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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin today's proceedings, I wish to address a point of privilege raised last Thursday, April 23, by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts in which she indicated that she has been the subject of ongoing personal attacks both inside and outside the House of Assembly, including through social media.

Having reviewed *Hansard* and the relevant authorities, I am now prepared to make a ruling. I am satisfied that the Member raised the point of privilege at the earliest opportunity.

As a preliminary point, I must note that the minister's point of privilege, as well as the statements made by several Members in response, raises very serious issues; namely, the treatment of women and gender-diverse individuals and their role in our House of Assembly and in parliamentary democracy in general; the accountability of government to this hon. House as part of our system of responsible government; the right of government to govern and the right of Opposition to hold government Members to account; and the importance of an historic symbol of significance to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Paragraph 3.90 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Fourth Edition states: "A member recognized on a question of privilege is expected to be brief and concise in explaining the event which has given rise to the question of privilege and the reasons that consideration of the matter should be given precedence over other House business. Given the serious consequences for proceedings, it is not enough to say that the breach of privilege or contempt may have occurred, nor to cite precedents in the matter. The allegations

must be clear and convincing for the Chair. If the question of privilege casts doubts on a member's conduct, election or right to sit, the member raising the matter must make a specific complaint against that member and make explicit all evidence upon which the charge is based.

"Generally, the member tries to provide the Chair with relevant references to the Standing Orders, parliamentary precedents and citations from procedural authorities and may seek the consent of the House to table related documents. In addition, the member should demonstrate that the matter is being brought to the House's attention at the first opportunity. The member may also suggest what corrective House action could be sought by way of remedy. Lastly, the member must indicate that they are prepared to move the appropriate motion should the Speaker rule the matter a prima facie question of privilege."

While the minister did not specifically reference any particular conduct or statement made in this House, she did speak of certain Members opposite pursuing an issue for which she had already issued an apology and referenced a "sustained personal attack." She did not offer a remedy or propose a motion.

The Government House Leader, in his response to the minister's point of privilege specifically referenced statements made by the Member for Viriginia Water - Pleasantville, framing them as "an attack on one Member, on the integrity of another Member in an attempt to publicly shame her ..." The Government House Leader also raised the issue of contempt of the House.

As noted in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Four Edition, at paragraph 3.4, the immunities and powers granted to parliamentarians as part of their parliamentary privilege are necessary to enable members to perform their work as legislators, namely, legislating, deliberating and holding the government to account for

the conduct of business. This particular matter raises the issue of Members' freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation, as well as Members' freedom of speech.

At paragraph 3.8 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, it is stated that "individual members can claim privilege only insofar as any denial of their rights or threat made to them would impede the functioning of the House. In addition, individual members cannot claim privilege or immunity on matters that are unrelated to their deliberative and legislative functions."

With respect to freedom from interference and obstruction, at paragraph 3.72, the text notes that "Speakers have consistently upheld that the House must protect its right to benefit from the service of its members against any intimidation, obstruction or interference. In order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied there is evidence to support the member's claim that they have been impeded in the performance of their constitutional functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament.... In some cases where a prima facie breach of privilege has not been found, Speakers have noted that members raising such matters have legitimate grievances, but have not been prevented from carrying out their deliberative and legislative duties."

On October 5, 2010, Speaker Peter Milliken of the House of Commons, in ruling on a point of privilege regarding alleged damage to a Member's reputation, referred to a decision taken on February 12, 2009, wherein he stated: "However, in adjudicating questions of privilege of this kind, the Speaker is bound to assess whether or not the Member's ability to fulfill his parliamentary functions effectively has been undermined.... "However, without minimizing the seriousness of the complaint or dismissing the gravity of the situation raised by the hon. Member, it is difficult for

the Chair to determine, given the nature of what has occurred, that the Member is unable to carry out his parliamentary duties as a result."

As Speaker, it is my duty to balance the rights, interests and privileges of the Members on both sides of this House. I can only exercise those powers conferred on me by and within the limits of this House. The minister's point of privilege and ensuing discussion have raised issues related to social media posts, online comments and other statements which have generally been made outside of the parliamentary precinct, and which are outside the scope of my authority as Speaker.

With that context in mind, I have reviewed *Hansard*. On April 21, 2026, during Oral Questions, the Member for Gander referred to a photo posted on the minister's social media and asked, "Why is the minister, in her Facebook post, redesigning the entrance to such an iconic tourism landmark?" In a follow-up question, the Member for Gander asked, "Can the minister explain to these artists why she feels using doctored photos in this context is acceptable?"

During Oral Questions on April 22, 2026, the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, again referring to the image posted by the minister, stated, "I've been a member of the CLB for over 30 years, an organization that played a vital role in the First Five Hundred, the Blue Puttees, and I've received numerous calls from members of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. All we are asking for is for the minister to please apologize for her error in judgment"

This led to an exchange with the Government House Leader, after which the Member for Gander asked, "How did the minister responsible for The Rooms and for the preserving of our heritage and culture fail to notice that the caribou ... a symbol of

the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, was replaced by a swoosh?”

It must be recognized that Oral Questions are the primary mechanism by which Opposition Members exercise their rights to seek information from government and to hold government accountable. This is closely tied to the freedom of speech, another fundamental individual privilege enjoyed by all Members. As noted in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Fourth Edition, at paragraph 3.52, “It permits them to speak in the House without inhibition, to refer to any matter or express any opinion as they see fit, and to say what they feel needs to be said in the furtherance of the national interest and the aspirations of their constituents.”

Upon review, I do not find that the questions posed during Oral Questions were intended as a personal attack on the minister; rather, the Opposition Members were asking questions relating to an action of the minister taken in the administration of her portfolio. While the minister stated that she had already addressed the issue and apologized before Oral Questions on April 22, there is no record of that apology in *Hansard* prior to the questions giving rise to the point of privilege being asked. The minister’s statement may have been made during a scrum or in a media article.

Based on the record before me and given the relevant precedents, I do not find that the minister has been impeded or obstructed in carrying out her duties. While I am extremely sympathetic to the feelings and experiences of the minister and the seriousness of the issues she has raised, I do not find a prima facie question of privilege. While this line of questioning no doubt had a personal impact on the minister, she did have an opportunity to address the questions raised by the Members opposite and to give her account of her true intentions with respect to the social media post which gave rise to this issue.

The Government House Leader has also raised the issue of contempt of this House, largely in relation to statements made by the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville. As the Government House Leader has correctly pointed out, contempts cannot be enumerated or categorized.

Certain actions that do not fall into the category of privilege may still be a matter of contempt. As noted in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Fourth Edition, at paragraph 3.11, “Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action or omission which, though not a breach of specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions, obstructs or impedes any member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties, or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House.”

I have already found that the statements made by the Opposition Members were not intended to be personal attacks. It is also significant to note here that the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, in his response to the minister’s point of privilege, apologized on three occasions to the minister. He also expressly stated that he raised the issue during Oral Questions as he received calls from people who thought it was an appropriate issue to raise.

Given my findings on the nature of the statements made by Opposition Members and my findings that the minister was not obstructed in her parliamentary duties, there is also no prima facie case of contempt.

While there is no point of privilege or contempt, this debate has raised several significant issues as it relates to representative democracy and the conduct of parliamentary business in the age of social media upon which I am compelled to comment.

There is no doubt that social media is a great tool for government, an opposition

party or an individual Member to get their message out to their constituents and the broader public. It's a great way to share information, to communicate government programs, to gauge public opinion, to answer questions and to share your perspective on any number of matters of public interest; however, far too often it is viewed as being used as a political tool aimed at tearing down one's opponents, cherry-picking comments made by colleagues, often without context, in order to paint a negative narrative and, with the use of AI and photoshop, it is often viewed to be used to mock, embarrass or shame through the creation of what many people would consider to be nasty, distasteful and/or juvenile memes.

It is my firm belief that the activity taking place on social media is having a significantly negative impact on decorum within this institution, a sacred institution for which the Speaker is entrusted with the responsibility to protect its decorum and dignity.

There is no question that cyberviolence and cyberbullying have a disproportionate impact on women. In a presentation delivered at the 59th Canada Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Hon. Nathalie Roy, President of the Assemblée nationale du Québec, spoke about the use of social media and its effects on political engagement.

President Roy cited a study from Quebec showing that women are more likely to be the victims of incivility and harassment online, particularly women from minority groups and women active in the public space. She also cited a study from the Samara Center for Democracy which showed that in 2021 federal elections, female candidates were five times more likely to receive toxic tweets than their male counterparts, aside from the party leaders.

In a document posted on the website of Governor General Mary Simon, titled *Building a Safe and Respectful Digital World*, it is stated: "Research shows that women leaders, racialized public figures, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and young people are disproportionately affected by misogynistic, sexist and racist comments online. These attacks are not harmless. They silence voices, discourage participation in public discourse, and create a climate of fear and insecurity. In a world that is increasingly reliant on digital communication and information, everyone has a role to play in creating safer digital spaces."

Given the seriousness of this issue and the scope of my authority as Speaker, I am taking the following actions:

1. I have raised the issue with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards as the Code of Conduct is within the mandate of that office. She agrees with the seriousness of this matter, and I understand she will be taking the appropriate use of social media by Members into consideration in the exercise of her mandate going forward;
2. I will be writing the Standing Committee of Privileges and Elections to request that it consider a review of the Code of Conduct for Members, as that Committee is authorized to do pursuant to section 35 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, with a view to possibly incorporating Members' conduct on social media into the Code. I will also be requesting that the Committee review the mandatory training requirements of the Harassment-Free Workplace Policy Applicable to Members with a view to incorporating the appropriate and respectful use of social media;
3. I have had discussions with the Clerk as it relates to the orientation program for new Members and constituency assistants to request that the program be reviewed with

the view of enhancing the training as it relates to the appropriate and respectful use of social media.

With that said, the most effective way to tackle this issue is for Members to take personal accountability for their own actions and that of their staff and other associates.

Here are some things that all of us, as hon. Members, can do: We can choose not to create, post or re-post nasty, juvenile, inflammatory memes. We can choose to instruct our constituency assistants, executive assistants, communications and other staff to refrain from doing so also. We can choose to ask our supporters, family and friends to also refrain from such activity. We can also bring it to our colleague's attention if we feel they have crossed the line and encourage them to remove offensive posts from their social media accounts.

This doesn't mean we don't put our perspectives out there. This doesn't mean Opposition Members can't criticize what they deem to be flawed government policy. This doesn't mean that government does not get thoroughly scrutinized and held to account. All of these things can and, quite frankly, should happen. The point, however, is that it can be done respectfully. It can be done based on policy, without becoming personal. It can be done without embarrassing, shaming and smearing a colleague's reputation.

And yes, even if we, as Members, were to do all of these things, we still don't have control over the actions of members of the general public. We should, however, be cognizant of this fact before we use social media to post items that will be open to any and all comments. We are blessed to live in a democracy, where we get to enjoy freedom of speech and freedom of expression. However, we may not like the words chosen by some individuals, as it can be mentally exhausting and hard on not just ourselves, but our families as well.

As I said, we don't have control of how the general public behave on social media and elsewhere, but we can control our own actions. We can choose to be kind. We can choose to agree or disagree over policy but not get personal. We can choose to act like hon. Members, whether inside or outside the House of Assembly, and, yes, even on social media.

Today in the public gallery, we have representative from Centreville Place community centre, which is the subject of a Member's statement.

Welcome Courtney Davis, Executive Director of Centreville Place; and Rigel Penman, a volunteer with that organization.

Welcome to our House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: We also have representatives in our public gallery from Legal Aid, which is the subject of a Ministerial Statement today. Welcome to Harman Khurana, CEO and Provincial Director; Lauren Chafe K.C., Deputy Provincial Director - Legal Services; Barbara Barker, Director - Legal Policy and Quality Assurance; and Amanda Barfitt, Director - Legal Services.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't welcome back our former Sergeant-at-Arms, Robert Escott, and we're always glad to see you, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Burgeo - La Poile, Fogo Island - Cape Freels, Placentia - St. Mary's,

Placentia West - Bellevue and St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Port aux Basques Lions Club as they mark 75 years of service, leadership and community commitment – an anniversary recognized this past March and will be celebrated in person this upcoming weekend.

For generations, the Lions have been a steady and dependable presence in Port aux Basques. Their work has supported families, strengthened community life, ensured that people of all ages feel connected and supported and truly exemplified the Lions Club motto: We Serve.

From helping seniors stay engaged to supporting youth programs and organizing events that bring people together, the Lions have always stepped forward when they were needed.

This milestone is a tribute to the volunteers whose dedication has carried the organization through the decades. Their commitment, teamwork and generosity continues to set an example for the entire region.

The Lions Club reflects the best of our province. Neighbours helping neighbours. Volunteers giving their time without seeking recognition. Communities built on passion, pride and resilience.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Port aux Basques Lions Club on 75 years of remarkable service and in thanking every volunteer, past and present, for the difference they continue to make.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

The Brimstone Head Folk Festival is an annual, multi-day event held in Fogo at the base of the iconic Brimstone Head landmark, which is famously considered one of the four corners of the earth by the Flat Earth Society.

This year's event takes place from August 14 to 16. The festival prioritizes an outdoor music stage and focuses on preserving local culture through traditional music featuring local talent, young artists and musicians from across the province. The Fogo Island Folk Alliance, which hosts the festival, has used it to encourage young performers, including supporting the Fogo Island Accordion Group. In 2026, this festival is celebrating its 41st anniversary, highlighting its roots in the mid-1980s.

Fogo Island features dramatic coastal hiking, Brimstone Head; world-class architecture, the Fogo Island Inn; and many historic fishing communities. Key highlights include artist studios, local museums, scenic trails like Joe Batt's Point and Fogo Island Marine Interpretation Centre offering a blend of cultural history and raw, rocky landscapes.

I ask all Members and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to make time this summer to visit beautiful Fogo Island. I assure you that you will not be disappointed.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, I rise today to share the story of Davis Didham, a young

man remembered for his kindness, determination and deep care for those around him.

Davis loved sports, especially hockey and basketball, and was known as a hard-working teammate, loyal friend and devoted son and brother.

Tragically, Davis lost his life to suicide on September 13, 2021, at just 19 years old. In the face of unimaginable grief, his family chose to honour his life by helping others and encouraging open conversations about mental health. In his memory, they established the Davis Didham Memorial. Each August they host a Memorial Golf Tournament at The Wilds Resort, where Davis once worked.

What began as a tribute has grown into a powerful community effort, raising more than \$66,000 for mental health initiatives. Much of this support has helped schools provide mental health first aid training for teachers and staff, equipping them to recognize when young people may be struggling and how to respond.

I commend the Didham family and their community, and I encourage our government to consider province-wide support for this important training for teachers and students to help protect the well-being of our youth.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: I rise today to acknowledge the Marystown Lions Golden Age 50+ Club for hosting such a wonderful kitchen party on April 25, just this past Saturday.

It was truly a great day spent with friends, neighbours and so many familiar faces from our community and the neighbouring communities. The whole event really captured the heart of what a Newfoundland and Labrador kitchen party is all about, good music, laughter and plenty of storytelling in a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

A special thank you to Bernadine and Bill for the fantastic music. They had a perfect mix of traditional favourites and well-loved tunes, and it was so nice to see people singing along, tapping their feet and even getting up for a dance. They really made the day extra special and, of course, the traditional cold plates were delicious and enjoyed by all; just another touch that made the evening feel so warm and comfortable to those in attendance.

I'd like to thank all the volunteers and organizers who put this event together, you could really see the effort that went into making sure everyone had a great time, and to thank the special guests that gave up their time as well. All in all, it was a lovely event that brought people together and reminded us just how special your 50-plus community is.

I ask all hon. Members to acknowledge the Marystown Lions Golden Years 50+ Club for hosting such a wonderful kitchen party recently.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Congratulations to the Centreville Neighbourhood Association's grand opening of the Centreville Place community centre last month on Livingstone Street.

Guests had an opportunity to learn about the centre and tour the space donated by the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

If you've read Dr. Andrew Boozary's work on social medicine, or read the *Health Accord*, you'll realize that a strong sense of community is essential for good health. Centreville Place is about building community. Residents long advocated for a centre and, knowing the work of Froude Avenue and Buckmaster's Circle Community Centres, I supported their efforts.

Government funding in 2023 allowed Courtney Davis of Thrive to consult residents, assess needs and determine what the centre should offer. With the support of the previous and current governments, Centreville Place became a reality. Programs and services were underway long before the opening; peer substance use counselling, community meals, children's summer programs and community cleanups, to name a few. Programming will grow in response to the neighbourhood needs. Centreville Neighbourhood Association chair, Louise Moyes, already sees a difference. Residents are happy with the work of the centre, and a sense of pride and belonging is growing.

Please join me in wishing Centreville Place every success.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, April 28 is the National Day of Mourning, a time to remember workers who lost their lives, were injured or suffered illness as a result of work-related incidents.

Today reminds us of the sacrifice made by workers and their loved ones whose lives have been forever changed by workplace tragedy. Their loss is felt, not only today, but every day, in homes and communities throughout our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Today encourages reflection and action. It is an opportunity for governments, employers and workers to focus on accident prevention, occupational health and safety and safer work environments.

Earlier today, I was honoured to attend the National Day of Mourning ceremony right here in the City of St. John's. Thank you to the St. John's and District Labour Council for organizing this important event, and I extend my sincere appreciation to all who participated. I offer particular thanks to Angela Ryan, who courageously shared her family's experience and reminded us all of the very real human impact behind workplace tragedy.

Workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses are not just numbers, not just statistics, they are people – parents, spouses, partners, children and loved ones. This is why prevention must always remain at the heart of workplace health and safety. Every worker deserves to come home safe and sound to their family at the end of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Speaker, I join the minister in recognizing April 28 as the National Day of Mourning, and in honouring the workers who have been lost or injured on the job, as

well as the families who carry the impact with them every day.

Last year, 17 workers in our province lost their lives due to workplace injury or illness. These are not just statistics, these are families, people in communities who are forever changed. Being at the event in St. John's today and hearing directly from those affected was a powerful reminder that this day is not only about remembering those we've lost but working to ensure that no one else is lost to workplace accidents.

Workers at events across this province continue to call for stronger protections, better enforcement and workplaces where safety is truly the priority. This can't be something we acknowledge one day a year; it has to be reflected in the decisions we make, the standards we uphold and the actions we take every day.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement.

On the National Day of Mourning, I, too, would like to thank the St. John's and District Labour Council because of the hard work that's done so we can remember the workers who never returned home. But remembering is only the beginning. Workers deserve more than just words, thoughts and prayers.

So we ask this government to increase the number of OHS investigators and to publish their reports online to hold employers to account. If you can prevent even one accident in doing so, then the effort was well worth it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, on January 16, 1976, the *Legal Aid Act* came into force in Newfoundland and Labrador, creating what is now Legal Aid NL. Fifty years later, Legal Aid NL stands as an essential pillar of a fair, accessible and inclusive justice system in this province.

Legal Aid NL employs approximately 145 solicitors and staff working across a network of 18 offices. It provides high-quality, equitable legal services to residents of the province to ensure all people, regardless of means, capacity or social situation, have access to the knowledge and services they require to protect their basic legal rights.

Legal Aid provides representation in criminal, family and civil matters, in appeals before the courts, before administrative tribunals for immigration and refugee claims and in specialized courts.

Speaker, Legal Aid NL embodies five main values: accountability, collaboration, compassion, respect and openness. As someone with experience as a Legal Aid lawyer, I can say that our Legal Aid team fully embraces these values. As the slogan states, these are real lawyers, for real people, who manage thousands of files every year with unwavering commitment.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in recognizing 50 years of the *Legal Aid Act* in this province and sincerely thank everyone at Legal Aid NL for their hard work and continued dedication.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

Speaker, I rise today to join the minister in recognizing the 50th anniversary of Legal Aid in Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to thank the almost 150 fantastic lawyers, staff and front-line workers throughout Legal Aid in our province.

For five decades, they've been the cornerstone of access to justice in our province, ensuring that all people can understand their rights and be properly represented. That is something certainly to be celebrated, but, Speaker, we must also recognize the pressures that these staff are under.

Courts across the province have been closed since before Christmas, and we've yet to hear any solutions. This means heavier caseloads, longer delays and more uncertainty for both the staff at Legal Aid, as well as the individuals and families relying on their services.

We must celebrate access to justice. We must also be serious about strengthening it because delays, closures are not just slows to the system, but they deny people timely access to justice.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

We congratulate Legal Aid on its 50th anniversary, and with sustainable government funding, we look forward to seeing many, many more.

As we know, justice delayed is justice denied, and that is why we look forward to seeing details in tomorrow's budget on how this government intends to fix the many problems causing delays in our justice system, as well as the resources they will commit to do so.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today to speak about the excellent season that ParksNL is set to have this year.

Newfoundland and Labrador is home to 32 provincial parks, including 13 camping parks, seven day-use parks, 10 park reserves, one waterway park and the T'Railway Provincial Park.

Last year, parks across our province generated the most revenue to date, bringing in more than \$1.6 million. They also exceeded the visitation records with more than 240,000 visitors.

Speaker, in addition to this, last year our parks had an outstanding 70,000 overnight stays.

Last week, ParksNL opened reservations for the 2026 season, and broke its reservation record on launch day.

On the first day alone, ParksNL received more than 6,000 reservations, with bookings continuing to come in. This represents a 19 per cent increase over launch day in 2025.

Provincial parks represent the best of our beautiful, natural environment and support mental health, cognitive health and physical health for all users.

Speaker, I look forward to this outstanding season ahead.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

Mr. Speaker, the record-breaking start to the 2026 ParksNL season is a clear signal that our province is a premiere destination for outdoor adventure. With over 6,000 reservations on launch day, a remarkable 19 per cent increase over last year, we are seeing an unprecedented level of enthusiasm for our provincial parks.

I would like to thank the minister for acknowledging the success of the online reservation system, first implemented by the former Liberal government in 2015. I also want to thank the dedicated staff at ParksNL and the officials at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Arts for their commitment to making our natural beauty accessible.

Speaker, my family and I are avid campers, having experienced, to date, over half of our provincial parks, and I encourage all residents to explore the incredible outdoor tourism opportunities here at home.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

These statistics only highlight how important our natural environment is to our tourism industry, our economy and our very way of life.

That is why we, once again, ask this government to rethink its cancellation of the South Coast National Marine Conservation Area and expand the number of protected areas to meet our target of 30 per cent. Please make the necessary investments to ensure that our wild areas are protected and the future generations may enjoy their benefits as well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

A story in the news today says a daycare in my District of Windsor Lake lost a toddler, allowing the child to wander alone, onto a busy street, at rush hour.

I ask Premier: How did a three-year-old child leave a licensed daycare, go unnoticed and end up alone, on a busy street, in St. John's during rush hour?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

When I heard this story, it's very troubling that you have a youngster that's in the care of a child care centre that is found wandering out on a street next to a busy thoroughfare. It's something that should never happen.

Within the department, we have protocols in place that address instances like this. They have to be reported immediately. We take measures to work with the child care centre to ensure it doesn't happen again. There are violations posted on site. There are other measures we can take to address this, either dismissal of an employee or suspension of licence.

So we take this very seriously.

SPEAKER: The hon. the minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I'm extremely disappointed the Premier did not answer that question. This shows how he feels about children and parents in this province. These are legitimate questions.

Premier, I will give you the opportunity to answer the same question, if you want to answer it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: Parents expect an answer from the leader of this province.

Meanwhile, the same CBC story states a separate violation order issued back in February indicates staff at Stephenville Primary frequently used tethers to restrain kids. "On numerous occasions, staff used

tethers to physically restrain children as well as verbal threats to deal with behaviours."

So I ask the Premier: How is it acceptable that children in a pre-kindergarten program were restrained with tethers on numerous occasions?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

There is absolutely nothing acceptable with what has happened – nothing. Tethering children is not acceptable.

Again, to my previous answer, we work with the child care operators. They are required to report any instances. If we require to bring in other authorities, we do. It's posted on our website – all violations we post on the website. We take measures to either train, provide the resources to the child care centre to address this. It could result in the termination of a child care worker. It could result in the suspension of their licence.

Every measure is taken to ensure this doesn't happen.

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Given that this incident happened back in February, what steps have been taken to offer supports to the children and families that were affected by these actions?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

With any incident that happens, communication is made with the parents that are involved. There are certainly privacy concerns around this, not just for the child involved, but also for the worker that may be involved.

We work with them and the authorities to ensure that nothing like this happens again, and to ensure that all are well aware of the situation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: I ask the Premier or the minister to commit to an immediate province-wide investigation into the use of restraints in child care settings.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me first address some of the preamble from the previous question. The Leader of the Opposition shouldn't be focused on who answers the question. He should be focused on making sure we get to the issue, and this is a very, very serious issue –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – and I couldn't disagree with him more. This is a real issue, and I agree with him, and we absolutely need to do better, and there should be no more repeats, but I will agree that we'll certainly do an investigation into why this is happening.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Premier. I very much appreciate the answer. I'm sure the children and the families appreciate that commitment as well, so thank you to the Premier for that, but I do ask: What concrete changes will be implemented to ensure children cannot leave facilities unnoticed in the future?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I mentioned it in this House previously. When it comes to safety of our schoolchildren and early child care, it's paramount, and I've also noted that policy that regards that is not static; it's always changing. We continue to improve our policies around anything that we come across that needs improvement, and we will continue to do so.

The incident here, the child care centre is aware of where we stand on this, and they will be monitored on a more frequent basis and provided with the proper professional learning and training that's required to address the situation going forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I appreciate it's a good thing to continue to review policies, but given that this has happened, has this policy been reviewed and what changes have been made to ensure it doesn't happen in the future?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, policy is not static. We continue to monitor that, to make changes, to amend it, to work with the industry and the sector and all parties involved to ensure that the policies that are in place are the best policies to address any and all issues that we come across.

Again, not static, we have to continue to improve on this, and that's what we intend to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, we are hearing concerns from the community that a provincial director for intimate partner violence may have been appointed without any public announcement, transparency or clear connection to front-line organizations.

Can the minister confirm whether this position has, in fact, been created or filled, and if so, on what basis?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, to address intimate partner violence and gender-based violence as a whole, we are improving the strategies and the supports for women and gender equality and also outreach to the different advocates across the province.

One of the things that we prioritize is making sure that the staff within Women and Gender Equality are properly supported and have the resources within the department to be able to succeed in that. As

such, we have actually created a stand-alone division and we do have a director hired, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, I ask the minister: Who was consulted in making this decision and why has there been no clear communication with those directly impacted?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, the position is a temporary position. It's not a full-time secured position but, also, I would remind the Member that after 10 years of Liberal government, it took a PC government to actually prioritize gender-based violence (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: It took a PC government not only six months in power to prioritize the war against gender-based violence that's impacting people across this province, our most vulnerable people, our marginalized people, people who need help and resources.

Maybe that's the question she should be asking herself, Speaker, why didn't the Liberals, after 10 years, actually support and empower women to help women.

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Speaker, residents on Birmingham Street in Cowan Heights in my district have lived next to a documented drug house, while the landlord knowingly continues to collect rent, with zero responsibility for the chaos on that property.

Will the minister acknowledge that there is a massive gap in our system that allows landlords to profit from criminal activity, and will he commit to closing that gap?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being; and Housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for the question. That is a very important issue and it's one that we are certainly cracking down on. Since we came into office, Mr. Speaker, there have been eight, nine – I'm not sure if it's eight or nine of these so-called houses that we have closed.

This is an issue, it reoccurs, and there are very specific details around how these do evolve, but we are certainly working on that with the staff of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. We are working with the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary.

We thank the members of the public who speak up and contact my office on this. This is very important, it's a priority and we will get that solved, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Speaker, these residents fear resolution will only come after a tragic incident occurs.

Is the minister prepared to stand in this House and take responsibility if refusal to update our laws leads to a violent escalation

in a neighbourhood that has been begging for help?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being; and Housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question once again.

I would hope that he heard my first answer when I spoke. It is a priority for the staff of my department responsible and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. It is a responsibility of ours and I am taking responsibility for it. We will work with the Members of the community. Everyone should feel safe while at home, bar none. It doesn't matter where you live in this province, everyone deserves safety in their home.

With respect to these particular houses that are around our province, we are working with the people who are responsible for those units, those who live there and those who don't live there, who move in, unfortunately, and take over the unit and run these houses.

Speaker, we are on it. It will be dealt with.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Speaker, airlines around the world, including those serving Canada, are cancelling routes due to high fuel costs. This concern was raised at the Destination St. John's AGM last week, noting that route cancellations will have devastating impacts on the tourism season.

Can the minister assure industry that all of the routes within Canada will be maintained?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts; and Sport, Recreation and Parks.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, I would like to thank Member opposite for the question. It's a really good question.

Our department, myself included as Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts, and Recreation, are in contact with the airlines and the airports on a regular basis. We are talking to them and monitoring the situation.

But like we said, tourism is looking really good this year. White Hills ski resort had the best year yet, Marble Mountain has had its strongest season, ParksNL is seeing a record demand and the cruise ships are visiting and they're continuing to –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Speaker, tourism operators and organizations, such as Gros Morne Gatherings, representing several rural seasonal businesses on the West Coast, are raising concerns in the media about staffing shortages ahead of the upcoming busy season. Staffing shortages were also flagged at the recent Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador conference.

What steps is the Minister of Tourism taking to address these labour challenges?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, I would like to thank the Member opposite for the question.

Yes, Gros Morne Gatherings group of properties are indicating that bookings are up 30 per cent overall compared to last year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: May to July bookings are strong in the Western region, and one of the larger accommodation operators in Gros Morne indicated that, last year, they were at 65 per cent occupancy and this year so far they are at 85 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Speaker, the Minister of Government Services claimed he made sure there was no homelessness in Deer Lake during his term as mayor. We have heard from people over the weekend that have experienced homelessness in Deer Lake.

Why did the minister say that?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

We have all spoke in this House at one time or another with passion. It certainly does come out from time to time on all Members of this House.

Speaker, I have spoken to that comment. I will work with the Minister of Government Services, I will work with the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs and do our best as we work with municipalities right across our province to do our best to end homelessness.

Everyone deserves a place to live. That is a priority of this Premier, that is a priority of our government and I am looking forward to the budget tomorrow.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: I would like to thank the minister for the answer, but it was the Minister of Government Services who claimed there was no homelessness in Deer Lake, and people there would like to hear directly from him.

So I ask again: Why did the minister claim there was no homelessness in Deer Lake?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question once again.

We are focused on homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Unfortunately, there is homelessness throughout our province, and that is something that, when we came into this office on October 29, we were faced with. We will certainly work with not only all Members in government but all Members of this House of Assembly to make sure that we do our best to serve the people of the

province and to operate within our means to deal with homelessness.

Speaker, under my department's poverty reduction and prevention strategy that is going to come out this fall, with what we are doing in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, we will have a solution for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: If the minister won't defend himself, does the Minister of Housing agree that there is in fact no homelessness in Deer Lake?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Services

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the Member opposite for the question, very important question.

Mr. Speaker, my late father always told me, if I want to make a difference in this world, I need to get the attention of those I'm trying to help and those I'm trying to work with to help.

I made a broad statement, and I know exactly what I said. My comments last week were well intended and, to clarify, I'm committed to helping improve the lives of others. I'm also all about solutions. That's what I signed up for. I'm committed to working with stakeholders, as I have mentioned here many times before, and I'm here to serve for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Can the Finance Minister please confirm that there will be no layoffs or job losses in tomorrow's budget?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: There will be no job losses or layoffs in tomorrow's budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Straight answer, we can all applaud that. Thank you.

Residents in my District of Waterford Valley continue to raise safety concerns about the Kilbride turnoff from Pitts Memorial. I've emailed the minister's office; they've confirmed receipt, which I appreciate.

Can the minister provide a timeline on some of the brush cutting, advance signage and any additional safety measures addressing this dangerous intersection that goes from a 100 kilometre an hour, sharp turn,2 into about a 30 kilometre an hour?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I have got an email from the Member opposite, and I tend to agree it's more of a commuter – that effects everyone on the Pitts Memorial Drive. I'm aware of that turnoff and the dangers involved.

We are, I think, going to do some brush cutting. We're looking at other options there, but that is a dangerous area where cars are backed on to a 100-kilometre highway. I agree 100 per cent, and we're going to try to work on resolving it. If it doesn't get finished this year, we'll try to do something next year, but it's very important for everyone, for the motoring public actually.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

Somewhat concerning that it could be pushed off until next year, so I'd like to follow up after on that. Ironically enough, when traffic gets backed up, it's safer because cars can see it. There's also an issue with that turning lane not being long enough.

So I ask the minister: Have they conducted a recent safety assessment of the Kilbride turnoff? If so, will you table it? If not, could you have one done and then table it?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

The first question is there's nothing being pushed off. The work involved, we have to have engineers go out and assess that area. It's not so simple as going in and extending a lane. There is road widening. You are on a highway and there's more involved than just going up and paving it.

To that point, officials need time to do the work. I've already asked for some brush cutting to be done the year. The people who heard me in the House, I said we're doing a traffic study for CBS, Paradise, St. John's and Mount Pearl to look at the full area. No

doubt that turnoff will be part of that study and when we get the study back, I'm sure I'll share it with everyone and they can see it themselves.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

From my time at the city, I know speeding, traffic and the volume of speeds is terrible all over Newfoundland and Labrador, certainly in the Northeast Avalon. I still find it concerning to say if we don't get to it this year, next. So I would like to have a priority to the minister's office to look at it for this year.

Will the minister commit today to installing enhanced warning signs and improving sightlines before peak summer traffic? That would be this year, Speaker, not next year.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I guess when we get rid of the snow and winter finally ends, we might get some tender work out to get some signage in the ground. But that's part of an asset management part in the department. They do the work. They're getting prepared for brush cutting, moose fencing, signage, all that is part of a bigger program. We're working towards getting those tenders out and the work all lined up. That's all part of the internal work within the department.

So whatever signage needs to be going there or anywhere in the province, for that matter, we'll get to it. It's just a matter of time. Right now, May 1 is on Friday. We

may have a storm next week, but we'll get there. Trust you me, we'll get there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Earlier this week, all government employees were notified of a privacy breach through the government's group benefits provider.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Has public servant personal information been breached and what is the government doing to protect employees?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: We all know that we've had breaches over the years, and yes, this has been a breach. One thing that can be gleaned positive from it is that there was no access to any banking information, SIN numbers and so on.

But yes, there was some personal information that was shared, and that's bad enough. I think a couple of steps would be they've got some potential credit counselling that would be available. For others, there's monitoring that would occur, that would be available.

My understanding is that all have been communicated of the breach, and I would think within hours after the notice of the breach, the system was secured.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to thank the health care and the IT professionals on their launch of CorCare this past week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Speaker, we've heard from residents with issues relating to their MyChart app and the accuracy of the information. The helpline is not helpful; residents are being told that they are waiting for on an outside firm for resolution with not ETA to issues.

So I ask the Minister of Health: Do you accept that response?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, we're looking at the rollout of CorCare as successful. We know, and we anticipated, that there was going to be some issues. Those issues are being addressed. The Member did raise an important point there, and we are looking at the advice being given to us.

I just want to make reference to MyChart. We've only actually had one chart, one patient's information, that was inaccurate. That was addressed right away. It was corrected quickly. We are very, very pleased at the performance of the rollout.

Speaker, I also want to mention and thank all the staff in Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services that stepped up and made this successful –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Minister of Health has acknowledged the federal government had decided to no longer negotiate a pharmacare program that would make diabetes medication and contraceptive free. I think we all agree that the federal government carry the blame for this decision, as the current and previous governments have pushed for it.

Now, since the federal government won't run the program, will the province seek money from the federal government to provide pharmacare themselves?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I really don't like the way sometimes my words are taken and twisted.

I said that they closed the door; they are calling it a pilot now, with three provinces and one territory. We are actually going back to the federal government to ask to be a part of that program, to be included. We are not accepting that this is a final thing.

In actual fact, we are looking for the federal government to now, after they're finished their pilot and they've made the improvements to the system, to have open engagement with us and allow us to come under pharmacare. That's our goal; that's what we intend. We are going to hold the federal government to account, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

On this National Day of Mourning we honour workers killed, injured or made ill on the job and renew our commitment to creating safe workspaces. One way is to install an adequate number of automated external defibrillators.

I ask the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: How many AEDs are in the Confederation Building complex?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: I'd have to get back to the Member on that question, Speaker. That's something I wouldn't have in front of me right now, so I will provide an update to you later on that, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: The answer is three; one in each of the security areas. Not nearly enough.

According to statistics, one in 10 people survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest. Access to an AED increases chances of survival anywhere from 70 to 90 per cent. AEDs should be accessible and within a three-minute roundtrip from any location in a building.

Will the minister commit to installing sufficient number of AEDs in all government buildings so that they are available, accessible and comply with the three-minute rule?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, that's something I could look into. I think the previous

government, the Opposition opposite, will remember I stood in my place in the House of Assembly and lobbied hard for an AED registry that would tell 911 wherever there was an AED to in the province. If you had a 911 call, you'd know where they're to and located to. But the Opposition right now, the previous government, refused to do so.

It is something I'm looking into. So to the Member opposite's question, something we're really open to, no doubt about it, but I think any AED, any lifesaving mechanism or device around, you can never have too many, so I do agree.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: There is hope.

A registry system would record the number of AED devices, their age, compliance with standards, maintenance and location and would allow 911 personnel to direct a caller to the nearest AED.

I ask the minister: Will he also commit to introduce legislation to establish an online registry of AEDs throughout the province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

This line of questioning, in all honesty, is really not in my purview, but this is my personal interest. It's something that I've long lobbied for, so the Member opposite may have been speaking to the same person I speak to, but if he was, that's fine.

I think that we have to improve upon our AED registries. They're put in place; they look good when they're put there. There's no one keeping track of the batteries unless

you do it yourself. There's no one updating to make sure they work. When someone needs that device, and it's not there, ready to use, we have a problem. I'm a big supporter of the AED registry. I'm a big supporter of it being tied to 911, and we need to get them out there and get them in places. I'm all about it.

Now, whatever minister is fully responsible for that, we're going to work together on that, but right now, that's where I stand.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Dr. Anne Drover, pediatrician and an associate professor at Memorial University, says stigma is preventing pregnant women who use substances from getting help for both mother and baby. She says the first step would be to ensure safe housing, with the necessary supports in place to keep mother and baby together, healthy and out of the foster care system.

What is the minister doing to reduce the stigma, and will there be funding in the upcoming budget specifically for this issue?

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I am actually making plans to meet with her. One of the things that I raised when I was questioned about the issue was about the harms that stigma does create. We are working to reduce stigma by actually making supports available but also on proper information.

Speaker, at the end of the day, access to health care has to be available for all of us.

That's a pillar of this government. We're going to be reaching out to vulnerable people. We're going to reach out to people with addictions, mental health issues, people who've been marginalized, people from different groups who have actually been bullied by society. We are going to do the health better and the delivery of health care services to (inaudible) –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Dr. Drover also stated that there is no comprehensive recordkeeping for babies born exposed to substances in our province.

I ask the minister: Will you commit to ensuring that this data is being tracked so that we can better support expectant mothers who use substances?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, as Minister of Health, I was a little bit surprised to realize that there wasn't a province-wide system that collected this information. Because the information is so important when we're looking at resources and actual health care needs of people in the different regions.

One of the things I will say is that CorCare will actually make this information gathering on a provincial wide level now to be more efficient but effective, and we will actually be gathering the information. But more than that, we will be putting the services in that the data says needs to be supported.

We will be reaching out, making sure the services are available for patients in the different regions of the province that need this service, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

My petition today is on paving and upgrading of Winterland Road, Phase II. These are the reasons and background of this petition:

WHEREAS the road between Winterland and Lewin's Cove has deteriorated extensively; and

WHEREAS this area has grown exponentially over the last number of years with new families moving in; and

WHEREAS emergency vehicles and school buses travel these roads; and

WHEREAS this road is causing damages to our vehicles; and

WHEREAS this road will have a negative impact on tourism in the area; and

WHEREAS the residents of this area need to use this roadway in order to access hospitals, shopping, banking and other essential services; and

WHEREAS residents were expecting Phase II to be completed this year;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to allocate the necessary funding to address the concerns of the residents, and provide the necessary road infrastructure by paving the remaining section of the road.

Last year, Speaker, we managed to pave half of that road, that distance, and we divided it into two phases. This year, the residents of Winterland and those who live in that area, the Lewin's Cove area, were looking for the other piece of that road to be done.

This road is very important because it leads almost directly to the Burin Peninsula Health Care Centre and all the schools that the students attend from that area are at the end of this road. Winterland is a fast-growing community, Mr. Speaker, and a lot of children and families in the area.

What I'm asking the minister, if he could do, is to send out the officials or engineers to the area and suggest possible repairs or paving that can be done. Mr. Speaker, if you talk to people in that area, they will certainly tell you that I'm not being disingenuous by asking for this. I'm not asking for anything else in this petition other than what the residents actually deserve.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I have a petition here on branch roads, and these are the reasons for and the background of this petition:

WHEREAS paving – the date is incorrect; it references to paving from L’Anse au Clair to Red Bay. I need to get that corrected after the break, when I get back in the district.

WHEREAS since then, there have been significant concerns on getting the following routes paved: Route 513, St. Lewis; 514, Charlottetown; 516, Cartwright; and 514, Pinsent’s Arm; and

WHEREAS both residential and commercial traffic has increased dramatically with the opening of the Trans-Labrador Highway and increased development in Labrador; and

WHEREAS gravel roads are more dangerous, causing residents to have more upkeep of personal vehicles and the roads need to be continuously maintained.

Speaker, my petition today is signed by folks from Charlottetown, from Cartwright and from Lodge Bay.

We have two branch roads that are 29 kilometres, one that’s 24 and a branch road that’s 78 kilometres. Speaker, when I started, after you left Red Bay, going north, we were driving on a gravel road. The only pavement that was done between Goose Bay and Red Bay, that 700- or 800-kilometre stretch was about 80 kilometres out of Goose Bay, which clearly was done to get ready for the Muskrat Falls project. Make it good for them.

The people who live there were driving on gravel road. In the spring and in the fall, it was just trenches. When I would leave the House, after being back in my district for a weekend or for a constituency week, my husband would say stick to the high points of the road. I would come back and I would stand here and I would petition and say, I bet you no other MHA was given that piece

of advice: stick to the high points. That’s how bad it was.

Bit by bit by bit, we got it done – a tremendous commitment by the Liberal government over 10 years –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I’m having difficulty hearing the hon. Member. She has the floor.

L. DEMPSTER: It’s very chaotic on the other side. It really is.

SPEAKER: Take your conversations outside.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, it really is. Thank you. I only have three minutes in a petition.

Speaker, bit by bit, we got the road done and the Labrador Straits, the 76 kilometres, 40-year-old pavement – we had a PC government for 12 years and it was a desperate state everywhere – desperate. We got the 76 kilometres in the Labrador Straits redone. We got the dirt road going north of Red Bay, going to beautiful places like Mary’s Harbour that leads to Battle Harbour, we got it done all the way to Goose Bay – tremendous federal-provincial investment that we prioritized.

Next, it was the branch roads. We had, in budget ’25, \$3 million approved, engineering work was started – and I’m really calling on the minister to take another look at this. I would say that, going forward, they’re going to prioritize what’s important to them in the budget, but don’t cancel work that was already done and then say this is about safety for all of us, because it’s a very serious safety situation.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm honoured to table this petition, helping injured workers recover. These are the reasons for this petition:

Accidents on the job leave employees wondering how they're going to pay their bills when they cannot work, while costing employers more in the long term due to higher claims at WorkplaceNL.

With quality care, some employees will be able to return to work sooner and with fewer health complications, saving them and their employer money and hardship.

Occupational health and safety clinics not only help workers rehabilitate more quickly but also can play a role in preventing workplace injuries in the first place.

And the Health Accord recommended setting up the occupational health clinic for the very reasons listed above.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to act on the Health Accord recommendation to set up an occupational health and safety clinic for the workers of this province.

Speaker, again, with respect certainly and the wonderful commentary from the minister regarding the National Day of Mourning, we know that there are huge sacrifices that are made by workers and their loved ones. Of course, today, in his words, encourages reflection and action.

Every worker deserves to be safe in their workplace. We've all, I'm sure, had experience, the hon. Members here, somebody in our families, friends, community, workplaces who've had people impacted. I know I have. I've had a good friend who was impacted and actually died

as a result of an occupational health issue. As well, I have a family member who was lost, a sibling, in a workplace accident.

It doesn't impact just that individual; it impacts the whole community and the families beyond. So this is one opportunity that people are calling for in this petition, that it was recommended by the Health Accord to ensure that we have a clinic that people can have more resources in order to prevent these kind of occupational health impacts.

I thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Orders of the Day.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, Order 7, second reading of Bill 12.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the MHA for Terra Nova, that Bill 12, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act, now be read a second time.

SPEAKER: It's been moved and seconded that Bill 12, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Amend the Children’s Law Act and the Family Law Act.” (Bill 12)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I’m very pleased to rise in this hon. House to introduce a bill that proposes very important amendments to the *Children’s Law Act* and the *Family Law Act*. These amendments will align provincial legislation with the federal *Divorce Act*, as it relates to parenting arrangements following family separation.

In 2021, long-anticipated amendments to the federal *Divorce Act* came into force through Bill C-78. These reforms were designed to modernize family law in Canada and, most importantly, to improve outcomes for children whose families are experiencing separation or divorce. Because family law is an area of shared jurisdiction, it is both necessary and responsible for the province to ensure that our own statutes reflect these federal changes.

Families do not experience federal and provincial laws as two separate systems. They experience one family justice system. So when legislation is not aligned, parents faced inconsistent rules. Children are caught between competing legal frameworks and disputes become more costly, more complex and adversarial.

Speaker, these amendments are long overdue. By aligning the *Children’s Law Act* and the *Family Law Act* with the federal *Divorce Act*, we are creating a more consistent and fairer legal framework for families at an already difficult time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: At the heart of this bill, Speaker, is a clear and

unwavering principle, that is the best interest of the child must always come first. With the passage of this legislation, the courts, lawyers and families alike will be guided by a clear, child-centered approach when making decisions about parenting arrangements.

Speaker, to help explain why this bill is necessary, a brief overview of the legal framework may be helpful here. In Canada, there is no single statute that governs all family law matters. Responsibility is shared between the federal and the provincial governments. The federal *Divorce Act* applies to married spouses who are divorcing and includes provisions on parenting arrangements and child support.

Provincial family law applies in all other circumstances, such as when parents were never married, are cohabitating or are separated, but not divorced. In those cases, the *Children’s Law Act* and the *Family Law Act* govern. They govern matters such as parenting time and decision-making regarding children.

So when the *Divorce Act* was amended in 2021, it introduced significant reforms to make disputes involving children less adversarial, to better address family violence and to provide clear guidance on how courts determine a child’s best interests.

The amendments before us today ensure that provincial law reflects those same principles. Without these changes, families in Newfoundland and Labrador would continue to be subject to different legal standards, depending solely on whether the parents are married. That inconsistency is neither fair nor practical. Children should not receive different legal consideration because of the jurisdiction under which their parents’ case happens to fall.

Consistency matters. Aligning our provincial legislation ensures that courts apply the same child-focused approach, regardless of

whether a matter proceeds under federal or provincial law.

Speaker, I would now like to take the opportunity to just highlight some of the key changes proposed in this bill. First, the bill will be replaced the terms “custody” and “access” with modern, neutral language. The new terms are “decision-making responsibility,” “parenting time” and “contact.” This shift in the language reflects a more-accurate understanding of parenting as a set of responsibilities toward children rather than competing rights between parents.

“Decision-making responsibility,” that term refers to making important choices about a child’s well-being, including health care, education, culture and religion.

The term “parenting time,” that is the time that a child spends in the care of a parent, and then we see the term “contact.” That refers to relationships a child has with others including grandparents, relatives or other important persons in a child’s life. The contact could include things like visits, phone calls, correspondence, without conferring parental decision-making authority.

This is modernized language, Speaker, and it places the focus where it belongs, on the child’s needs and on parental responsibilities. By adopting this approach, the province is promoting co-operation, reducing conflict and supporting healthier parenting relationships after separation.

Bill 12 also introduces a clear and comprehensive definition of family violence. Family violence includes not only physical harm, but also threatening conduct, coercive or controlling behaviour and actions that cause a family member to fear for their safety or the safety of another person.

Importantly, conduct does not have to meet the criminal standard of proof to be

considered family violence under this legislation. That’s important. When determining the best interests of the child, courts must consider both direct violence and a child’s exposure to violence. This ensures that the law does not minimize or overlook the lived experiences of victims and children.

The bill also sets out duties for parties, legal advisors and the courts, which includes encouraging the use of family dispute resolution processes, where appropriate. These measures are intended to reduce conflict and support more timely and constructive resolution of parenting issues.

Another key issue addressed in these amendments is relocation. Moving can have a significant impact on a child’s relationship with parents, or others who have parenting time, decision-making responsibility or contact with the child. Bill 12 establishes clear notice requirements, which must include a proposal for how the child’s parenting time and decision-making will be handled after the move, and a process for objecting to relocation, when necessary.

Overall, Speaker, these amendments reflect a broader commitment to access to justice. They encourage early information sharing. They encourage appropriate use of dispute resolution. They encourage reduced parental conflict. All goals that are essential in family law matters, especially those involving children.

Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not address a June 2025 decision of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador, which found subsection 27(2) of the *Children’s Law Act* to be unconstitutional. This provision prevented individuals from applying for custody or access where a child was under a continuous custody order pursuant to the *Children, Youth and Families Act*. This bill responds to that decision and ensures the legislation complies with constitutional requirements.

Speaker, I can also advise that officials from the Department of Justice and Public Safety have consulted with the courts about these matters. While the courts are supportive, they have noted the need for time to update forms, processes and public-facing information. For that reason, the bill will come into force on proclamation. The department will continue to work closely with the courts to ensure readiness prior to proclamation.

The department has consulted with the Child and Youth Advocate, Canadian Bar Association, Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, Legal Aid Newfoundland and Labrador, and we are going to work with them and others to ensure that family law professionals are informed and prepared for these changes.

Speaker, these amendments align provincial legislation with the *Divorce Act*. These amendments establish clear criteria for determining the best interests of the child, and they reinforce that this principle must be the sole focus of decisions affecting children and family law matters.

I respectfully encourage all Members of this hon. House to support this important bill, which strengthens our family law framework and ensures greater consistency, greater fairness and protection for children and families across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

It is an honour to respond today to the minister for Bill 12, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act.

Speaker, this is a very important bill because, as the minister said, children, definitely, do matter and these changes are, definitely, hopefully, going to be very positive changes. The *Children's Law Act* and the *Family Law Act* and the 2021 *Divorce Act* – so the amendments are going to happen here. It's in the best interest of the child. Consistency of care for children is extremely important.

Speaker, I was the minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development from 2015 to 2017. That was a very eye-opening time for me. I'd come from a community where I was a registered nurse and worked with persons with disabilities and then to go into this department and the needs were so high. The differences within the department for the security of the children and the safety of the children and the social workers trying to balance that, you can see how difficult it is.

Also, when it comes to parents and family members, mothers and fathers trying to make the decision, everybody wants to make the best interests of the child – the department, the families, the parents, everybody, community – and the health care and the education and the religious affiliation of that individual. It's very difficult raising children today in 2026. It's not an easy thing to do.

When there is conflict in a family, it is even more difficult. Family violence – the best interest of the child, again, and the children's exposure to family violence has got to be taken into consideration. I'm very happy to hear the minister speak about that here today. Because children can be around violence, not be personally or physically impacted, but they can view it and see it day in, day out and this will have such a significant impact on their morale and how they're going to grow up and their ability just to succeed in life.

Extended families and your involvement with your extended family – I know, myself, I

grew up and I was lucky to have four grandparents in my life. I consider myself extremely lucky, but to have your extended family and access to your extended family, your aunts, your uncles, your cousins, your grandparents, those people who really and truly care about you is extremely important. I'm happy to hear the minister speak about that also. Access to justice also is very, very important.

I'm really hoping that these amendments here today are going to be adequate to meet the needs that we see happening in 2026. I'm happy to hear that the minister has, in fact, consulted with the Child and Youth Advocate, the Canadian Bar Association and Legal Aid prior to bringing this into the House and that we're going to give them time to get ready for these changes.

Speaker, again, I hope these changes are adequate and I hope that we can, in fact, support the changes, but we'll see when we go to Committee.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a great honour to rise and represent the constituents of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde. I'd like to say thank to the Minister of Justice for presenting Bill 12, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act.

Very important proposed amendments that we are making to this bill today; it's all about putting the interests of the child first. It aligns provincial legislation with the federal legislation with the amendments made to the *Divorce Act* that was updated in 2021.

We are modernizing our legislation to support children and their parents going through separation and divorce and reduce unnecessary conflict. With the proposed legislation, the provincial government is placing the best interests of the children at the center of decisions when families are going through separation and divorce.

Speaker, as has been said here many times, our children are our greatest resource, and this is evident once again in the proposed amendments of Bill 12. This is about putting the child's best interests first. These amendments make clear that the primary consideration in divorce and parental separation is the best interest of the child. While Family Law is a shared provincial-federal jurisdiction, as previously mentioned, the amendments will align with the federal *Divorce Act*.

As the minister explained, adversarial terms, such as custody and access, are replaced with more neutral terms, such as decision-making responsibility, parenting time and contact. The amendments also remove subsection 27(2) from the *Children's Law Act*. In June 2025, the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador declared that subsection was unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court also declared a section of the *Children, Youth and Families Act* to be unconstitutional and the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being is reviewing that act and will work with Justice and Public Safety officials on any future amendments.

These legislative changes provide the following: a clear definition of family violence, which must be considered when determining parenting arrangements; direction for parents to pursue family mediation and alternative dispute resolution, where appropriate.

Speaker, approximately 25 per cent of marriages in Newfoundland and Labrador end in divorce. While that is well below the

national average, many families are affected by divorce and separation. We are seeing an increasing number of divorces that are being resolved out of court. The amendments promote family mediation, which has the potential to further increase out-of-court resolution, cutting down on the length of the divorce process.

Again, the proposed amendments in Bill 12 are about putting the best interests of the children first, and that's what we are seeing and that's what we are committed to doing here. I'm proud to stand here to support Bill 12 presented by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you to the minister for all the information there, bringing forward this Bill 12, which we're going to be happy to support. Bringing the provincial and federal jurisdictions in line makes complete sense. We don't want anybody to fall through the cracks.

As the minister has said, Speaker, we see rates of divorce and parental situations of all kinds of different shapes and sizes. I was just looking at some statistics there. The key divorce statistics for Newfoundland and Labrador, the latest data, I believe, in 2020, was 618.

However, I think it's really important to note that the nature of parenting isn't what it used to be decades ago with a very traditional, kind of, form of marriage. There are all kinds of living together scenarios in common law and, of course, a multitude of different family situations that are actually parenting children. Again, children, being our biggest asset, our hope for the future

and the ones that are most vulnerable that we need to protect, this is something that certainly makes a lot of sense to come in line.

Especially when we're talking about divorce situations and parenting custody, when a couple or a family situation changes, it's really, really important that we see this kind of treatment be consistent from both the federal and the provincial so that it doesn't get caught between all kinds of legislative red tape.

I will note, as well, really important in this is about the protection, when we talk about family violence. In this House, Mr. Speaker, we have been talking about how important it is that we look towards methods that are not violent and encouraging collaboration and methods in our educational system, in our family structures that are really important for raising healthy children, healthy families and healthy societies.

In order to do that, of course, we want to make sure that the family violence, that there's clarity around that, what's best for the child. Because negative impacts for children in these kind of scenarios – I'm sure the hon. Members of this House, we're all party to those kind of scenarios. Personal information, myself, it's extremely important that the children are put first in a situation where parenting roles have shifted.

Any kind of clarification, early information sharing, as the minister has spoken to, that can happen in this scenario, I think is very, very important. I certainly, at this stage of the game, am very happy to say that we will be supporting this bill; however, we will have questions going forward in the Committee aspect.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour and a privilege as always to rise in this House and speak on behalf of legislation and our constituencies as well, Sir. I'll say that everybody shares in that honour and pride to be able to do that each and every day that we come to work.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleagues across the House and on this side that this is an extremely important amendment to this bill, but there is also a housekeeping aspect to it, as the minister had alluded to, in terms of bringing those provincial and federal jurisdictional issues in line with each other. What I can say is I applaud the minister for bringing this forward.

When we talk in this House and the topic of children comes up, at every single turn what you'll see is you'll see our Minister of Education, time and time again – we've heard it from the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi as well today – that our children truly are our greatest resource. If we can do anything, even small steps such as this, to put the children first, especially when you're talking about divorce, separation, I would think that, in a lot of cases, that perhaps – and nobody wants to see it, but we see the kids pick up some trauma based on why the parents might have got to that point.

Again, all of this is done in the best interest of the children. I mean, we're never going to be put in a situation in this House where we're not going to have, I hope, unanimous support for anything that affects children.

Regardless of how the parents go to that point, it's never going to be the fault of the child, Mr. Speaker, I'll say, and I think we can agree with that.

So when you're talking about scenarios where legislation could be out of line, as the minister alluded to earlier in her preamble, you could have children, through no fault of their own – they certainly never got there. The parents are the responsible parties for

having put them there; therefore, the kids shouldn't be affected by desperate outcomes or something that's out of balance because of the marital status of their particular parents having to shift towards provincial legislation versus federal legislation.

Any type of activity, I say, any type of change we can make as legislators is very important. If we can reduce trauma of any kind for children going through any of these circumstances, I say it's worthwhile.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we talked already about the shared jurisdiction there. The minister also alluded to those adversarial terms being used, such as custody, access. It's very cold terminology if you think about it. When children are present, they're going to be hearing this. They're going to be hearing these conversations as well. So even if the sharpness of those adversarial terms can be taken out and lessened, I think the formality of that can be still accomplished without words, perhaps – and I'll say it – that might spark a reaction from either one of the parents as they go through this process too.

When we talk about children first, and you're always going to hear that from this side of the House, about putting children first, when these disputes take place – and they do get heated. If people are separating, there's always going to be money thrown into the mix as well, There's always going to be the parenting time that's going to be fought about. You're going to see that time and time again. If we can use legislation in this House, work together with all sides – and I think we'll have unanimous support to these amendments today – any time we can do that to lessen the cost on families and individuals, lessen the exposure to the whole process – and we heard on this side of the House already, Mr. Speaker, that people are taking care of this business between adults outside of court more and more often.

I don't want to offend any of my lawyer friends but, if you're like me, any time you've ever engaged the services of a lawyer, it seems like they're the only guys that seem to win. Those bills just keep coming and coming.

So if we can lessen the time it takes, Mr. Speaker, to deal with this, lessen the exposure to the children as well and lessen the financial burden of this experience and this situation – because that financial burden, again, of this process of separation and divorce, comes back on the children too. Not to say anything more negative about lawyers, but if they're taking the money out of the family, out of both sides, that's less disposable income for the families, and for those children as well.

With that, I did say, of course like the minister already alluded to it, it was a subsection from the *Children's Law Act* at the provincial level that had been deemed unconstitutional. Again, taking that out, a housekeeping issue. The need for that clear definition for family violence, when you're considering, especially, the parenting arrangements that happen, post-separation, post-divorce and all that, the need for that cannot be understated.

We, certainly, have heard, even during Question Period, it's on the minds of every district, people in the district, about intimate partner violence, kids being subject to violence. We've talked about trap houses and very desperate times in some districts where there are children in some of these homes. Any time we can do good work in this House to limit the exposure to anything that's going to ill-affect children, their development and them, in turn, becoming future leaders, future legislators and having them have the ability to reflect on a childhood that was safe. As our Minister of Housing said earlier today in Question Period: everybody deserves a safe place to live.

We can all agree that, when it comes to our children, that is paramount. So whether that's the parenting arrangement post-separation, like I said, any little thing we can do to pass something through this House that's going to help, we're going to take that opportunity.

Again, we've seen just some small changes here, which will try and increase the level of civility, I guess, between the sometimes seen as warring parties during the separation. We've heard the minister talk about consistency. These children are not at fault here. Whatever happens with Mom and Dad or the parents or whatever that parenting arrangement is, it's not their fault; therefore, there shouldn't be differences, major gaps or cracks in the system where one child is left behind and another one has a better outcome because of the particular piece of legislation used in that scenario.

In closing, I'd just like to say, thank everybody on behalf of the minister for the commentary. I think that this should be a slam dunk, if I can be so bold as to say that. In terms of something that does housekeeping, keeps us in line with those particular things, like family law, where we have the dual jurisdiction going between federal and provincial governments; and also enhances our ability to protect children in any way, shape or form, I say, is good work. It's time well spent. As we heard some of the statistics, I guess, from the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, these rates for separation and divorce are, unfortunately, continuing to climb. That's because of a whole range of things: it's economy, parenting is different these days.

The institution of family, the definition may have slightly changed over time, with people not adhering to the original structure of the family, the nuclear family, where in some cases, Mom stayed home and Dad went to work. Those definitions have changed over time with the level of equality we have in our society nowadays. You know, I have a friend in Kilbride – you all saw that old

movie, *Mr. Mom* – where the wife was the majority breadwinner and was, I believe, a dual specialist in our health care world, and the dad raised the kids. There's nothing wrong with that.

What I'm saying is, regardless of what the scenario is and regardless of the circumstances, legislation has to be consistent across jurisdictions. We have to protect our children, Mr. Speaker, and anything that we can do in this House and come together, and I'll say it again, to transcend the partisan political lines and do what's right by the people, this is another one of those, it's good work. I'm happy to be a part of it.

With that, I'll take my seat. Congratulations to the minister on her first bill, bringing this to our House and getting these very important housekeeping issues and definitions put to this floor for a positive change for the children of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for the bill. I also want to firstly thank the Department of Justice, the drafters. I do have a good understanding of what kind of work goes into a substantial bill like this. I know that they would have been working on this for a very long time, so I just want to thank the drafters and the experts in the Department of Justice, the staff and the lawyers who work in the court system, because many of them would have inputted into this piece of legislation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Yes. Thank you.

I am not a lawyer. This is not an area of expertise of mine, and I have not been minister of this department, so my comments today are from that non-expert perspective. I do not have lived experience in this area. My comments in this area are as a legislator representing the people of Mount Scio.

I have a lot of notes I'm going to try to go through and, for the first time ever, I'm going to read them off my laptop. I'm going to use my laptop to help me with my speaking points today. It's the first time I've ever done that, but I'm not an expert and hopefully this will be okay. I appreciate the opportunity. This is an extremely important piece of legislation for children and families in Newfoundland and Labrador, Speaker.

In terms of this bill, there are two foundational statutes in this province that this bill impacts: the *Children's Law Act* and the *Family Law Act*. I would say, Speaker, this is one of the most significant modernizations of family law that Newfoundland and Labrador has seen in a long time. This bill brings provincial law into alignment with the federal *Divorce Act*, which was overhauled in 2021.

So I think it's important, obviously not with a legal background myself, but in terms of families and laypeople looking at definitions, looking at legislation, on navigating these very complicated systems, I think it's important that now, with this change, they can see consistent language and principles from provincial law and the federal law under the *Divorce Act*.

There are many changes in this bill, which I will admit, we're still piecing through on our side. We're still doing analysis on this bill. But the changes are all around the child. Everything is from a child-centered perspective. Everything is in the best interest of the child and, obviously, that is paramount.

It's also a framework for family violence for the courts to use when they are looking at family violence issues, Speaker. They have structured rules for relocation and changes of residence; new duties for parties, lawyers and the courts; and a formal embrace of out-of-court dispute resolution. Obviously, this changes some gender-neutral language throughout.

I do not have lived experience with this area of law. I know we've talked about social media today. I'm in many, kind of, mom Facebook groups. I can hear the Members over there sighing. I hope they're not sighing at my speech.

AN HON. MEMBER: Nope, that was me, and I will stop for you.

S. STOODLEY: Okay, I appreciate the Member saying that. Anyway, thank you very much.

Speaker, I'm a member of many Facebook groups and, in those groups, there are a lot of moms. I joined a lot of mom Facebook groups when I had my child in 2020. There are a lot of comments and there are a lot of questions. Every day, I see three, four or five questions from parents about family law and then other people are giving other people advice. It's a very active area and topic of discussion that I know that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of parents in Newfoundland and Labrador going through this system and it's incredibly complicated, but it's incredibly important.

We do have resources to help these individuals, Speaker. I do want to commend Legal Aid. I can't imagine how much of their work must be in this area. I do want to commend, for example, PLIAN, Public Legal Information network. I have referred many constituents to PLIAN and to Legal Aid who are going through family law, family violence, legal issues. There are many resources to help.

Sometimes as an MHA, you know, you have to reach in and help connect them with other resources, but it is an incredibly important issue that touches so many families in Newfoundland and Labrador and across Canada.

Obviously, separation of families, divorce, custody disputes, these are so important in family lives and shape children's lives forever. This law is incredibly important in that regard. I know that the language in the statutes around custody and access has been recognized as being adversarial.

I can certainly understand that you're granted custody, I'm granted custody or I'm winning, you're losing, that type of language, I think, has not been helpful historically. Kudos to the minister and to the Department of Justice, this bill aims to change that and change the wording around how the system of justice frames outcomes in family law instances, Speaker.

I understand that there has been a disconnect between federal law, which is more modern, and our older provincial law, so hopefully my understanding is that this –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's starting to get a little bit loud. I'm trying to hear the hon. Member speak.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

My understanding is that this bill aims to close that gap and, hopefully, it does that. Like I said, we're still going through this bill because it is a very big, substantial, very important bill.

So some of the big terminologies that shift in this bill around custody and access, these are being retired entirely from the *Children's Law Act* which, I think, is very important. After this, again my non-legal understanding, though, is that custody will

not longer be a legal term related to family law in Newfoundland and Labrador, which is a significant change.

There are also three new concepts, as the minister talked about: decision-making responsibility – the responsibility to make significant decisions about a child’s well-being including health, education, culture, language, religion, spirituality and significant extracurricular activities. I think that’s incredibly powerful for children, Speaker.

I think parenting time is a new area brought into this area for the first time. The time a child spends in the care of a parent or someone standing in the place of a parent – this includes day to day decision-making during that time, unless a court orders otherwise.

Another significant area is contact – the time a child spends with someone other than a parent such as a grandparent or other significant person. That could be a visit or it could be any sort of other means of communication.

These are very important because they describe what parents actually do. They make decisions for their children, on behalf of their children, with their children’s best interest in mind, and they spend time with their children.

Removing some of the adversarial language, I think, removes some of the conflict around one parent winning, one parent losing or any of those connotations, which is incredibly powerful for the child and for the family and for the entire legal system.

I think child development is an important element of this. Again, I’m not an expert on this, but hopefully the change and removing those kind of adversarial portions of this bill will help children navigate with their families through this and to come out better on the other side, Speaker.

So this bill, as I understand, strengthens the best interests of the child and makes that clear and gives it a stronger standard. The court must consider only the best interests of the child when they’re making a parenting or contact order, and the word “only” is very specific and deliberate in this piece of legislation. Primary consideration must be given to the child’s physical, emotional, psychological, safety, security and well-being.

Then the bill also spells out what the court must consider, including the child’s need, given the age and stage of development, including the need for stability; the nature and strength of the child’s relationship with each parent, sibling, grandparent and other important people in their life; each parent’s willingness to support the child’s relationship with the other parent; the history of care of the child; the child’s own views and preferences given weight based on age and maturity of the child; the child’s cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual upbringing, including Indigenous upbringing and heritage; any plans that exist for the parents or caregivers for the child’s care; each person’s ability and willingness to care for and meet the needs of the child; the ability and willingness of parents to communicate and cooperate with one another; the history as it relates to that family of any violence, any impact that that has on the family, on the family dynamic and on the children; and any relevant civil or criminal proceedings or orders that exist for that family and for the child.

There are two key new principles that the bill introduces: the court must not consider past conduct of a person unless it’s relevant to that person’s parenting role, and the court must give effect to the principle that a child should have as much time with each parent as is consistent with the child’s best interest. These are very powerful, important principles, Speaker.

One of the areas which I give kudos to the drafters and the lawyers for is new

definitions and a new framework that this Bill 12 introduces for families in Newfoundland and Labrador. For the first time, I believe, family violence is now defined in the act. The definition is intentionally very broad to capture the reality of how violence actually happens in families. Conduct does not need to be criminal in order to qualify as family violence in this act.

So what is family violence in terms of this act? Obviously, it's physical abuse, forced confinement; sexual abuse; threats to kill or cause bodily harm; harassment, including stalking; failure to provide the necessities of life; psychological abuse; financial abuse; threats to kill or harm an animal or damage property, and actually killing or harming an animal or damaging property. Those are kind of explicitly outlined in the act, and these are aside from things that may be from a criminal perspective. It explicitly captures patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour and, for children, includes direct or indirect exposure to family violence.

The bill also outlines how courts must consider it. When family violence is present, courts must take into account the nature, seriousness and frequency of the violence and when it occurred; whether there's a pattern of coercive, controlling behaviour; whether the violence is directed at the child or the child is exposed to it; the physical, emotional and psychological harm or risk of harm to the child; any compromise to the safety of the child or other family members; whether the violence caused the child or another family member to fear for their safety; and any safe steps taken by the person to prevent further violence and improve their parenting.

My understanding of why this is incredibly important is that family violence in the courts has often been treated as a separate criminal matter and not directly tied to custody and access decisions by Family Court. So now family violence, even when not found from the criminal side of the

courts, is directly built into this act and can be fully integrated, not siloed, in making decisions that are clearly in the best of children in Newfoundland and Labrador. This framework forces courts to look at the full picture before making orders that put children or other family members at risk.

Another area where this bill significantly makes some changes is in terms of relocation and changes of residence. My understanding is that this solves some problems in terms of relocation. That has traditionally been a very tricky problem in family law. Our law has lacked clear, structured rules for what happens when a parent wants to move with a child and, obviously, this has led to more complicated court situations for families.

This bill creates clear processes for three different situations. The first is relocation, a move likely to have significant impact on the child's relationship with another person who has parenting time or contact; the second is change in residence – decision-making responsibility and parenting time, moves that are not relocations; and third, a change in residence – contact, so moves by a person who has contact with a child but not parenting time. Again, there are different rules around each of those three categories and the court will consider them differently.

Notice required for relocation, a person who intends to relocate a child must give at least 60 days written notice, and there's information about what needs to be included in that request, the expected date, the address of the new residence, the contact information as well as a proposal as to how the decision-making should happen, how the parenting time should work or how contact should work after the relocation.

Also with this framework, parties have a right to object. The other party has 30 days to object to the relocation, and they can do so by notifying the relocating person of the objection and filing it with the court. They can make an application under the act, and

then the court has many factors to consider when authorizing the relocation. They have to consider the reason for the relocation, the impact of the relocation on the child, the amount of time each person spends with the child and their level of involvement, whether the relocating person complied with notice requirements, existing orders or agreements about where the child lives, the reasonableness of the relocating person's proposal for ongoing parenting time or contact and compliance history of all the parties with existing orders.

This bill also deals with intent, which is incredibly important. My understanding is that the court is not allowed to consider whether the relocating person would still move if the child can't go with them. It stops parents from being effectively forced to choose between staying and losing access to their children. These are concepts and things that are built into the law that the government's bringing forward.

So burden of proof also is a key element that is outlined in the legislation. Where parenting time is roughly equal, the relocating person must prove the move is in the child's best interest. Where the child lives mostly with the relocating parent, the objecting party must prove the move is not in the child's best interest. In other situations, both parties shared the responsibility.

Then, in terms of safeguards for family violence, all notice requirements can be waived or modified by the court, including with notice to the other party where appropriate, including where there is a risk of family violence. So there are new duties outlined in the law for parties, legal advisors and courts.

So in terms of parties, people with decision-making, parenting time or contact must exercise those rights in a matter consistent with the best interests of the child. Parties must, to the best of their ability, protect children from conflict arising out of the

proceeding. Parties must try to resolve matters through a family dispute resolution process. Parties must provide complete, accurate and up-to-date information. Every document filed with the court must contain a certification that the party is aware of these duties.

Legal advisors also have duties that are clearly outlined in this bill. Lawyers acting on a person's behalf must encourage the person to attempt family dispute resolution unless clearly inappropriate. They have to inform the person of family justice services that could help, and inform the person of their duties under the act. Every document a lawyer files must contain certification that they've complied with these duties.

The bill also outlines duties of the court. The court must consider whether any of the following are pending or in effect for any party: restraining orders, non-contact orders or other orders to protect a person's safety; child protection orders, proceedings, agreements or measures; or an order, undertaking or recognizance, things that are of a criminal nature.

The court can make inquiries of the parties or review information available through a lawful search. This is incredibly important because these duties create a culture within the parties, within the lawyers, within the court system, of co-operation, transparency and decision-making around the child, which, obviously, the best interest of the child is the most important thing and is at the base of any changes to the *Children's Law Act* and the *Family Law Act*.

I do think family dispute resolution is an important element in this bill as well. The bill formally recognizes and encourages dispute resolution outside of court.

I don't think I'm going to get to all of what I wanted to talk about today, Speaker. I might pick it up again in Committee, or I might share my notes with one of my colleagues.

In terms of family dispute resolution, the bill formally recognizes and encourages dispute resolution outside of court. Family dispute resolution process in this bill, importantly, is defined to include negotiation, mediation and collaborative law. Lawyers and parties are pushed toward these tools as a starting point. The court should not be the first stop and it shouldn't have to be a stop at all.

So there's a lot in this bill that helps families resolve issues without going to court. Because if that's in the best interests of the child, then that's possible and feasible that that would be in everyone's best interest.

Again, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on this very important bill.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, it's always an honour to rise in this House and have the opportunity to speak and represent the beautiful District of St. George's - Humber.

It's also important to speak to Bill 12, amending these acts, in the best interests of the children. It wasn't that long ago in our gallery we had a class of children and it's why we put these amendments together. At the end of the day, when a relationship falls, the child is not at fault and these amendments will put the child's interest at best. They come first. The child always comes first (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Speaker, we're modernizing the legislation to support children and their

parents going through a separation, divorce. It's never easy on a child. In a bit, I'll expand on my own personal experience, but it's never easy on a child. We all know someone, we all know families that have gone through it.

When parents are civil and the relationship dissolves and they put the child's interest first, the child has a real opportunity to grow and thrive in community. But when parents are bickering, the child is usually the one who suffers, not the parents bickering, the child.

These amendments will help courts give them the leverage, the levers, to help push the child in the right direction, to help parents be pushed in the right direction for the best interests of their children. I can't speak of that enough: the best interests of the child.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Speaker, when you look at some of the terms that are changed, custody and access that are changing to decision-making responsibility. That's a lot softer term than custody or access. It puts decision-making back to the parents.

Ye guys brought this beautiful person into this world, you have a responsibility. You have a responsibility to work together in the best interests of the child, and that's so important. Parenting time – a lot of times you have one parent or another where a child may spend more time and the parent wants to spend extra time, because of work duties, responsibilities, the parent has to have access. That parent has to have access to that child to help, I guess, relate to the child, grow the child and show the child what that parent is, who they are, who their family is.

Family is extremely important, whether it's a mom, dad, grandparents, aunts, uncles, they've all had a responsibility or have part in growing the child. So allowing that access

for children to be able to reach out to these other people is just so important.

A lot of the amendments are cleaning up the language and aligning with our federal government. That's important that we're all on one line, but a lot of the stuff that we see and hear, courts have been doing now for quite some time. Judges and parents have been deciding this stuff for a while.

Society has changed. Years ago, you had one parent working and one at home raising a child. But in the family society today, both parents are usually working and time is spent away from the family unit, the home, and a lot of time the children are spending time by themselves. When you put the best interests of the child at heart, two parents working together can make sure there is parental time, whether it's the mom or the dad, the aunt, the uncle, the nan, the pop. These amendments are going to help do that, going to help provide the child access to their extended family, and extended family is so important. Because they all have a part in raising our children.

I know my grandparents, on both sides, had a huge part in raising me. Both my parents worked and whenever my Mom and Dad Dunphy or my Nan and Pop Cormier, they were around, especially in my younger years – my aunts and uncles, my sisters, brothers, they helped raise me when my parents were both working. So it's important to put the best interests of the children at heart.

But in the event parents do continue to bicker, in the event that parents try to play the child off another parent – I mean, when you hear these stories, it hurts. The courts now have an opportunity to help mediate, help put mechanisms in place to prevent this, or try to allow the child to have the best opportunity to grow in life.

We hope parents don't bicker, we hope parents take the best interests of a child at heart, and when it doesn't, the courts can

intercede and help mediate and resolve the conflict and still keeping the best interests of the child, whether that's access for one parent or another or, like I said, extended family.

Speaker, I'll take a personal note for myself. I am that statistic of 25 per cent. I am. Myself and my daughter's mom, we have an incredible person. A number of years ago, yes, we did move separate. But we did realize back then, eight or nine years ago now, that our daughter was the most important thing – our daughter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: I was a shift worker at the time at the mill in Corner Brook. I worked days and nights and nights and days. My schedule was all over the place. But do you know what? My daughter's mom, we worked out a schedule that we shared parenting responsibilities and duties. We didn't make a decision without talking to each other, because we know how sometimes children can get, they can also try to play one parent off the other.

Dad might have a little softer side – I'd like to think so. A debit machine. However, we have an incredible, empowered daughter, and a lot of that goes to her mom.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: When two parents work together – and this is a prime example – and take the best interests of the child at heart, your child can grow to be a strong, independent, educated human being, and that's what we have.

H. CORMIER: My little girl – well she's not little now, she's almost 20, but she's one independent person and she has no problem taking a pen to paper and letting you know. That's a direct result of two parents working together.

AN HON. MEMBER: She was put first.

H. CORMIER: She was put first. That's so important, when you put your child first.

These amendments that our Minister of Justice and her department have put forward certainly align to help take care of that, take care of the best interest of the child. So I thank the minister. Even though a lot of parents were already doing this, it's important to have these amendments in place so when parents do have a bit of conflict, the courts can have the mechanisms to put in place to take care of the situation.

So on that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and say to all parents: If, by chance, your relationship dissolves, please, because our children are our future, take the best interest of the child at heart first.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to stand up in this hon. House. I wasn't going to today, but this particular topic and what we're doing here today is very near and dear to my heart, given my background.

I'd like to thank the previous speaker for his address here today. He did a great job, and very touching, but also, we all learn from each other in this House, and we have to learn. It's too bad we don't know more about each other, really, because I think that's important, for all of us to have some insight into each others' backgrounds and so on.

Speaker, I'm going to take this today, and I'm going to do it from a couple of angles. First, I'm going to talk about the bill, and then I'm going to talk about some personal things.

The changes made to this bill will align the *Children's Law Act* and the *Family Law Act* with the *Divorce Act*, which was, I think, brought in by the federal government in 2021, and this is important. Any time you line the language up, that you change the language to make it easier and make it more understandable, make it more palatable, that's important. Any language that certainly takes into account children and children's feelings is certainly something that I always like to promote.

These changes move away from the language such as custody and access and make it more child centered, and that's important, like parenting plans. I love the idea of the parenting plans and how they work. It's great work, Minister, great work. Decision-making responsibilities and so on, these are much better terms to be using when talking about children; because, a lot of times, children are in the room or in the court, wherever this is happening, and they're listening. They don't understand these words, but they do understand words that have them as the focus. I think that's important.

It expands and defines the best interest of the child. It takes into account the child's needs. Every child will have different needs. There will be different circumstances around the reasons why the child is in court or being discussed.

The nature of the relationships and the history of the child, that's important. It's all important and that's where we are. That's where we are; that's where we need to be, and moving forward – I mean, I hear from so many parents about this particular act and all call for changes – all of them.

Parenting plans – I like that. I like the parenting plans. I think that's somewhere where I'd like to see us move. In these parenting plans, my understanding is that the parenting plans would happen prior to the court proceedings. Now that makes sense. That makes sense, because before

you enter the courtroom, the parents have already decided what's best for the child. It makes it so much easier on anyone. Love it. Love it.

They define family violence and use the definitions from the *Divorce Act*, which line things up. I like that. It clarifies rules on relocation and moving with the child. A lot of times, in my previous life, I'd see children transferring into the school that I would be working at, and the child would be there, probably with one of the parents, or probably the child would be moved home with the grandparents.

In a lot of cases in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, that has happened in the schools that I've been in. That's important, the communication piece is so important, because the movement of that child around, you have to make sure that the school is aware and that everybody is aware what's going on with that child. You have to do that; everybody has to be aware.

I think about the schools and the number of guidance counsellors in schools and so on, no fault to our education system – no fault – but we need to be training more guidance counsellors, people who deal with children. That's what we need. We need to entice people to go into that profession. It is a great profession. Any principal of any school will tell you, one of the most important resources in any school in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is a guidance counsellor, a good guidance counsellor. That's important.

The relocation of a child, the information that will be passed around, that's key. It's key to the child's teacher. It's key to whoever is with the child, who's bringing the child, the background from the schools that the child is coming from and so on. All of that's important and all that has to be gathered by somebody. All that has to be gathered by somebody. This goes across multiple departments over there. It goes across multiple departments because you

have to make sure that everybody is in sync, because we're talking about the child.

The ability to approve or oppose a process of a child is also very important. It really is, because if a process is put in place and the parents can't agree, then there has to be something as well there to make sure that they can look at this, the court or whoever, evaluate it and make the necessary changes.

This bill will take the language – because courts are using two sets of regulations and rules when making these decisions, this bill will be a welcome change to the language.

Speaker, I'll just take a couple of more minutes. I don't need to talk a lot of on this but, like I said, I felt compelled to.

In my experience over the years, I dealt with a lot of children that moved to my school for various reasons. A lot of those students were moved to my school because of parental separation or divorce. It was really difficult to deal with, and not because the child was difficult. It was really difficult as a school principal and a team of teachers working with the child and the family, and understanding the circumstances, why the child was there.

The Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, Minister – I'll get back to him.

Speaker, my experience in this area comes from the years I spent, like I said, in schools but I also spent 12 years teaching post-secondary students as well. These post-secondary students, some of those, too, in dealing with the parents and listening to the parents and how they miss their child and so on; having fathers and mothers coming into the school and wanting to check on the progress of their student because they don't have custody and they just want to come in to check and all the rules and regulations of schools around there.

Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, I just want to say to you that I mentioned to you before, but I saw a picture of you recently, if you don't mind me saying, holding your grandson.

J. WALL: Granddaughter.

P. PIKE: Granddaughter, okay. I said, he gets it now because I know what it's like. I have seven of them, seven grandchildren and I get the feeling. You want the best for that child, just as you had for your own children. Grandchildren are worse, by the way. Anyways, we all know that.

The thing with it is that it makes you realize how important it is that children get the best care possible. That's the reason why, in a lot of cases in rural Newfoundland, when those parents split up, if they do, the child ends up with the grandparents, which is not a bad thing, in a lot of cases.

AN HON. MEMBER: How old are you?

P. PIKE: Almost as old as you.

Working with K-to-12 students most of my career, those students impacted by divorce and separation, we have to have supports in place for them.

As well as my experience as minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, that also brought a lot of things to light with me, personally, in dealing with families and dealing with children who were placed in care.

I'm dealing with an episode of that right now, as a matter of fact. Children who are in care, parents realize that the child is in care for various reasons and they want to know the progress of the child and so on and how the child is doing. I know that's part of the minister's portfolio and it's tough work. It's really tough on those –

AN HON. MEMBER: Tough on the heart.

P. PIKE: Yes, it's tough on the heart and also tough on those social workers, those fabulous social workers that do this day in and day out – where we'd all be full of tears, they do it in a very professional manner. We're so thankful to have them.

As well, the retention of those types of social workers is extremely difficult. They're difficult to get, to do the types of work that they're doing. Retention is everything.

Anyway, I'd like to thank the Speaker for giving me an opportunity to speak on this. It's so important to all of us. It's a great bill. I'll certainly be supporting it, I have to tell you that upfront, because I think it's needed and anything – anything – that we can do to help shape the lives of the children and young adults in this province, then we, as a House, have to stand firm and be unified in that.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

Happy to stand here today and speak for a few minutes in second reading of Bill 12, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act. It's, what we would call, a very substantive bill, Speaker, very thick. Clearly a lot of work went into this bill.

The drafters of the bill were already referenced and thanked, and I will my voice to that. But even before you get to the drafting stage, there is so much work that happens. I want to commend the minister – this will be her first piece of legislation, I believe, in this hon. House, and that's really incredibly special.

I look back to, I'm going to say, maybe 2017, when I was in CSSD, as the minister and my very first piece of legislation was a

new *Children, Youth and Families Act*. One of the things that always kind of stood out for me was when we got down to the nuts and bolts, I went into the boardroom one day and there as a whole list of titles on the whiteboard, and what shall we call this bill? In the end, I chose something that wasn't there. I thought we've just got to make it really simple. Sometimes we can all complicate things. I said: Let's call it the *Children, Youth and Families Act*.

Fast-forward, when I brought the bill to the House and it was late spring, and one of my colleagues looked at how thick it was and he said, you're going to have us here for another month. You're coming with this bill and it's so substantive, we're going to be here another month. I said: No, I'm fairly confident that we won't be because we did a lot of work upfront. Months and months and months of consulting, in particular, with Indigenous governments, organizations, those on the front line in the Indigenous area.

That was a heavy department to be in, Speaker. I don't know the numbers today, but at the time I was there, we had over 1,000 children in care in this province and more than half that we knew that were never going home. Three hundred and fifty social workers – it was already mentioned here today – in that department that work on the front lines, that work in all corners of this province.

One of the first things I did as a new minister, when I went into that department, it was the 31st day of July in 2017, and by the first week in September, I was on the road. Because, as a minister, you will go in a boardroom and staff will brief you every day. To a large degree, when you're new, you only know what you're being told and you have to trust that. This is not a slight against the staff, your executive.

But for me, personally, getting out on the ground, getting out to meet people where they are, getting out for my own self to hear

the stories from the social workers of the challenges that they would go through, of some of their limitations, of some of the things they needed – and it wasn't always in a remote community in Labrador that you heard about the challenges, Speaker.

I remember sitting around a table filled with a number of social workers in Gander. I had heard a story where children had to be apprehended from a community that was a couple of hours away. There was a grandpa they were dealing with that was angry. They had no cell coverage. It's different now. When I had my accident on election day, actually, and I'm in the middle of nowhere, I was able to get out and find a signal and I was able to text somebody to tell my husband where to come. I had just beat the bottom out of the vehicle. It wasn't like that.

So it was good to get out and to be able to hear the stories, whether it was Corner Brook, whether it was Nain, all corners of Labrador, and hear from the social workers about the challenges, what was working, what wasn't working, and ways that they needed to be better supported.

I'm digressing, but *Children, Youth and Families Act* was very special to me, the first bill, just to close out that chapter. So it came in the House and we went into Committee on the bill. Tracey Perry was the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. I believe she was sitting maybe right there and I was sitting actually where the minister is today. That's where I was. We went for a long time. She had a long list of questions. We were up and down, up and down. The bill passed that night.

Before I got back to West Block, it was about 10:45 at night, I was receiving texts from people saying that's the way legislation is supposed to work in the House. Because for the people, on behalf of Newfoundland and Labrador, the government of the day, whatever banner or stripe, the government is bringing legislation. Sometimes it's amendments; sometimes it's to make things

better. Then it is the Opposition's job and the Third Party, whoever else is in the House, to come with amendments, to propose changes; because, at the end of the day, we're making law that has to be the best law that it can possibly be for the people that we are privileged here to represent.

I think about the helmet legislation and how many times even that was back and forth before it even came to the floor of this House. There were people who said I live in the middle of nowhere. Why do I need to have a helmet? It will be a barrier to me if I'm clearing my driveway. Okay, we don't need it for that. We worked through all of these different things. We also had doctors around the table who said we've seen brains come in too many times that it could have been a different outcome if there was a helmet.

Sometimes when I'm speaking in schools and little children are asking you, what's your job? I use the helmet legislation. You have to have a helmet when you ride a bike. That happened in the people's House.

Today we are in second on Bill 12. When my colleague was speaking, who spent his life as an educator and I've no doubt that he did a great job, I thought about a principal that we had back in my hometown and I wished we had him longer. He came in his retirement – I'm even going to say his name here, Lloyd Walters. I don't know if anybody knows him but I will tell you that he is an incredible, incredible man. In retirement, he came to Charlottetown but, while there, his daughter was in an accident, I believe, coming back from teaching herself on the West Coast, so we got about a year.

I spent 14 years on school council and that man used to come into our meetings and come into the office sometimes in school when things were going wrong and he just had this habit and he would say, folks, why are we here, if it's not for the children? Why

are we here? He could diffuse the most tangly, difficult situation.

This bill today, there are a lot of scenarios in life that are not black and white. That's a little bit difficult for me, even as an MHA, when you deal with scenarios that are grey. When we get into thinking about things like a *Divorce Act* and the statistics are stark; it's one in two. One in two marriages today will end in divorce.

At a time when my parents went south – kids they were – I was four years old when I went to live with my grandparents and I joined a very full household already – seven boys, two girls, I made three; there was 12 of us in the household. I went there at four years old and then that started a long custody battle that I won't talk about here because I want to focus on Bill 12.

But I was the only child in my community that was being raised by my grandparents and my parents were divorced. My mom went off to nursing school and my dad was off flying – the only child. That's not the case today, and that is why we need these rules to protect the children. When we look at sections like – I believe it was section 3, talking about a parenting plan and decision-making, we didn't need that too much a long time ago.

I'm going to mention a lady who is the most humble, unassuming lady you will ever meet in your life. She just passed away at an elderly age, and she deserves to be mentioned in this House and to have her name in *Hansard*. We knew her as Aunt Susie. She wasn't my biological aunt. Aunt Susie was born – probably not the right language, but we used to say with a crippled hand. She had one hand and it kind of ended here at the wrist. In my hometown, her funeral was just a couple of days ago. I'm sorry I couldn't get there.

But Aunt Susie raised 12 children. She lost her husband in a house fire when I was 12 years old, in the middle of the winter,

isolated, and all the children went to live in other homes. That woman did an incredible job raising her 12 children. We didn't need to talk about a *Divorce Act*. We didn't need to talk about sharing time among children because they've come back from all over the country to pay their respect and bid farewell, but times have changed.

I was in St. Anthony mid-January and I was going for dinner with a younger family, and I sat beside the lady and the little guy was upset. When we come to realize what was wrong, he had just come off the bus and he had spent several days with the dad, and now he was so happy to see his mom that he didn't want me to sit next to her at the restaurant. There are real impacts to when families of whatever gender, whatever, can't work things out and that is why sometimes the law has to step in to make sure that always the best interests of the children are at heart – always.

My heart went so out to that little boy. Just like when I was the minister of child welfare, my heart went out to children so much. One particular little boy, still in my heart all these years later. When Christmas came, I said to the deputy minister, I called him by name and said, I'd like to send him a gift. She said: Minister, there are over a thousand children in care. You can't send one little boy a gift.

Sometimes we have anger among children and they're acting out. They're just looking to be loved. So that's why we've got to make sure that there are laws around to protect them. Interesting that this bill is very much – there have been amendments to it to align with the federal law. It is interesting how the federal government laws and the provincial government laws have to align and work together. I remember when the feds were making some changes years ago, we were in a little bit of a scramble in the department because I remember being told we may be offside with our own legislation based on the direction of where the federal government is going right now.

Speaker, I'm a little bit off track here with my notes, but it's about the best interest of the children. So I'm very happy to be supporting this bill today.

I did want to mention – I'm a little bit all over the place because this bill came kind of late today. but I attended the National Day of Mourning today. I just have to mention it. My heart goes out to folks like Darren Ryan who was one of the injured workers. There was a story shared on him. I don't know if I'll get another opportunity, but I have to mention Jim O'Toole.

He was small in stature but a giant of a man in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Jim O'Toole has a special place in my heart. He went to fire school with my brother, and most know my story of my brother being murdered. It's coming up now on the 23rd anniversary and, in your heart, it's always yesterday. I never knew that until we did the presumptive cancer legislation in this House in 2022. He called me outside and then every time I would see him at many meetings after that, Jim would share stories of him and my brother Lester and some of the troubles they would get into and cars stuck in the snow and things like that.

I know that in this hon. House, everyone here today, our thoughts and prayers are with Jim O'Toole's two children, his wife and their family. He certainly at the end of his life left a legacy in the advocacy and the changes that he pushed for. We know that his cancer was a diagnosis from work.

I'm just going to clue up my remarks here, Speaker.

One more point I wanted to make about the tough decisions, one of the notes in the bill, the Explanatory Notes around the best interest the child, "require that only the best interests of a child be considered by a court in making an order under the Act." I'm probably dealing with three different similar cases in my constituency right now.

One of the things that I really struggle with – but as my colleague said I’m not the expert, I’m not the lawyer, we have to leave decisions to the courts, et cetera – is a case where a young family, they go their separate ways and the mom found a job in another community and wanted to kind of have a new beginning. Then the judge ruled – and it was the dad that had left in this particular case, I’m sure it can go either way, but just dealing with this very recent. The mom found another job, a very good job, could have gone and started life over but the court ruled that she had to stay in the community where the child’s biological father was because that was ruled to be the best interest of the child.

Now, I’m glad I don’t have to make those decisions because I’d probably wear my heart on my sleeve and you’d be saying: What do the child want to do? But, obviously, when they’re very little, they’re probably not in a position to make those decisions.

The one final comment I want to make around best interest of the child is, I was just sitting there in real time and I was thinking about the Bagbys. I don’t know if anyone else in this hon. House have read their book that they wrote, *Dance with the Devil*.

There was a terrible situation that played out in our province where the Bagbys basically had their entire bloodline wiped out. Where there was an individual who had murdered their son and, at the end, took the life of their grandchild and her own – very, very tragic.

I came into CSSD kind of under when all of this was happening and that was such a difficult time. What can happen then sometimes, in departments, in governments, is you have a tragedy that somebody was advocating: this is going to happen, this is going to happen, and change doesn’t come. Then when there’s tragedy – and I had it said to me many

times, even by people within the bureaucracy – sometimes the pendulum can swing too far.

I mean, you don’t want children ever removed from homes because the home is maybe not tidy or – it has to be a solid reason, but sometimes tragedy happens and the pendulum swings. I knew the Bagbys. I connected to the Bagbys through my own life tragedy and had many conversations. It was a very difficult situation for them. I read their book. I still have the book. I would encourage maybe the minister of families right now might want to – he might find that book interesting to read given the department that he’s in right now.

So all of those kinds of jumbled thoughts, Speaker, to say that there is a difference in the type of law that gets tabled in this House. If there’s a municipal piece of law or Crown lands or we’re changing boundaries, we’re giving more authority to municipalities, all kinds of law that comes, but not as weighty as law when you’re dealing with children, when you’re dealing with divorce, sometimes domestic violence and everything that goes with that.

There are a lot of sad stories out there, Speaker, which is just a reminder for us of why we have to get it right. We have to get it right.

So I want to thank the minister. I want to thank her team. I’m sure that there will be some questions back and forth when we get down into Committee.

Speaker, I will be happily supporting Bill 12, An Act to Amend the Children’s Law Act and the Family Law Act.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill 12, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act. This legislation's overarching is something that every Member in this House should be able to agree on. It's about the children, their safety, their stability and their well-being during what often is one of the most difficult times in a family's life.

When a couple goes through a separation, it can be very complex. Emotions can run high; circumstances can change quickly. When you factor in that there are children involved as well, the children are the ones who often it impacts the most. That's why when we set laws and guidelines in these situations, they must be clear, they must be modern and they must focus truly on what matters.

Let's face it, things in life change and incorporating things like gender-neutral language is certainly a welcome change and updating terminology and references used in the act, this is always a good practice in any bill.

To me, Speaker, this one hits a little close to home. I'm one of the statistics that the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde mentioned. When my mother and her husband, at the time, were separated, it was as amicable as a separation could be. There's very little in this legislation that would apply to my situation as an 11-year-old, but that separation did impact me greatly. I left the childhood home I grew up in, and like the MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair had said, I also moved in with my grandparents. They actually turned the front porch into a bedroom; there was no room in the house.

I only mention this because what I went through was minor compared to some of the situations and stories you hear in the news and the media and the real issues that families are facing. We need to make sure

that children are protected and I can't stress how important this is. The best interest of children needs to be top of mind when we make any decisions here in this Legislature.

I feel this bill moves us in a good direction and that's a good thing. It brings greater clarity and explains and defines what, as one of the clauses, best interests of the child means, by taking into account things like children's needs, nature of relationship and history of care.

Families in Newfoundland and Labrador deserve a system that is easy to understand; a system that is there for them and one they can navigate. When people are making and dealing with stressful situations, uncertainty and sometimes fear, the last thing they need is confusing law. The focus should be and should clearly be on the children that are involved.

Bill 12, I feel, helps reduce that confusion. The act clarifies rules around relocating and moving with a child. It requires a court-approved relocation and also gives individuals the ability to oppose the move through a court process, which was not, currently, in the legislation before.

The bill reinforces that decisions about parenting must focus on the child's needs. One of the amendments specifically states it requires "that only the best interests of a child be considered by a court in making an order under the Act." Not preferences of the adults, not past grievances – the child's needs. That includes their physical safety, their emotional well-being and their right to maintain meaningful relationships with the people who care for them, of course, when it's safe to do so.

Speaker, one of the most important parts of legislation is to continue the recognition of family violence and the impact on the children involved. This bill establishes processes which must be followed when a parent or other person with a decision-making responsibility, parenting time or

contact, in respect of a child intended to change residence or relocation – that’s pretty wordy, Speaker, but language like this does give legislation some teeth and the court some teeth to be able to make those prudent decisions and this is a smart move.

We know that exposure to violence at any age, but more so in children, can have a long-lasting effect. It can shape how these youth see the world. It can affect their mental health. It can affect their development and their sense of security. After all, their parents are the ones they look to, to protect them.

This bill strengthens how those realities are considered in decision-making. It ensures that safety is not an afterthought. It is front and centre and one that gives the court direction, and that matters because no child should ever be placed in a situation where their well-being or safety is compromised. No child should ever feel unsafe in what is supposed to be their home with their parents and/or caregiver.

Speaker, this legislation also shifts how we talk about parenting and separation. We are moving away from language that creates a sense of winners and losers. It shouldn’t be about that. Again, it should be about the children involved. Framing one parent as having custody and the other as having access is something that can divide a situation that’s probably already complex and there’s probably already some hostility.

We now look at focusing more on parenting responsibilities and time. I think that’s a very smart move, because words do matter. That may seem like a slight change in wording but, again, in my opinion, it’s something that’s much bigger. It’s a shift towards co-operation, shared responsibility with parents and reducing unnecessary conflict when possible; basically, wording that helps parents work together for the betterment of the child, not working against. At the end of

the day, parents should be working together for that betterment of the child.

Speaker, I want to make something clear, this legislation isn’t a silver bullet. It’s not going to solve all the complex issues and complex situations that we find before us oftentimes in the courts and outside the courts, but it is legislation that can guide us. They can set standards that can be held to; they can provide structure, but they cannot replace the compassion we need and the communication required, and sometimes common sense. That’s why, alongside these legislation changes like we have before us, we must also continue to support these families through services, through education and throughout community supports.

As the bill says, we must ensure that people have access to mediation, where appropriate and encourage the use of family dispute resolution processes by parties to the proceeding, where appropriate, to resolve matters to decision-making responsibility, parenting time and contact in respect of a child.

Again, Speaker, that’s very wordy, but it’s very specific and that’s something our courts need to have the teeth, to have the legislation for them to be able to make these decisions.

In my district, like every other district that we represent here in the House of Assembly, there are families navigating these challenges as we speak, today. Modernizing this legislation makes this more clear and this can only benefit the families and the children involved.

I also want to acknowledge the work that has gone into bringing this bill forward. Changes like this require consideration, so I want to thank the department, thank the stakeholders and thank the minister for bringing this forward. This work truly matters.

The decisions we make here in the House of Assembly have a real impact on the people we are elected to serve. The 40 of us here have a responsibility to ensure the legislation we pass today is not just for families of today but for the families in the future. It's about strengthening the framework that supports children during this difficult time of change. It's about ensuring that our legal system reflects the values we hold as a people and as a province, and we value what puts children first. We must ensure that the voices of the children aren't lost in the process.

So, Speaker, I will be supporting this bill, and I'll just sum it up in saying that legislation is never easy. It's something that we need to manicure and we need the departments to come forward with. There are a lot of things in this bill here that I'm glad to see. This isn't a final step. I'm sure we'll be looking at this in years to come and, as we get into Committee, we'll have lots of questions and dive deeper into this.

Overarchingly, I think this is a very important piece of legislation. I'm pleased to support it, Sir.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We too, as my colleague has said, will be supporting this.

I wanted to start with an example that stuck with me many years ago when I was early on in my teaching career, and parents who were separated. What amazed me was just how amicable the separation was. There was no animosity. They got along very well. In fact, later on, one spouse worked for the other in a business and attended the other spouse's wedding to their new partner.

I remember asking at the time, why? I mean, how did you manage this? How do you get along so well? One of the things that they said at that time was that we had our differences, but we resolved that our children were not going to be brought into the middle of it.

I heard, like the Member for Waterford Valley talked about, it still can be hard on a family, and I would say it still is. It's probably even worse when you've got parents then who there's a toxic relationship or they feed into the court system, which is, by itself, in nature, adversarial. Certainly what this bill does is it talks about guiding families through separation. It's talking about reducing conflict in the separation process and improve outcomes for children. It's talking about shifting the tone away from a win or lose dynamic, a zero-sum game. It's talking about protecting a child's best interest, protecting children from conflict arising from the court process and coming up with a dispute resolution process.

Certainly, I think as my colleague from Burin - Grand Bank has said, you know, we can probably see the essence of this sometimes in the school system, but here's my concern. It's not with the bill.

All of this is fine, but it comes down to the resources that go into it, because I would say any conflict resolution is going to require people. I was speaking to a social worker recently in Child Protection. The fact is, that has to be a very difficult situation, especially if you have to go in and remove children from a potentially threatening environment. The comment was that they were still 92 social workers short.

To me, this legislation works. The intent is great, but we've got to make sure that, if we want to avoid a court system, and there are challenges already there with getting court dates and so on and so forth, but if we want to avoid that, then it's going to become human resources intensive. We're not talking about pieces of furniture and so on

and so forth, or property. We're talking about people, human beings, lives. It's complicated.

So I would hope that, as we move forward in this legislation – and I'm not going to speak much longer – that we make sure we have the people available to make this legislation work. Put the resources there into the counselling, into the mediation and into the specialists who are going to be able to reduce the conflict, who are going to direct, who are going to help guide families through the separation and who are going to make sure that if there's already a relationship that might be toxic, how do you move beyond that so the children are not the ones who suffer and that the parents can go on to have a positive adult relationship post-relationship so at least, at the end of it, children aren't put in the middle and forced to choose.

While I've had friends who have had positive separations, there are others that are quite toxic and quite acrimonious and, in the end, it's not only the families of both sides that lose out but also the children who are caught in the middle, and I would say the grandparents on both sides as well. So from my point of view, I support this legislation, but the best way we can support it is to make sure we have the people in place to guide families and to put those supports in there to support them.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Are there any further speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, if the Minister of Justice and Public Safety now speaks, she will close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to say that it's truly an honour to stand in this hon. House of Assembly this afternoon and speak to this important bill; not only to speak to the important bill, but to hear all of the speakers in this hon. House take their position on this in terms of supporting the bill. I can say that, so far, we see an expression of support for the bill, and that makes me very proud.

I'm just going to identify that we've heard from 10 speakers, 10 Members of this hon. House, who each represent the people in their respective districts. I think it's really important for us to acknowledge that, because they stand in their spots to represent the people who have an interest throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, a very important and significant interest, in this very important bill.

I'll start with the Member of the House of Assembly for Placentia - St. Mary's. She, in her remarks, was the first speaker and identified the importance of the best interest of the child. I think that really represents what this bill – the essence of this bill is the primary focus that is on the best interest of the child. She also referenced other important principles like family violence and the significant impact that that can have on a child. She recognized and acknowledged the importance of having this family violence piece in the bill, and to develop it so that we will see children succeed in their later life. I think that was very important to acknowledge. She also talked about the access to justice.

So I think that that was the important thing right starting off, that we do see and there's a recognition of this hon. House of what's really important about this bill.

We also heard from the MHA for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde. He, again, recognized that this is what this bill is about,

putting the interests of the child first. He, in his remarks, focused on that as well.

The MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, who indicated that she is happy to support this bill as it stands right now, she said that when we look at it – and she's representing the people of her district who, of course, are concerned that we are passing legislation that makes common sense. That's what she identified, that this alignment of the federal and provincial legislation is exactly that. It makes common sense.

She also talked about family violence and the piece on family violence that is in this legislation and that we do need to ensure that there is clarity with respect to the definition of family violence, which of course we can examine further in Committee. Again, she as well, identified the central core of this legislation, which is the best interest of the child, and that it is extremely important that the child is put first.

The Member for Lake Melville as well, he spoke about the bill and his focus was about the adversarial terms. His address to this hon. House looked at the negativity of adversarial terms like custody and access. Those are cold terms, he described them, and that is certainly true, especially when children who are involved in these issues hear that they're getting custody of a child and access. Certainly, those are cold terms and that's why this legislation is an incredible improvement, an advancement with respect to the legislation. Consistent legislation across jurisdictions, he also pointed to how that is so important, that we have that consistency.

The Member for Mount Scio started off in her remarks thanking the people who have done the incredible, substantial work with this legislation. I thank her for recognizing that initially in her remarks. She referenced the Justice and Public Safety officials, the lawyers, the Legal Aid lawyers, all of the people who are involved in the legal

profession and who are impacted by this legislation.

She acknowledged that she didn't have lived experience, that she wasn't a lawyer and didn't have any experience, but I would say, in response to that, she is a legislator, like she acknowledged, and she has an important voice to be heard when it comes to this important legislation.

She talked about the fact that this is foundational legislation, that when we look at the *Family Law Act* and the *Children's Law Act* and how this is foundational legislation, but now it is aligning with the *Divorce Act*. One of the most significant reforms in family law, is how she described it. I would agree 100 per cent with that description of this legislation today.

She acknowledged the fact that navigating the complex legal justice system in terms of family disputes is challenging, but she acknowledged the importance of having consistent language and principles. She talked about the best interest of the child and about family violence, which of course are central pieces to this legislation. She also talked about formally embracing alternative dispute resolutions or family dispute resolutions, and that is so important. It's a very central piece to this legislation as well.

In addition to gender-neutral language, she also talked about the adversarial nature of the language, custody and access, and the terms of winning and losing. We're moving away from that. I'm so pleased that we are finally doing that.

It should be noted that the *Divorce Act*, this was in 2021. We are five years later. I'm very, very pleased to see that this is happening now, but the Member for Mount Scio also framed it in terms of saying there's a disconnect between the federal and provincial law, and that this bill attempts to close that gap. That is 100 per cent as well.

She talked about the child's development and how that is really what needs to be looked at here. When we talk about the best interest of the child, what does that really mean? It does mean that we're looking at the child's development in terms of their future. She acknowledged, as well, that this bill will strengthen the best interest of the child principle. These are powerful principles.

Family violence is a powerful principle now that is intentionally going to be very broad, and that is incredibly important. Also relocation, there's emphasis on that and how we're going to be looking at different rules around relocation. Legal advisors and family dispute resolution, those are all important things that she identified in her remarks.

The MHA for St. George's - Humber, I must say that, in hearing him speak, it was very moving to hear him speak. He talked about how important it is for children to thrive and grow, and that we need to give the courts the levers to help children and parents. That's exactly what this legislation is going to do. It's going to give the courts that ability to do that. But when he talked about the terms that are in the language that's used, again, yes, we need to have that softer language.

He also talked about the responsibility of parents to ensure the best interest of the child and how important it is to have parents working together. I acknowledge that is so important, and I want to thank the Member for St. George's - Humber because he spoke about his personal, lived experience, about how he and his daughter's mother have an incredible relationship. To me, that really demonstrates what is possible, Speaker, when two parents work together to make the best interest of the child a priority. He gave us an example of that. I think that's very important to acknowledge here in this House.

The MHA for Burin - Grand Bank talked about the amendments as well, and he described it as child-centered language, and that is true. It is child-centered language. It is considering, as he pointed out, the child's needs and the fact that every child has different needs. That is also acknowledged in this bill. So I was happy to hear as well that he'll be supporting the bill because, he said, it will help shape the lives of children in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, she also talked about her personal lived experience with her grandparents. These personal experiences only help us understand this legislation. So it should be recognized that that's not necessarily an easy thing to do, but it's so important. I thank Members that stand and have the courage to talk about their own personal experiences because that will only better inform us to ensure that we have the best legislation possible.

She talked about, as well, thanking the drafters of the legislation. I acknowledge that this is a very substantive bill and, having been a minister for many years, she understands the amount of work that goes into this type of substantive bill. So I'm very pleased that she was able to make her comments as well.

I also want to acknowledge the MHA for Waterford Valley and thank him as well for sharing his personal lived experience and talking about the best interest of the child. His acknowledgement of the piece about family violence and how it's important that this legislation gives teeth to that, as he described it, and that's an excellent way of describing it. But he did understand and as well comment that it's not a silver bullet, and that is so correct. What it does is it sets out the standards and the structure, as he described, but, as stated, it cannot replace compassion and it cannot replace common sense.

As well, one of the things that I found interesting and I really liked to hear from the Member for Waterford Valley is that he said this legislation is not only for families today but it's for families for the future. I thank him for acknowledging that and pointing that important point out.

Finally, our 10th speaker this afternoon talked about the legislation and the importance of it. He also, quite correctly, expressed concerns that we need to have the resources that go into supporting this bill. Still, he commented about some of the under resourcing that exists in this area and acknowledged that we do need people to make the legislation work and, although an intent of legislation is good, it has to be supported by the resources. I can say to the Leader of the Third Party that I concur 100 per cent with that. I thank him for expressing those concerns.

Speaker, in conclusion, I just want to say that this legislation is very powerful. It is legislation that really talks about how difficult it is when families go through separation and divorce. We know it can be incredibly challenging, especially for the children.

What do these amendments do really? They will modernize our laws to reflect today's realities. It will, we hope, reduce unnecessary conflict by having updated legislation. That is so important, updating the legislation. What that will do is reflect a collaborative approach to parents and it encourages parents to focus on their shared responsibilities rather than on the legal disputes. You can see when you analyze this legislation, that's exactly where it goes. It's looking at each item, really, when you examine it closely. It shows that the best interests of the child are what's paramount here. It is the focus.

It also shows that there's a move, a shift away from the legal, traditional kind of dispute to try to encourage family dispute resolutions, and that is one of the guiding

principles when we look at the best interests of the child. It's going to ensure the well-being of children. When parents are supported to work together, children will be better positioned to thrive. They will be better positioned to thrive, and we want all of our children to thrive.

Speaker, in conclusion, why is this amendment important, as well? Because it aligns our provincial and federal legislation. That alignment is so important because it will reduce the confusion, it will reduce the litigation and it will reduce delay. Amendments like this will help ensure that the best interest of the child is the central focus for the courts, for the legal professionals and for the families.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are the Members ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion has been carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act. (Bill 12)

SPEAKER: The bill has now been read a second time.

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a

Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 12)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 4, second reading of Bill 4, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act.

SPEAKER: Okay.

If the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board now speaks, he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

I look forward to closing debate on this bill. I just want a few short words that I'll pass along first.

One is that the bill came in in 2022. It came in at a time and, in '23-'24, it collected \$12.5 million in taxes from Newfoundland and Labrador. I think that's a significant amount of money, more than what was anticipated.

I put in a request for the Legislative Library to find out how many times did we address the previous government on the sugar tax and it came in in excess of 120 times we had spoke against the sugar tax. It happened but we're thankful that it ended. It was an affordability measure and it is an affordability measure. I think we probably all agree, now, that maybe, especially in this time, about the affordability.

Zero to zero was what was stated the last time we engaged – zero to zero, what's the big deal? I know that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would say clean up legislation every chance you get. Clean it up. What we're saying is that we're going to clean up the remnants of the bill and that's

our goal to tidy up that legislation so that wording is good.

The Member for Corner Brook, I think when he ended last, he might have been the last speaker if I'm not mistaken, he said this is not the greatest use of time for the House. I was going to say: Hear, hear! Because it's not. True, it is not.

One thing I want to say, and I was inspired by his address, anybody watching now is going to say, how inspired? Well, remember, if you can recall in the House the Member stood and talked about a book that he had read by Thaler which was *Nudge*. I said I bet that's an interesting read so Easter break, I picked up the book and I went out. I just want to share one closing quote because the hon. Member said, nudge, because nudge for attacks, the move towards attacks, but let me read one passage from the book, if I may, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's a prop.

C. PARDY: This is not a prop, is it?

SPEAKER: Go ahead.

C. PARDY: It's all innocent. Here it is.

SPEAKER: Make it quick.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Make it quick.

C. PARDY: "A nudge, as we will use the term, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives."

AN HON. MEMBER: Correct.

C. PARDY: That is right, the Member says, but then comes, nudges are not taxes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Fair enough. Page 8, it might have been a different version that you might have had. Anyway: “Nudges are not taxes, fines, or subsidies, bans or mandates.”

I say I would agree with that and it’s a wonderful passage. If I had more leave, I’d be able to read it. But that’s a really good book, I would suggest.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Anyway, I thank everyone for their participation in the debate and look forward to Committee.

SPEAKER: Are Members ready for the question?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

The motion has been carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act. (Bill 4)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a second time.

When shall this bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, “An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 4)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I just received a nudge from the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. So I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that this House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

This House does now stand –

L. PARROTT: At 2 p.m. tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Yeah, I know, I’m not finished.

This House does now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, April 29 at 2 p.m., budget day.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2 p.m.