

J. DWYER: Well, we're avoiding redundancy. The same thing we want in the department.

J. ABBOTT: I like that answer.

J. DWYER: Why did Purchased Services more than double than the budgeted amount?

S. JONES: Purchased Services last year we had an increase of almost \$10,000. That was a result of increased training cost for the Triple P parenting and membership fee for the Child Welfare League of Canada. That was something that wasn't budgeted for; hence, when you look at the original budget for next year you'll see an increase because we've now made an allowance for that through zero-based budgeting.

J. DWYER: Okay.

In the past year, were there any new programs or policies that were introduced to the child welfare program?

I didn't think I'd ever stump you. When is she going to get a question that she can't answer? I appreciate it, Susan.

S. WALSH: We reviewed all of our programs and policies over the last couple of years, specifically really related to new legislation in 2019, and actually did it with an Indigenous group, all Indigenous partners who wished to be represented. All of those policies were reviewed. There were changes to ensure that there were not negative impacts that were unanticipated.

Some people talk about you can't have a wood stove and be a foster parent. That's off our books. Do you know what I mean? We did have some changes like that.

We also changed our adoption policy for foster parents to try to streamline it. These were already people who were approved; they were caring for people for a long period of time. We didn't need to treat them the same as people

whom we never had a relationship with before who would come in to adopt a child. I'm sure there are more.

J. DWYER: No, that's very progressive thinking and I really appreciate that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Two quick questions – well, maybe. Spending on Professional Services was far lower than anticipated last year and this item in the budget has taken a significant cut. Are there expenses that we were preparing for but now no longer need?

S. JONES: For last year, we did have savings of \$44,500, and that was due to the post-implementation support for our structured decision-making model. It ended up being less than expected, for various reasons. For example, some of the support that we were given we were given virtually, versus them coming down and giving it to us. When you look at year over year, we had set up our budget for three to five years. Every year that amount of support, as we get into it and we worked out all the information, was going to decrease, and so that was a scheduled decrease for next year anyway.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Finally, is it possible to have a breakdown of the number of children and youth by type of living arrangement and by region?

J. ABBOTT: Sure.

J. DINN: Yeah.

That's it for me for all of section 3.

CHAIR: Okay, I'm seeing no further questions.

I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.1.03 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.1.03 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.1.03 carried.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to call the final subgrouping.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.1.04 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.04 inclusive carry?

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Income Support Regional Client Services. I'm sure that there are, obviously, from region to region, different needs. Are there specified programs for different regions?

J. ABBOTT: No.

J. DWYER: No, okay.

J. ABBOTT: If I may, because Mr. Trimper made some reference earlier in terms of what the numbers were, say, for Labrador versus the Island. When we answered, the interesting thing is that because of the federal role in the Indigenous communities, the demand on our income support is zero, basically, because they're paying for –

J. DWYER: So we don't take care of those 600 income support recipients?

J. ABBOTT: No, the 600 would be Newfoundland program clients.

J. DWYER: Oh, okay. I see what you're saying.

J. ABBOTT: But given the population, you would have assumed a much higher number. If there were one difference, it would be that because of the prevalence of the self-funding by the federal government with the Indigenous communities.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

Last year, the Salaries of the budgeted were increased by \$400,000 over the budgeted amount from last year. Is that because it came over? I shouldn't answer your question, I suppose.

J. ABBOTT: Two things. One is, yeah, you can notice the expenditure last year dropped bit, but not a lot because we had a pretty stable workforce. That being said, we hadn't needed to recruit because our caseload numbers had come down, but we are assuming, as the year wears on, we will have to increase that staff back because we expect there will be some increase in our caseload as the CERB peters out there this fall.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Then again, Transportation was saved because of COVID.

J. ABBOTT: Same thing.

J. DWYER: Looking at Income Support Program and Policy, I know that this came from another depart. For 2020-21, Salaries were slightly higher than budgeted in '21-'22 – are slightly lower than this year's budget. What is the reason for that?

J. ABBOTT: A one-time payout this past year for some employees, and then we were able to get back to what would be the more normal level of spending for those positions.

J. DWYER: Is that severance or is it buying out a contract?

J. ABBOTT: No, more severance.

J. DWYER: Severance. Okay.

Moving into 4.1.02, Income Support Program and Policy. The salaries were slightly higher than budgeted for this year and in 2021-22, salaries are slightly lower. Is it the same reasoning?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Okay.

While it appears that the department did not spend most of its transportation money, the full budget was spent. Why is that?

S. JONES: The Transportation and Communication cost last year was a slight overrun, just \$100. That was a result of telecommunication costs were slightly higher than projected due to the way – of course, working from home.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Were there any more income support programs added or policies added that had any costs or any savings?

J. ABBOTT: Cynthia, I'll ask you.

C. KING: No, there weren't.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

I fully agree with the Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement program. I just want to put that out there to start out. These are not negative questions whatsoever, but Allowances and Assistance budget was \$210,000 and only spent \$112,000 this year. \$210,000 again next year, why is that?

J. ABBOTT: Two things, one is the budget we had for the past year obviously we didn't spend anywhere near what we thought we could and should. The take-up of the program wasn't what we expected. We have had several conversations in the department now of how we can bring more attention to that program because we know the need is there.

The increase this year is that we carried over the last year's budget plus there's an increase this year. In this year's budget, we're going from \$60 a month to \$100 a month. That's for mothers-to-be and then after the baby is born.

J. DWYER: Okay, perfect. Thank you.

J. ABBOTT: The second part of the program is through the child tax credit.

J. DWYER: Then looking at the Poverty Reduction and Community Sector, why were the

Salaries \$68,000 less than budgeted and only \$30,000 less budgeted this year?

J. ABBOTT: Again, we had vacancies there and we will be recruiting and are recruiting to fill those. They will be at a slightly less salary cost because they'll come in at a lower salary for the coming year.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Was there any new initiatives added to further increase poverty reduction and increase program with the community sector?

J. ABBOTT: No, there wasn't, but my mandate letter puts the onus now on me to come forward with new policies, changes, programming that we think we need for the province.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Like I said, I wouldn't be changing much of that, but if you're doing that, I would certainly love to weigh in on it if that's possible.

J. ABBOTT: Absolutely.

J. DWYER: Because like I said, this is something that we can all come to a solution on. Because I never ever believed that any one person had all the answers. Like I said, it might be somebody that comes up with an idea, but it's a caveat of something that can be built on.

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DWYER: Like I said, I want to be part of the solution. Like I said, to start this meeting this evening, I'm living it. I have two parents that are obviously seniors. I'm no spring chicken, I suppose. I have a son with a disability. Like I said, it's about awareness and it's about inclusion. I don't think that inclusion means exclusive rights. I think it means being accepted into what's going on already. If that needs some caveat of supports, then, yes, we do that based on different means.

I've done this now with this department – three different ministers but three different times –

J. ABBOTT: Yeah, I'm staying.

J. DWYER: Yeah. Well, I hope you do because you have a good background in health care as well. I know that your staff have been very consistent over those three different Estimates that I've done with you. I commend you for that because it shows some stability to a very vulnerable piece of our province.

Again, I thank you. I don't have any more questions for the Estimates. I thank the Table staff and I thank everybody from the Committee and the research staff for coming tonight to make sure that we make our province better for the most vulnerable in our province.

Thank you very much.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Dwyer.

CHAIR: Thank you.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Under 4.1.01, while actual spending on Salaries was lower than expected in '20-'21, there's a slight increase to this item for '21-'22. Were there any vacancies last year? Are we anticipating new hires this coming year?

J. ABBOTT: Yes and yes.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Spending on Supplies and Purchased Services was lower than anticipated. What expenses were expected but not incurred?

J. ABBOTT: Sharlene.

S. JONES: That was office supplies. Obviously, the demand was lower due to the fact that many people were working from home.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under section 4.1.02, the actuals for Allowances and Assistance were slightly lower than budgeted for last year. Is there a particular reason for this, or is this just a result of the normal cycles of demand?

S. JONES: We had almost \$8 million in savings last year and that's due to the decrease in the number of income support cases. This is most likely due to the availability of the Government of Canada's COVID temporary recovery benefits; we had people obviously coming off our case who would have taken on CERB.

J. DINN: \$8 million in CERB.

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Dinn, we had roughly a reduction in, I'll call it, our average caseload of around 2,400 cases.

J. DINN: Okay.

That's 2,400 individuals, then, that represents?

J. ABBOTT: No, that would be cases, so that would be families.

J. DINN: So the number could higher?

J. ABBOTT: Yes, in terms of the individuals.

J. DINN: I'll say this here and I've said it before – and you weren't part of the decision – I have a real issue. I know that a number of groups said that basically clawing back or disqualifying people from social assistance who had applied for CERB has had a negative effect, certainly, in the food bank. It is \$8 million savings we are looking at. That is, from my point of view, problematic but I'll save that for another time.

Why were provincial revenues far lower than expected last year?

S. JONES: There was a decrease in revenue as a result of collections being lower April to June as a result of the COVID limitations, as well as not being able to access the federal systems for offset recovery when no payment arrangements were made for overpayments to clients. There were some delays.

J. DINN: Is it possible to receive a breakdown of the number of people and families currently receiving income support by region and by census household type?

J. ABBOTT: Are you able to do both, Cynthia?

C. KING: Yes, we can do both.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Okay, I think you have this answered but the number of people on income support who applied for CERB are 2,400 households – or cases, sorry. Of these 2,400, how many have been asked to pay money back since CERB was counted as income?

J. ABBOTT: Approximately 700.

J. DINN: That's cases, right?

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

Income support levels have not increased since 2012, despite inflation and a general trend towards fewer case numbers. I notice that you mentioned your mandate letter and that you are to come up with new measures. Maybe not new money but new measures.

I'm wondering when can we expect an increase to the rates and how about the shelter allowance portion in particular.

J. ABBOTT: Just a couple of things. One, we will be doing a review of the income support program itself this year, so we will be looking at all the issues that you referenced and more: what's the demand, what's the need and how we can structure or restructure that program where possible.

When you look at our rates relative to other provinces, we're actually doing quite well. Even when you compare with the cost of living, we're doing quite well. We're not at the bottom of, shall we say, the barrel when it comes to that. I've looked at that since I joined the department.

That will factor in now to our analysis for any changes we need to make. We're certainly listening to what's being said in the community, we're analyzing that against the evidence and then we will bring in that. Obviously, there will be broad discussions around what kinds of changes we should be considering. Then we'll wrap that up, hopefully for next year's budget.

J. DINN: I'll make the point here, too, with regard to this. Maybe not for families but,

certainly, a lot of people we deal with are single, and single men in particular.

J. ABBOTT: Yeah.

J. DINN: I can think of one example. He lived frugally to the point of having curtains and blankets up over every exit and entrance. Still, by the end of it, he was left with \$40 a week for food. That's it. Heat, the electricity rates went up a little bit and he was down to \$9 a week. While I appreciate the fact that relative to other provinces, it's still not helping people who are – I challenge anyone here to live on \$40 a week in food. Put that and see what you get with it.

I think when we're looking at this it has to be looking at the single individual. I would say it's not by accident that most of the people you see who are at the intersections begging are mostly men.

J. ABBOTT: Again, I think that's what we need to get behind in how we understand that and really come to terms with those numbers. Interestingly enough though, the nature of our caseload has changed over the years. Actually, single men are making up a very large portion of our caseload when it used to be families. I think the timing of this review of income support is quite good, because it will allow us now to really focus on the examples you use and see, all right, what do we need to do there.

J. DINN: Yeah. Thank you.

Our office has heard – I've actually met with people – from funeral home owners who are owed money from income support for unpaid funerals. What happens is that the next of kin has a certain window to apply to income support for coverage of basic burial costs; however, sometimes they miss that window and therefore fail to qualify. Yet it is the funeral home, in these cases, that is left to absorb the cost. One of them in particular is owed, since 2012, over \$173,000. That's just one.

I'd like to know what the total amount currently owed to funeral homes by Income Support for unpaid burials is. Is the department currently studying an alternative method for streamlining the burial payment application process to avoid problems with the current system?

C. KING: We've worked with funeral homes a lot over the years in order to try to streamline the applications for funerals as best we can. When people pass away and their families don't have the resources to cover the cost of a funeral, either if you're an income support recipient currently or if you have low income, you can apply to the department. We take into consideration your income and your assets and we have to do a financial eligibility assessment to determine eligibility under the Income Support Program. That process, of course, we attempt to do that as quickly as possible and it does rely on families to get the information to us.

We are aware that there are some funeral homes that have brought forward cases where they feel that bills are outstanding. Staff are actually currently reviewing those files to determine whether there is money owing or what the circumstances are. We'll continue to work with our funeral homes in order to make sure that any amount that's outstanding or owing is paid in full in a timely manner.

J. DINN: Thank you.

There are just three so far in the metro area who've applied and it's a significant amount of cash, so it's not just a few. That carries right across the province. Again, will there be an alternative method, maybe, to simplify this process so people can apply more readily?

C. KING: We continually attempt to make our processes more and more simplified. With this current advocacy from funeral homes and them coming to us with the particular cases currently, we are certainly looking to see if there is anything further that we can do.

Several years ago, we actually eliminated some of the financial eligibility assessments for current recipients and we continue to try to improve that process.

J. ABBOTT: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Minister Abbott, just hold on for a second, your light ...

Minister Abbott.

J. ABBOTT: Mr. Dinn, our business is not to subsidize or support the funeral home. Obviously, they're doing the service and I understand that. Obviously, we are there to support the families and therein lies the challenge because families, then, there's an onus on them, obviously, to support the situation and to provide the information in a timely fashion. That's probably – and I know – where this breaks down.

As Cynthia said, we have to look at our process there. It really is how to expedite that exchange of financial information to the department. We'll be focusing on that, because, yes, I don't want to see the operators out of funds, but they're going to have to make sure that they do some due diligence as well. It's a difficult situation, as you can appreciate.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

I believe MHA Dwyer has an additional question.

J. DWYER: My very last question: Income support recipients that did avail of CERB and were getting both at the same time, who is it to claw it back? Are we clawing back CERB or are we clawing back income support? Is it the province that has to worry about it? Is it the feds?

J. ABBOTT: Well, we would be – quote, unquote – clawing back what we would call an income support overpayment. The maximum that we would seek to repay would be \$25 a month.

J. DWYER: Okay.

That's it.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 4.1.03, Mother/Baby Nutrition Supplement: How many mothers avail of this program right now?

J. ABBOTT: It would be less than 200, I think.

Pardon?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

J. ABBOTT: Seventy last year.

J. DINN: We note that for this year's budget, the payment is increasing from \$60 to \$100 a month and even without increasing the amount budgeted to this item this year, we would easily have been able to absorb the cost of the payment increase. Given that only \$69,000 of the \$210,000 was paid out, have we looked at increasing the income threshold so that more mothers can avail of this program?

J. ABBOTT: We haven't done that. But that's really less – the issue, I think, Mr. Dinn, is that we're just not reaching, I'll call it, the target group, we know. We're working with the Public Health units and the Family Resource Centres, where young mothers would be, to certainly encourage that. We're really going to ramp that up this year.

J. DINN: Okay, so we'd have an assessment of how that –

J. ABBOTT: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

In 4.1.04, Poverty Reduction and Community Sector, whether you give them now or another time is good, but is it possible to have a list of the organizations and initiatives receiving funding under the Grants and Subsidies?

J. ABBOTT: Yes, absolutely.

J. DINN: The Greene report emphasized the need for governments to leverage its relationship with the community sector. To us, this term remains rather unclear. How do you interpret that word when you read the report, when it comes to leveraging?

J. ABBOTT: As minister, I have already started to engage the community sector and representatives thereof, like the Community Sector Council. There is a working group of community leaders across the province and we have met and talked to them. How I interpret that and how we will be looking at this is really: What can government do to support the

community sector to grow and prosper and meet their mandates?

Another aspect of this will be are there things that government is doing that could possibly be done better, more effectively by the community sector. In our department, we are looking at those kinds of issues and opportunities and at the same time, we want to make sure there is no duplication in all of those things. We are also looking at how in our relationship with the community sector there is more transparency and accountability. We have all of that in play.

We are going to be using the work plan that was done under the community sector *The Way Forward* document. We think that is a really good document and plan to work from. We are looking at the priorities within that and how we advance those.

That is where we are on a broader scheme, and then we will be dealing with all the community agencies and groups that deal with government and how we can better that relationship. I am a firm believer that the community can and should be strengthened. I see it as the third pillar. We have the private sector; we have the public sector and we now, I think, can have the community sector. It should be able to stand and by – quote, unquote – competitive and seen as a strong sector in its own right.

J. DINN: The next part has to do with the interpretation of leveraging, because many years ago when I was a volunteer I can remember the call that the client that we served was told to come to us first. They had gone to social services or income support: Before you come to us, see if you can get food from a food bank. Now, my response is that this is a volunteer organization; we don't have the resources. However, on the other hand, when it comes to the housing initiative that we've undertaken, with the right amount of support then it works. But I guess there is a concern that maybe some of the duties or responsibilities of Income Support or your department would be offloaded onto.

J. ABBOTT: Certainly not the intent and certainly won't be my intent, because that would be wrong.

J. DINN: Okay, no, I appreciate that. And you worked in that sector with the Canadian Mental Health Association. I like the idea of partnerships.

Finally, what systems are in place to measure the success or failure of any particular initiative that is offered by the community sector and funded by the department? I think you talked about the whole notion there of making that there's no duplication. I guess this is along those lines. What criteria will be used, and is funding contingent upon regular reporting by those receiving grants?

J. ABBOTT: I think on a go-forward basis I'll say yes. We're at that early stage. The Minister of Finance, again, in the Budget Speech, talked about where we are going in the strength in the transparency and accountability arrangements we have with all agencies, big or small. That process will be starting. We have some templates and protocols already in and around government that we can use. We'll certainly build those up, but they'll be done in collaboration with the agencies involved.

Certainly, one of the very strong outcomes of the meeting I had last week with the working group is they said bring on transparency, bring on accountability, because we want to be seen as transparent by government so that they can tell their story, what they're doing and get the support and recognition of that.

To me, it is building up the capacity within the community sector so that everybody then can be seen as meeting their goals and their aspirations. But the pivotal thing is that if government is going to be funding you for some or all of your activities, then our goals and objectives and their goals and objectives have to be aligned. They'll operationalize them, but they have to be aligned.

We know of examples where the mission they're undertaking is good, but it doesn't align with where we as a department or government are going at that particular time. So there are going to be lots of conversations that have to take place to align that and then the funding will follow. The reporting will follow, and then subsequent funding will follow.

J. DINN: And that's it for me.

I do want to say thank you to your staff, not only the people here who are answering the questions, and yourself, but also the people we deal with on a regular basis who have been very helpful. At times, I know we might butt heads, but we've always managed to find solutions and help a very vulnerable segment of our population who have an awful lot of complex needs. The people who are out in the intersections, they have a lot of other issues that are going on, so I know it's a huge challenge.

Thank you.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Dinn.

CHAIR: All right.

I ask the Clerk to recall the group.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.1.04 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.04 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.1.04 carried.

CHAIR: I shall ask the Clerk to call the final vote.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development carried without amendment.

CHAIR: The next meeting of the Social Services Committee is on Thursday, June 3 at 6 p.m., considering the Estimates of the Department of Education.

Can I call for a mover to motion to adjourn?

J. DWYER: I move to adjourn.

CHAIR: MHA Dwyer has moved to adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

Carried.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.