

**First Session – Forty-Third Legislature**  
**of the**  
**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**  
**Standing Committee**  
**on**  
**Legislative Affairs**

*Chairperson*  
*Ms. Jelynn Dela Cruz*  
*Constituency of Radisson*

**Vol. LXXVIII No. 1 - 10 a.m., Monday, January 29, 2024**

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Third Legislature**

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**  
**THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS**

**Monday, January 29, 2024**

**TIME – 10 a.m.**

**LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba**

**CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Jelynn Dela Cruz  
(Radisson)**

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – MLA Nellie Kennedy  
(Assiniboia)**

**ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4**

*Members of the committee present:*

*Hon. Min. Fontaine*

*Ms. Dela Cruz, Mr. Goertzen, MLA Kennedy,  
Mrs. Stone*

*Substitutions:*

*Mr. Blashko for Ms. Lathlin at 10:16 a.m.*

*Mrs. Hiebert for Mr. Goertzen at 10:54 a.m.*

**APPEARING:**

*Cindy Lamoureux, MLA for Tyndall Park*

*Ms. Sherry Gott, Manitoba Advocate for  
Children and Youth*

*Louise Lavallee, Elder, Office of Manitoba  
Advocate for Children and Youth*

**MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:**

*Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for  
Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending  
March 31, 2023*

\* \* \*

**Clerk Assistant (Ms. Katerina Tefft):** Good morning. Will the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to order.

Before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

**MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia):** I nominate Ms. Dela Cruz.

**Clerk Assistant:** Ms. Dela Cruz has been nominated. Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Ms. Dela Cruz, will you please take the Chair.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, everybody.

Our next item of business is the election of the Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families):** I'd like to nominate MLA Kennedy.

**The Chairperson:** MLA Kennedy has been nominated. Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Kennedy is elected Vice-Chairperson. *[interjection]* Rookie mistake.

This meeting has been called to consider the Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

Before we begin, I would like to remind everyone that questions and comments must be put through the Chair.

Are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long we should sit this afternoon?

**Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland):** 'Til noon.

**The Chairperson:** 'Til noon. It has been suggested that we—this committee sit until noon. Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement, and would she please introduce the officials in attendance.

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech, I would.

**The Chairperson:** We thank the honourable minister. Oh—does it—she speaks first? *[interjection]* Okay.

**MLA Fontaine:** I will introduce my officials that are here in a couple of minutes. I'll start with my opening comments.

But first and foremost, I just want to welcome everybody and say miigwech to my critic for what we discussed earlier, and I appreciate that.

Miigwech to the Advocate. I'm very pleased to be here with you and all the good work that you and your team do. Miigwech.

On behalf of our government, I would like to say miigwech to the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, Sherry Gott, for joining us today to discuss her office's 2022-2023 annual report and service plan. We're so grateful for MACY's work, and value your office's recommendations to improve the systems and services that support children, youth and families here in Manitoba.

Much remains to be done to ensure all our children in our province grow up knowing that they are valued, supported and loved. Our government is committed to strengthening families and communities and building safe, healthy environments where children can thrive.

Since 2018, MACY has issued 12 reports, providing invaluable guidance on how to better support young people and improve outcomes. As part of MACY's annual compliance monitoring process, the government of Manitoba provided detailed information on action taken in response to all outstanding recommendations from these reports.

As well, a summary of progress will be publicly posted to the InfoMB website as part of our commitment to transparency.

Many of MACY's recommendations emphasize the importance of engaging with Indigenous communities, organizations, governments, and ensuring that culturally based services are available and certainly done in a respectful, collective manner.

My mandate letter contains clear direction to collaborate with Indigenous governments and communities to transfer jurisdiction of child welfare back to Indigenous communities, nations and families, where it rightfully belongs.

On January 31, 2023, Peguis First Nation became the first Indigenous government in Manitoba to bring their own CFS law into force and to commence delivering services to their community members both on and off reserve.

In 2022-23, Manitoba provided Peguis with an \$11.35 million for the delivery of CFS, and has committed \$10.81 million in 2023-2024. The reduction in funding reflects the transfer of non-Peguis members to the provincial CFS system after Peguis First Nation law came into force.

Manitoba is actively negotiating co-ordination agreements with the Manitoba Métis Federation, Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. The Province is also working with other First Nations and tribal councils

that are seeking to move forward with their own CFS laws.

\* (10:10)

Eighty-one per cent of First Nations in Manitoba are at some point on the path to exercising jurisdiction. The Indigenous Jurisdiction Transition Office within Families was specifically created to work with Indigenous nations on the path to exercising jurisdiction over Child and Family Services. The office also works with other departments to ensure a smooth transition to Indigenous law.

In the 2022-23 Annual Report, MACY acknowledges that—significant legislative measures aimed at empowering Indigenous communities to develop their own child-welfare systems and recognizes the amendments as important references when discussing the support provided to communities in the pursuit of self-governance and legal autonomy. My department and I are grateful for the opportunity to support the transition of services to Indigenous jurisdiction. We know this is important, sacred work, and it will forge a better path for future generations.

The Child and Youth Services Division in my department continues to work alongside MACY and community partners to improve services for vulnerable families, in particular, those who work with a Child and Family Services agency.

I have made it my priority to meet with many of the organizations and Manitobans who work to support families and children. The incredible work of organizations like Wabung Abinoonjiag and Blue Thunderbird means families receive the supports they need when they need them and helping them to be as strong as possible while also building up our community of matriarchs. I think that the Advocate knows that we have incredible, extraordinary, powerful Indigenous women that are doing this work, and a lot of this work is being led by—are the matriarchs in the community, and I lift them up for the work that they're doing.

We are working with our community partners to help us improve the services provided to all children and families, building strong relationships and partnerships between community agencies and Child and Family Services agencies, and the families served by both will help us improve outcomes for children in this province.

In response to the MACY report—special report, Every Two Hours: A Special Report on Children and Youth Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence in

Manitoba, Women and Gender Equity Manitoba, WAGE, has identified several initiatives to enhance supports for children and youth in Manitoba who are exposed to intimate partner violence.

In July 2023, WAGE entered into a bilateral agreement with the Government of Canada for the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. Part of the implementation plan for the first year of funding includes funding focused on improving child-centre services for children and youth who have experienced or 'witnessed'—witnessed gender-based violence. This work is under way and includes working directly with community organizations to co-design future work supported by this funding.

Services provided with this funding would use a trauma-informed, culturally safe and child-centred approach. Additionally, WAGE has provided operational funding to The Pas Family Resource Centre to provide Indigenous cultural education for young men in northern Manitoba, focused on healthy relationships, addressing toxic masculinity and power. Programming will take place in schools and community spaces across communities in central-north region of Manitoba.

The Manitoba government continues to work on initiatives and systems improvements in response to the report, *Bridging the Gaps: achieving substantive equality for children and disabilities in Manitoba*. The Department of Families is currently undertaking an evaluation of one of two pilot projects providing out-of-home respite to families supporting children with very high-care needs. The results will be used to inform plans for how best to expand the continuum of respite services, a critical support to strengthening families and avoiding placements in the child-welfare system.

In summer 2023, the department released an online guide for parents who use self-managed services such as respite. The guide explains how to self-manage—how self-managed services work, how to find and hire a disability support worker and ways to make the professional relationship with their disability support worker a positive one.

The Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness provides over \$5 million annually to community-based organizations to provide mental health promotion and early intervention supports to children and young people across the province.

Improving the mental well-being of children, youth and families, throughout Manitoba is a priority.

The Manitoba government continues to work with Shared Health, service delivery organizations, education stakeholders and community-based organizations to ensure services and supports are available and accessible for children and youth in Manitoba.

We will continue to work with key partners to develop a suicide prevention strategy for the province, with a focus on youth.

The death of every child and youth is a tragedy, and a sacred responsibility for each and every one of us to ensure that children make it to their 18th birthday.

And I know that our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has made a commitment for this government that more children will make it to their 18th birthday.

Miigwech.

**The Chairperson:** We thank the honourable minister.

#### Committee Substitution

**The Chairperson:** There has been a membership substitution: Mr. Blashko for Mrs. Lathlin.

\* \* \*

**The Chairperson:** Does the critic for the official opposition have an opening statement?

Okay, I would like to acknowledge Mrs. Stone to take the floor.

**Mrs. Stone:** I would like to welcome everyone here today, and welcome to the Advocate.

I appreciate you continuing in this role and what is a very challenging and difficult responsibility.

I'm new to this role as critic and also new as an MLA, so please bear with me as this is my first committee. And I look forward to learning; learning more about what you're doing with the Advocate and in your office, and getting into some good questions.

We know that there are too many children in care and, disproportionately, Indigenous children. The PC government ended birth alerts and significantly reduced the number of newborn apprehensions, while reducing the number of children in care year over year.

We know that there's still more work to do, and behalf of our—on behalf of our PC caucus, we look forward to working together. I look forward to working with the Advocate, as well as the new minister, in a collaborative relationship to ensure that children don't fall through the cracks.

They're our priority, and we want to make sure that we're there for them. So, we want to share the safety and best interests of our children and young people, and they are our utmost priority.

I'll keep my comments this morning brief so that we can get into the questions. And again, I thank you for being here today.

**The Chairperson:** We thank the member for sharing and as they've mentioned as well, this is a first committee for many of us, so thank you for that.

So, do the representatives from the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth wish to make an opening statement?

Okay, and then I'll acknowledge Ms. Gott.

**Ms. Sherry Gott (Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth):** Tansi. Kinanâskomitinanaw. *[Hello. Thank you; I'm grateful for all of you.]*

Wapiski Asineesis Eskwe' nit-isinihkason. *[Translation: My spirit name is White Little Stones Woman who carries an Arrow.]*

Wapistan Tootem. Akas Takonow Sapotaweyak ne-na -oche. *[Translation: I am from the Marten Clan, Sapotaweyak Cree Nation.]*

Good morning. I'd like to thank the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Sherry Gott, and I am the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, known as MACY.

I am a proud member—I am a—I am proud to be the first Cree woman to serve in this position. I would like to acknowledge that the mandate of MACY extends across the province of Manitoba.

Our primary office is located on Treaty 1 territory, and our water is sourced from Shoal Lake First Nation.

We live and work on the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, Nehethowuk and on the homeland of the Red River Métis.

We are here today to discuss the contents of our 2022-23 annual report, which was released on December 1, 2023. Before I provide more details, I would like to introduce our two deputy advocates who are here with me today.

Kelly Gossfeld is the Indigenous deputy advocate responsible for advocacy service, youth engagement, finance and administration.

Dr. Karlee Sapoznik Evans is the deputy Manitoba advocate responsible for research, quality assurance, investigations and public education.

And joining us today is our elder, Elder Louise Lavallee.

\* (10:20)

In addition to our deputy advocates, I'll—have invited program managers from our office to join us. Seated behind me are Dr. Matt Maher, manager of research and quality assurance; Jamie Robinson, manager of serious injury and reviews and investigations; Tanis Hudson, manager of investigations and child death reviews. Seated in the gallery are Kirstin Magnusson, manager of advocacy services and youth engagement; Joanne Lysak, manager of advocacy service; Lindsay Ridgley, manager of public education.

The work of our office is guided by the United Nations convention on the rights of a child, or UNCRC. Children's rights are at the forefront of everything we do. All program areas work together to respond to individual and systemic issues that challenge the rights of children, youth and young adults in Manitoba. This includes the work, insight and inspiration of MACY's Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad, known as YAAS, and there's 14 members.

Our mandate has expanded since The Advocate for Children and Youth Act was proclaimed in 2018. For the past five years, we have been advocating in the following eight domain areas: child and family services, adoptions, disabilities, mental health, youth addictions, youth education, youth justice and victim support services, which includes domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

As the annual report highlights, our office responded to 2,555 requests for advocacy services in 2022-2023; 665 of these young people were supported through ongoing advocacy, which includes long-term supports or complex interventions.

This past year, the complexity of advocacy cases was again on the rise. Children, youth and young adults often required services from multiple systems. On average, advocacy services—advocacy cases remained open with an officer for six months.

In total, 80 per cent of the children and youth we supported through advocacy services were Indigenous. Given the long-standing overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in child servicing systems

across Manitoba, throughout my first year as the Advocate, our team focused on relationship building and collaboration with communities and First Nations across Manitoba.

In 2022-2023 fiscal year, we received 265 formal child death notifications, up by 35 per cent from the previous year. During this fiscal year, there were 73 child death reviews completed, which had identified areas of deep concern. These concerns are highlighted on page 31 of the annual report.

Of these concerns, suicide deaths remain the leading manner of death for young—for youth ages 10 to 17 in Manitoba. Last year, we tragically lost 37 young people under the age of 21 to suicide. This is the highest annual number of deaths ever reported to my office through suicide, and represents a 42 per cent increase from the previous fiscal year.

In 2022-23, we lost 18 young lives to drug overdose. This rise in deaths highlights concerning gaps in the addictions and mental health systems, and is placing a heavy burden on communities and families across the province. The misuse of substances, coupled with limited access to proper education, prevention and treatment resources contributing—contributes to the vulnerability of young individuals to these life-threatening situations.

Despite recommendations made in our 2020 special report about unexpected sleep deaths in Manitoba, we continue to see a high number of these deaths. When these safe sleep practices—related deaths are examined—are examined closely, it is clear that risk factors are primarily driven by social disadvantage, exclusion and discrimination. Our office will be releasing an updated report of our 2020 safe sleep report in the near future.

Another ongoing concern is the sexual exploitation of children and youth in Manitoba. For youth who are sexually exploited or at risk of being sexually exploited, a provincial strategy is needed, including investments in prevention, early detection and intervention. Our office continues to be made aware of young people who are at immense risk of harm or death on a daily basis and who are without self-sufficient to—supports and protections to mitigate these risks.

This issue has connections to an—ongoing missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls crisis, with Manitoba having the second highest rate of missing children and youth per capita in Canada.

It also has ties to the devastating number of suicide deaths of young people in this province, alongside the high rates of apprehension and child welfare, mental health, addictions, homelessness and youth justice system involvement.

Last year we received 19 systemic advocacy referrals related to these co-occurring challenges. Last fiscal year, we had a major operational change: the addition of our serious injury program, a reviews and investigations program. This program marks a significant milestone for—as the first of its kind in our province, providing a centralized tracking system for serious injuries sustained by children, youth and young adults receiving reviewable services at the time of the injury or in a year prior.

These services can include children, youth and young adults who are receive—who receive child and family services, youth justice, youth mental health, and/or addiction services. Investigations work to ensure that the rights of seriously injured young people are upheld and that their needs are promptly addressed through adequate care.

Through a comprehensive data collection analysis we will be able to identify recurring trends and themes across our province. As a reviewable service—as reviewable services are made aware of their duty to report serious injuries under this change into our legislation we are receiving increasing referrals, becoming busier than we've ever been as an office. We are closely monitoring and this increased workload and will be seeking additional staff as needed.

This past year youth engagement co-ordinators carried out a diverse range of public education engagement and outreach initiatives throughout the province. This includes a development of a rights-based lesson plan tool kit for educators, numerous training opportunities, events, and consultations with the youth advisory squad. They also participated in a peer-to-peer research project, the creation of two videos, and the painting of three murals focused on UNCRC rights.

The public education program has had a busy year, including presentations, connecting with children through national child day lesson plans, Have a Heart Day, and I Love to Read Month. Public education also supported the production of a webinar about children and youth exposed to intimate partner violence in Manitoba.

This webinar was based on findings by the research team released in our report, *Every Two Hours, A Special Report on Children and Youth Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence in Manitoba*. This report repositions children exposed to IPV as a centrally impacted victim and rights to services.

Alongside special reporting, the quality assurance team continues to—its compliance monitoring of recommendations issued by my office. Our annual compliance report is an important tool to hold government departments accountable for ensuring they are consistently working to improve programs and services to young people.

**The Chairperson:** Perfect timing. Okay.

**Floor Comment:** Can we have an extension?

**The Chairperson:** Absolutely. Okay. So the Advocate's time has expired.

Is there leave to allow her to finish her statement?  
[Agreed]

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you.

So, titled rates—rights 'delied' are—sorry—rights delayed are rights denied, last year's compliance report outlined that 18 per cent of all recommendations issued by our office were complete. We are eager to see further progress and the implementation of recommendations in our upcoming compliance report for this year, which will be released later this week, on Thursday.

Finally, we are looking forward to our forthcoming legislative review. This past March marked five years since the enactment of ACYA and the intended start of the legislative review process. The process was delayed by the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs due to the provincial election, and we now await for the formal sitting of the committee to review our act.

Our office formed an internal review committee to conduct jurisdictional scans, legal research and external stakeholder engagement to assist with understanding the current barriers to services for young people in Manitoba and how the act may be amended to address these barriers.

We look forward to sharing knowledge gained by our office to work with the committee in a collaborative way.

\* (10:30)

To conclude, our office remains committed to offering programs and services, making policy recommendations and working collaboratively with government and community organizations to best serve the needs of children, youth and young adults in Manitoba.

We must always keep the rights of children at the forefront, and involve youth in creating opportunities which are inspired by them and reflective of their needs. Children are our future, so let's ensure they not only see that vision, but believe in it and the important role they play.

I extend my sincerest gratitude to all of you for your continued support and partnership. Ekosi. Thank you for your time and attention.

I now welcome questions.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Advocate Gott, and thank you to those who've joined us here today in support, as well, of this great work.

The floor is now opened for questions.

**Mrs. Stone:** Thank you very much for your opening remarks.

My first question is, during your opening remarks, you mentioned that your office is busier than it's ever been. I'm just wondering if you could share where that demand is coming from. Is it a significant increase from the advocacy services side, or is it kind of across the board?

**Ms. Gott:** I'm just—sorry, I'm just looking for our response here. [interjection] On page 19? Just give me a few minutes, okay?

Thank you for your question. I just wanted to let you know that our regulations came into force on July 1 of this—2023. So, we're finding that, you know, as the system starts to learn and report to our department with regards to serious injuries, we're still trying to iron out those processes and stuff like that. So, we get referrals from all departments.

**Mrs. Stone:** In your report, you have reported that the number of requests for advocacy services has increased. Do you expect those numbers to continue to increase this year?

**Ms. Gott:** I—what—we expect that there will be an increase, because, as we develop our public ed campaign, we hope that our office gets more exposed.



I can tell you that, throughout our travels this past year, we have had—we have done quite a few presentations, as I talked about in my report, and we also met with leadership in various communities, First Nation communities, to talk about our office. And one of the things that was highlighted during our meetings is that, you know, MACY has been around for 30 years; how come I haven't heard of you?

So that really concerns me, you know. And so, our act came into force fully five years ago, and I think, you know, with support of government, I hope that we can get some funding to continue to highlight our office and what—the kind of work that we do in supporting children, youth and young families.

**Mrs. Stone:** This question is, again, for the Advocate. What kind of—what additional resources are going to be required to launch this public education campaign that you've mentioned?

**Ms. Gott:** So when I talk about that public ed campaign, I'm talking about—the recommendation 48 of the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry specified that public awareness must be undertaken to inform the public about our expanded mandate and the role of the representative for children and youth.

There was a clear reason for this recommendation and why it was issued by Commissioner Hughes. If this new position is to offer support and protection to vulnerable members of society, it is essential that there be a broad public understanding of the office and its role and extent of its authority.

**Mrs. Stone:** In the report, you provided two examples of youth who have reached out for your advocacy services. Since I'm new to this role, I'm just wondering if you could just walk me through the process. When you get a call or a child or a youth reach out, you know, do you contact a guardian, do you contact a social worker? Like, how does that work?

**Ms. Gott:** Sorry about that; I just get so nervous.

One of the things that happens is that children, youth and young adults are allowed to contact our office wherever they are at, and so we receive referrals through phone, email, walk-ins, mail and social media. We connect with them to an advocacy officer who listens to their concerns, create a plan that's tailored to the—their needs, and they meet regularly. Average time spent with an officer is six months.

**Mrs. Stone:** Can the Advocate please share how much money goes into the overall communications of

this report and preparations of the annual report as well?

**Ms. Gott:** One of the things that, you know, we want to report—because we are responsible to the public, right, so we want to outline a report that's detailed and planned. And one of the things is that it's usually people power that costs a lot of money, like, for us. And our priority is to, absolutely, children and their rights above else. It takes people and power and resources to move the needle. Our office runs lean operations, and we have measures in place to ensure responsible spending. So it's not very much.

**Mrs. Stone:** Can the Advocate please share how much the office has grown in size and staff since its inception?

\* (10:40)

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that question. I can tell you that our office has grown quite a bit in the past 30 years. Initially when our office opened up, it was just advocacy, and we would advocate for children and youth and young adults. And then in 2008, investigation team was launched; 2018 we had our research team. And 2018, at the same year, we had youth engagement. And in 2023 of this year we had our serious injury regulations come into force.

We now have close to 50 staff, but that doesn't include our youth engagement, YAAS. Like I said, there was 15, and then our elders team, which is—consists of seven members. So we've grown from, I would say, 14 staff to 40—close to 50.

**Mrs. Stone:** This question's, again, for the Advocate. With the growing demand that your office is seeing, are there plans to add additional staff for this year?

**Ms. Gott:** We are hoping, yes, because of—we are monitoring our serious injury program because, like I said, it was—the numbers are increasing. And as we figure out our system, and working with different departments and if we require additional staff, definitely, we will request that.

But we also want to have, you know, our public ed campaign looked at, and—to ensure that the public is well educated on our office. So I'm hoping, yes. Thank you.

**Mrs. Stone:** This is—question for Minister Fontaine. Is the minister's office entertaining adding additional staff to the Advocate?

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for the question. Funding for the office of MACY is actually through the

LAMC, so the Legislative Assembly management committee. And I cannot share at this table what LAMC decides; those are conversations that take place with your folks, our folks, and those are confidential.

**Mrs. Stone:** My colleague, Mr. Goertzen, has a few questions before he has to leave.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** For the Advocate, you highlighted in your report serious concerns and trends around youth suicide, which I know are being sadly mirrored around, you know, Canada, probably North America and maybe around the world.

What type of information do you have on attempted suicides in Manitoba? Obviously your office is notified of a suicide, but are you also notified in some way about youth who attempt to take their life?

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that question. Yes, we do get reports under our serious injury—it falls under the serious injury definition, under the regulation. So that gets reported to us.

But I think what is more needed is urgent and sustained action. Establish a comprehensive youth mental health strategy within—that encompasses a range of evidence-based, culturally sensitive and easily accessible mental health and addiction services specifically designed for young people. Ensure the supports are available where and when youth need them the most.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Thank you for that response. So—just so I understand the process a bit more, if a youth has attempted a suicide and, you know, there's a good chance they'll end up in some sort of a medical facility, emergency room or otherwise, does that, then, get reported by law to the Advocate, or is there a duty to report from a hospital to the Advocate for youth-attempted suicide?

**Ms. Gott:** So, only if it meets our serious injury definition. So if you want, I could read that out.

Serious injury means that an injury—means an injury that is life-threatening, requires admission to a hospital or other health-care facility and is reasonably expected to cause serious or long-term physical or psychological impairment or is the result of a sexual assault that causes serious physical harm or reasonably expected to cause long-term psychological impairment.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Thanks for that.

I guess the reason I ask is, if there's not a duty to report—it has to meet a certain standard, as you've described—I wonder what role the Advocate could play as something of an early-warning mechanism, right? If we're trying to get ahead of the problem as much as one can, we're reporting number of youth who've committed suicide—and that is now the leading cause of death among youth, I understand, under 18—but would the Advocate have a role in more preventative measures, even if they don't meet the standard of serious harm?

**Ms. Gott:** Absolutely, we would have a role through our systemic advocacy. Our systemic advocacy person looks at what is going on in Manitoba with regards to our youth and young adults. If there is a lack of services and support we definitely would report on that.

Also, individual advocacy—when our officers spend time with youth and young adults and develop that relationship that is needed to be able to ensure, like Minister Fontaine said, to—these children to youth to reach their 18—to reach 18 years old, and hopefully over, right? So, and if it—the advocacy officer would support that youth and to direct them to the resources that they require, supports, whether that be mental health, counselling, any youth engagement activities that would support that youth.

We also have our youth engagement team that works with young adults and provides support in those areas if needed. And we also have our research team that researches on the impact of suicide of youth, young adults and families in Manitoba.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I remember reading a report going back to 1994 about, you know, the challenges of youth suicide in Manitoba. And the numbers would've been less then, but, you know, this is something that the Province, the nation, has, you know, struggled with for a long time. I guess the—I may have missed it, and so you'll forgive me, it wouldn't be the first thing I've missed in my political career if I did—but in the report you identified, how many youth committed suicide in this time frame that the report is covering.

Does it identify how many youth have attempted to commit suicide that your office was notified about?

**Ms. Gott:** We didn't report on that this year because this is—our annual report only covers 'til March 2023. But I am hoping in our next report that we will be able to report those numbers. And I think what is more important is that there needs to be more mental health

promotion to support youth and young adults, ensuring that they stay alive.

**Mr. Goertzen:** And not trying to diminish the importance of that, because certainly that is extremely important. I'm just trying to get a sense of maybe some of that, you know, historical data. And so you're saying next year it might report on how many attempted suicides are reported to your office.

Is there any other past data, or is it—this will be sort of the first year and then it'll be a go-forward reporting system?

\* (10:50)

**Ms. Gott:** So, we don't track those attempts and—because they're not reliable data, I don't think. But, I think it's something that we could work with the Province to, you know, ensure that we keep that data and share it publicly, if that's something that is required.

And, one other thing I wanted to say about that is that I think it's important that, you know—and I keep repeating this over and over since I started—that mental health promotion is very important for our youth and young adults to prevent this suicide.

**Mr. Goertzen:** And I certainly agree with you on that.

I guess the reason I'm interested in the reporting of this data is that it does provide, then, a bit of a benchmark, right, in terms of more than just suicides—which that number is tragic and growing—provides, you know, something of, maybe, an early warning system of what's happening. But then also can also look at the interaction with programs, your office, those who attempted suicide and, hopefully, positive outcomes in the future for them, and what worked and why did it work. So, that data, I know, is important.

Also recognize that LAMC is the funding body for your entity, and that probably requires more funding. And I've sat on LAMC for longer than a person should have to sit on that committee, so I understand the challenges of that.

But I look forward to the reporting of that data next year. And thank you for your work, and I'll turn it back over to my colleague.

**The Chairperson:** Mrs. Stone.

**Mrs. Stone:** Thank you, Chairperson—

**The Chairperson:** Oh, sorry. The Advocate has a chance to respond.

Would you like to respond? *[interjection]* Okay.

**Ms. Gott:** So, like I said before, attempts are not in our legislated mandate and current scope, but we certainly would like to, you know, keep that—track that information so we could share it. And I'm hoping, through our legislative review, that is something that we could discuss and make a recommendation to ensure that our serious injury definition is expanded.

**Mrs. Stone:** In your report, you called—and, I think, your opening remarks, as well, you talked about the comprehensive mental health strategy for young people.

Just wondering what additional resources are going to be required to implement this strategy to address youth suicide?

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that question. And I think that one of the things that is required is that—to ensure that there's a rollout that happens with—through collaboration, and I'm hoping that all levels of government support this strategy.

And I know that it requires a lot of human resources to do that, and requires a lot of consultation with communities to see what meets their needs the best. Because children are not all the same—children, youth and young adults. And I'm hoping that, you know, a mental health strategy is developed that will support their needs and meet their unique needs.

And one of the things that I did suggest at one point is that—to have—especially for our Indigenous youth, to have a land-based approach to working with children, youth and young adults. So—and I think that it's very important for those Indigenous youth to have that access to that and appropriate funding and support for them to access those kinds of supports and services. And this includes across Manitoba, not just Winnipeg-centric, to look at the rural and remote locations.

### Committee Substitution

**The Chairperson:** Okay, we've had another membership substitution. That would be Mrs. Hiebert for Mr. Goertzen.

\* \* \*

**The Chairperson:** And I'll acknowledge Mrs. Stone on another question.

**Mrs. Stone:** Just a follow-up to your previous comments, outside of Winnipeg, are you looking at a regional approach, or how do you plan to be, kind of, comprehensive across the whole province?

**Ms. Gott:** Well, I'm hoping to see that each location where rural has equitable access to resources, and that is something that is required. You know, not—we're not all—you know, I know that, you know, going to the North is more expensive. You know, you have your travel costs, your hotel costs, all that kind of stuff—everything goes up, but, I'm hoping that, you know, the Province tries to implement some kind of mental health strategy that all youth can reach themselves.

**Mrs. Stone:** If this mental health strategy is implemented, how will the Advocate report on that to the public?

**Ms. Gott:** How we would monitor is through our compliance. We have our annual compliance report, and we hope that, you know, through that monitoring, that, you know, our—these mental health promotion and youth hubs in all of—we hope to see youth hubs in all of Manitoba, regional—through the regional health authorities. And I think that it's very important to look at the North, Thompson, particularly, because it's a regional area and most of the communities in the northern area access Thompson as a hub, so.

**Mrs. Stone:** So, you know, as we've seen, the amount of youth suicides are increasing. This is very concerning, and I think we're seeing it across the whole country, as well.

When—through this mental health strategy, or perhaps within your own office, have you thought about what type of KPIs that you would implement in order to monitor and report on that? Those KPIs would be?

**Ms. Gott:** First of all, I think one of the things that—we need to see that mental health strategy and how it looks, and how we would, you know, through our compliance, we would look at—certainly look at and review what the strategy looks like through our compliance report and look at it in a critical way and see if those KPIs are being met.

So—and I think that it also needs to be co-determined by—through collaboration with communities, regional offices and—so, we've made several recommendations calling for a comprehensive strategy through our compliance.

So, when you look at our compliance report, we have—we've reported on it, and I think, you know, that needs to be looked at carefully.

**Mrs. Stone:** In follow-up to that, what are your immediate and long-term priorities for special investigations?

**Ms. Gott:** One of the things that I have come across in my meetings with different departments is inequalities amongst the Indigenous child-welfare authorities and the outstanding recommendations from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry; the implementation of mental health and addictions strategies; the implementation of safe sleep deaths recommendations; and disability report recommendations.

So, when you look at our report that we released, Rights Delayed Are Rights Denied, children can't keep waiting, so—to—for government response.

**Mrs. Stone:** Thank you, and I think my colleague has a couple questions to follow up on this topic, as well.

**Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler):** Good morning, Chair. I would first like to acknowledge both Minister Fontaine. Also, to you, Sherry Gott, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, look forward to working with both of you to do the best we can for children, youth and Manitobans.

\* (11:00)

Thank you for your—to your team for the commitment that you have put towards our youth and our children. The work that you do is—along with all those that are supporting roles to assist you, is invaluable. Thank you for that.

I look forward to developing a relationship with you and supporting you as we continue to advocate for those that are most vulnerable: the families; the youth; the children that need the help.

There's so much good work that you do, and I appreciate you reporting to us how many children and youth are being impacted by the advocacy, and also by informing us of how we can do better and to continue to support the growth, and highlighting areas that we need to improve on. So thank you for that.

A little bit about me, it's just a kind of background here so you can understand my questions. As a mother myself, and also as a foster parent of a youth that was in care, I understand a lot about the struggles that children and youth have.

During my time as a foster mom I walked with our Indigenous foster child through difficult situations daily, working with schools, with addictions crisis that were happening, mental health scares. My family and I walked together, this road, with our child that we had.

As a mom I would like to do anything I can to protect, help and encourage, and to understand my

children. There are times that we needed extra support.

My question for you would be, do you have, or—the question would be, do you have parents or other folks that support the child or youth, reaching out to you on behalf of the child; whether that be a teacher, a foster parent, or a single-mom that needs extra help, to ask for help so that they can help the child succeed—for help to advocate for their child—and what would be the resources that you would have to better help them serve the child that needs advocacy?

What exactly does MACY offer for direction and services, if any, and what has worked, and what does not work in that situation, resource wise?

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that and thank you for being a foster parent, by the way.

It is amazing—like, foster parents have a special place in my heart, thank you.

I can tell you that we do get calls from parents: birth and adoptive parents, foster parents, legal guardians. In my report it says, on page 24, who calls us. We have percentages there.

Seven per cent of foster parents and legal guardians call us. Parents and adoptive parents, 16 per cent, and children and youth, 15, and professionals, 39 per cent. So—and it just goes on like that, so.

And so as far as our advocacy officers, when they're walking with these children and youth that they come across, and we get calls from, they have all kinds of resource; informal and formal supports for those youth. And they provide those resources to the youth when they are in need; whether they are in mental health or looking for supports in the school system.

So, they have the advocacy officers and we also have, you know, provide those resources for foster parents and parents, so.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** I just want to acknowledge: thank you for what you do, and that's such an important part is to have those resources available for those parents and for those people supporting the children, as well as the children.

My question is for the children and youth—again for you. In regards to the children and youth and homelessness, after having toured the Siloam Mission recently, I learned that there are more adults and adults

with children and families using the mission for food and shelter stays.

With recent increases in costs of groceries and basic needs in general, affordability is a big stress and concern for many parents and children. How do you—how have you found it—this, in your role as the Advocate, and are kids and youth reaching out to you when they are finding themselves in these situations? What is your role—and when someone reaches out to you in that situation, what are the resources that you have, that you can, like, access or that the family or children can access if they're in a situation like that?

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that question. I can tell you that, you know, this has been a long-standing issue for—in the system, in the child-welfare system. Children are aging out into homelessness, and that's a concern. We teamed up with End Homelessness of Winnipeg to develop a report, and I don't know where that report is at, but part of my team was working in collaboration with them to develop a report to highlight those concerns. And we certainly get calls from children and youth that—especially youth—that are aging out of care and have nowhere to go, so they're couch-surfing or with other families.

And so we understand that this is a gap, right, for our children; the resources are limited and—to house children and youth. And so—but I also understand that the Province is working on a strategy to end homelessness for youth and young adults, and I'm looking forward to seeing that. Thank you.

**Mrs. Hiebert:** Okay, just a question. Have you—like, is there a relationship between you and the missions if there are children or youth coming through their system, that they can call you, and what is the—what, then, would you be doing or what would be the steps that would be taken to help those children specifically?

**Ms. Gott:** Yes, definitely. We have met with Siloam Mission and Main Street Project to discuss contact with children and youth, particularly youth and young adults. So our advocacy team who Kelly oversees—sorry, Ms. Gossfeld oversees—and so they get the calls from the children and youth and young adults, and they walk with those children and youth to ensure that there's appropriate supports and services for them while they're in those shelters.

**Mrs. Stone:** I'm a statistics person so I have a few questions as it relates to some numbers. Can you please just share with me how many kids are currently in care?

**Ms. Gott:** Hi. Thank you for that question, but I don't have that number with me, and I think that's a question to the minister.

**Mrs. Stone:** Is the minister able to share those numbers?

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for the question. And I just want to take a couple of minutes here. First off, I spoke too long, and so I didn't have an opportunity to just acknowledge my team that are here. So I'm just going to acknowledge the folks that are in the room.

So we have Michelle Dubik who is my deputy minister; Alec [*phonetic*] Krosney who is the director of ministerial affairs; Catherine Gates, who's the DM for Housing; Heidi Wurmman who is our ADM for Families; Shelley Johannson [*phonetic*], who is the analyst for Families; Tina Moody, who's the ADM for Families; Todd Clarke, who's an ADM for Justice; and Maria-*[interjection]*-Cotroneo—I apologize. Miigwech. Thank you. I butchered that. I apologize for that—who is the ADM for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness.

So I do—just wanted to acknowledge them. Also, I also just wanted to acknowledge for you sharing at this table your journey, and I echo our Advocate in respect of doing what I always call very sacred work, right? Taking on—taking children into our homes, your home and loving them and guiding them and advocating for them is very sacred work. So I just want to acknowledge you and say miigwech for sharing that.

And so to the question, so as of March 2023, the number of children that are in care is 8,990 children.

\* (11:10)

**Mrs. Stone:** A question for the minister again.

Can the minister please share how many newborn apprehensions have been taken?

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for the question.

So, from zero to three days old, for the time period from April 2022 to February 2023, there were 72 baby apprehensions.

**Mrs. Stone:** Question for the minister.

From those newborn apprehensions, can the Advocate tell us how many are still under the care of CFS?

**MLA Fontaine:** I'm sure that the member can appreciate that I don't have that information right now.

And to be able to get that information, we'd have to work with the authorities and agencies to be able to glean that information.

So, right now, unfortunately, I don't have that information, but that would take some co-ordination with other—with the department and other agencies and authorities.

**Mrs. Stone:** The minister be able to take that under advisement and share when she has those numbers available?

**MLA Fontaine:** Yes, I can.

**Mrs. Stone:** Question for the minister again.

How much purview does the minister's office have on newborn apprehensions as they happen?

**The Chairperson:** Mrs. Stone, if you could repeat that?

**Mrs. Stone:** Question for the minister: How much purview does the minister's office have on newborn apprehensions as they happen?

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for the question, to my colleague.

So, as minister, I wouldn't be getting those—that information or those updates, unless, perhaps, I requested for them. Certainly that's the authorities and the agencies that do that work.

What I will share is this: is that I would imagine everybody around the table understands and would want, and in a variety of different capacities, is working towards ensuring that children stay with their parents, that children stay with their mothers, that children stay with their fathers, and that we continue that work of decolonizing systems that impact and create the conditions in which children or babies are taken from their mothers and their fathers at birth.

And I have said, since I was appointed as minister, and particularly as an Indigenous woman, and particularly as an Indigenous mom of my two boys that I love more than life itself, that my commitment and dedication in this role, for however long I'm in this role, is to ensure that children are returned to their families and their communities and their nations, and that we keep children and families together and communities together, because I think everybody around the table would know that, when our children are taken away from us, it not only affects moms and dads or siblings, but it affects whole communities; it really does affect nations.

And in my mind, there is no greater illustration or action of reconciliation than to ensure that children are with their families. And that is my—and I've made that perfectly clear since I've been in this role, that that is my commitment and my priority as Families.

And so the department does have some programs that are meant to keep babies with their families. So we've got the Mothering Project; we've got InSight project, which our colleagues—we were just there in Dauphin looking at some of those projects.

So, again, I don't necessarily have that right now, but, again, for me as minister, and also I would say this: is that our Premier (Mr. Kinew) has made—and I alluded to it earlier—clear about, you know, making sure that more Manitoba children make it to their 18th birthday and beyond, as the Advocate said. And, to that end, part of that, I would say, like, the quintessential piece of that, is ensuring that families are together and that they've got the resources and the supports that they need to be able to thrive.

**Mrs. Stone:** Thank you for that, Minister, and I think that we're on the same page of that, and I'd like to recognize the former government and former Minister Squires had significantly reduced the number of newborn apprehensions and the work that she did.

The question is for the Advocate: Kids in care went down year over year under the previous PC government. So do you expect that those numbers will continue to go down this year?

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that, and I guess one of the things that I would like to ask of the government is we need clarification on those numbers. We understand that the definition of children in care changed over the past few years, so I would like to know what those numbers are and were.

\* (11:20)

The other thing is, you know, I'm hoping that—sorry—as time goes on that children—the number of children in care is reduced. You know, we are, after all, we are returning children to their rightful place in their communities, especially Indigenous children.

Indigenous children have always been over-represented in the systems—in all systems. So I think it's really important that we continue to support bill C-92, C-24. And so—and that work, you know, continues that we have our children continue to go home.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Mrs. Stone—[interjection]—Mrs. Stone, you'll have to say that you're handing the floor over.

**Mrs. Stone:** My colleague from Tyndall Park has a few questions.

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Thank you, Madam Chairperson, and welcome to your Chair. And thank you to our Advocate and for your entire team for the work that you're doing for children here in the province.

I have four questions, so I'm going to just jump right into them. The first one hasn't been discussed yet. I was just wondering, with respect to keeping siblings together, does MACY have any information on this? Is this happening often? Is it not happening very often? Is there any sort of connection or correlation with keeping siblings together with respect to suicide or overdoses?

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that question. And I think, you know, due to the lack of resources in the system, children tend to get separated from their siblings and—which is really unfortunate—because I think we need to make investments in that area where we can keep children and families together.

And we know that EPRs—emergency placement resources—have been slowly done away with, which is unfortunate also. But we also know that children do not belong in EPRs; they belong in—with their families. And I think the model of keeping children together is a good model, and the more resources that are put into keeping children in care, and to—I mean, keeping children together—would support those families.

**MLA Lamoureux:** We understand that a youth mental health strategy will be coming, and I think that we could definitely use a lot more promotion on it as well. But is there something that would be helpful in the immediate future—I'm talking tomorrow, the coming week—that we, as legislators, could be better doing to promote mental health services or anything more tangible, before it's released?

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that. I think there needs to be a specific plan in place, and immediately. Have been saying this for over a year now, that we need a mental health strategy. And I think through collaborating with communities, organizations that work with children and youth, I think it would be important to do that. I know that.

And so on an immediate, I think there needs to be a response to that crisis.

**MLA Lamoureux:** Very happy to hear what you said earlier, just about foster parents having a special place in your heart, and I know that's felt unanimously around the table. We actually spoke about that in the last session. I brought forward a resolution recognizing foster parents and received unanimous support as well.

And so I'm wondering, the UN convention on rights of the child, article 27, states that children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live in a caring environment.

Can you speak to your experience working with foster parents, specifically maintenance rates and allowances they receive? And again, this is in your experience, do these rate allowances cover the most basic necessities: food, clothing and services—for these children?

**The Chairperson:** MLA Lamoureux, if you could repeat the question.

**MLA Lamoureux:** I'll bring the mic—I will—I can project my voice, as well. There you go.

So, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 27, states that children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live in a caring environment.

Can you speak to your personal experience, as the Advocate working with foster parents, specifically with maintenance rates and allowances that they receive, and, in your experience, do these rates and allowances cover the most basic necessities that the children need: food, clothing and services?

**Ms. Gott:** I know that, recently, there has been, you know, discussion in the media about—the Free Press, I think, did an article on the lack of funding for foster parents.

And, yes, I am concerned that they don't have enough to support these children and youth that are in care with the Province. And I am hoping that this is something that will be seriously looked at in the near future.

And I think that, you know—I think it was \$17,000 that was quoted for a child—to raise a child, currently. So, the foster care rates have been frozen for a long time, and our—you know, when we come across foster parents, or when they call us, there are concerns that,

you know, some of their activities are not being paid for.

So, you know—and I think it's very important. If we bring children in care, we are responsible for them as a government. And I think that, you know, we take children out of their homes because of poverty or whatever it is, and I think it's up to the government to be responsible and provide the appropriate care and resources that these children need.

**MLA Lamoureux:** This will be my last question. I want to thank my colleague for the time here this morning, and, again, you as the Advocate, and all of you, for working so diligently for children here in our province.

My last question is, do you believe that there should be an emergency debate when we resume session on March 6? We need to talk about children here in Manitoba and, at the core of it, it is about keeping children with their families. That's what we all want, I think that's fair to say.

But do you think that there is a need for an emergency debate on it?

**Ms. Gott:** Definitely, I agree with that.

And I think that, you know, with the number of children in care in Manitoba—and I don't know how many of those children are Indigenous, but I think there needs to be a discussion on that. And we know that our families want their children back in their communities. And, definitely, you know, a debate needs to happen on that.

**Mrs. Stone:** You had mentioned in one of your previous remarks about bill C-92. So, you know, I think we all know the system's about to undergo a pretty significant change with the transfer of children to Indigenous governing bodies. And, you know, the PC—previous PC government did play a role in this.

But I'm just curious what this change will mean for the Advocate?

**Ms. Gott:** Thank you for that question. One of the things that we have been working on is trying to develop a memorandum of understanding to Indigenous governing bodies to ensure that children's voices continue to be amplified. And we want to support those governing bodies to implement their own legislation, and we certainly support that as an advocate office.

We have other domain areas that we need to continue to focus on, because the Advocate office has



been known to be very child welfare focused. We have under—other domains that we can—under our legislation that we can review, and I think youth justice, education, mental health, addictions, victims services and disability needs some looking at. And certainly that, you know, those are the seven other domain areas that we review. So also, we want to see the numbers of children in other domain areas go down, which includes justice, mental health and so on. And I did mention that many of our Indigenous children are overrepresented in these systems, especially in the area of justice, also.

So, yes, thank you.

\* (11:30)

**Mrs. Stone:** How can the Advocate—if you could just kind of explain how this will work in practice—ensure consistency across the entire province? You know, we might be looking at over 60 different agencies that you'll have to communicate with.

So just in terms of clarity and communication, so we do ensure that no kids fall through the cracks.

**Ms. Gott:** I think that through collaboration and ensuring that appropriate systems are in place to ensure that children do not fall into—in—through the cracks.

And I think, you know, that response needs to be clarified and verified by the minister.

I'm hoping that, as an Advocate office, we will continue to monitor through our recommendations to ensure systems are working.

And so—and the other thing is that through our MOUs—memorandum of understanding—that we will continue to work with those Indigenous governing bodies.

And also I've been in talks with my other colleagues, the CCCYA, which is a group of children advocates throughout Canada. We are pushing for a federal advocate at that level.

**Mrs. Stone:** So will the Advocate continue to report on all of its KPIs once the transfer to other agencies is in effect?

**Ms. Gott:** Oh, sorry.

Under our legislation we will continue. The one thing that—with the federal legislation, we will not

have access to those numbers, but we will continue to monitor.

**Mrs. Stone:** Yes, that was going to be my next question is just, what changes are going to be required in how the Advocate will report.

**Ms. Gott:** We can report on those—only those under our jurisdiction.

But definitely I can tell you that children are still calling us, especially with—it was mentioned here—with Peguis; those youth are still calling us.

And so we refer back those cases to—back to the community, and so they respond to those.

So we're tracking those, though. Thank you.

**Mrs. Stone:** Okay, thanks. Yes.

So, will additional resources be required to communicate among various agencies?

**Ms. Gott:** I don't foresee that at this moment, because one of the things is through our public ed campaign, of course, I think those will come into light, if we—definitely, you know, time will tell what happens in that case.

So, thank you.

**Mrs. Stone:** Okay, thank you.

This question is for the minister. You had mentioned in a press conference that this time next year we'll have more Peguises.

So I'm just curious how long the process took for Peguis initially.

**MLA Fontaine:** Miigwech for that question.

Just a couple of things. In respect of the questions in respect of foster care rates, I do want to advise the committee—and in particular the Advocate—that we don't have to wait to have a debate on this, right?

As minister I made it a priority to meet with Manitoba Foster Parents Association; I'm actually meeting with them tomorrow to have those discussions with them.

So our department—I, as minister, take this issue very, very seriously. And as I said, you represent just one of many, many amazing Manitobans that take in children, right?

And so I'm having that meeting tomorrow, and I just wanted to advise you of that—that we're doing, in respect of jurisdiction. So, a couple things; let me just say a couple of things.

One, I think that, you know, bill C-92, you know, gave the legislative framework, or the go, right, to—for nations and communities to be able to—and again, the language that we use is still very colonial, but to, you know, to exercise jurisdiction. It's a very colonial language. But really, it gave the go and the legislative framework to bring our children home, right? It gave the legislative framework for First Nation communities or tribal councils to be able to, say, you know, create their laws that are based on the way that we always took care of our children, right? Indigenous laws that centre children.

I mean, that's the thing that's been lost in this colonial process, particularly in CFS, is that our children have always been the centre. They've always been the motivation of our teachings and the way that we exist with one another, but colonization stripped that away, right? And so bill C-92 is, you know, allowing that to take place.

I actually think that that's really exciting in many ways, right? Dismantling and decolonizing child welfare, which has been so harmful, and I think everybody around the table knows that it's been harmful. And now Manitoba is on this path to bringing children home or exercising jurisdiction. So I think that that's something we can all be really proud of and that we can get behind.

So to that end, what that looks like is going to be very different for very—for other First Nations, for a variety of different First Nations or for, again, because you're going to have some First Nations like Brokenhead Ojibway First Nation, right? Peguis, right? Individual First Nation, or you're going to have the MMF that are going to exercise jurisdiction over MMF or Métis children or you're going to have tribal council. So it's going to look very different across the province.

Our department has been working and is very excited, and the priority is to work with First Nations or tribal councils to help facilitate and work with and partner in exercising that jurisdiction. So I don't have, necessarily, like, you know, how long it took for Peguis; Peguis was maybe about a year. But again, the legislation says that after 12 months you can just exercise your laws, right? So again, it's going to look very different for everybody.

But, you know, I also just want to say—I want to give a shout-out to our transitional team that is really working hard on behalf of Manitobans to really transform child welfare. So in our terms as politicians—doesn't matter what side of the House you sit on—in our term, child welfare's going to look very, very different, right? And that's something that, again, no matter what side of the Chamber we all sit on, that's something that we can all be proud of as Manitobans.

**Mrs. Stone:** Appreciate those comments, Minister.

Are you able to share how many agencies will be ready by, say, this time next year?

**MLA Fontaine:** Again, I don't have those numbers right now, but certainly there are a lot of First Nations that are actively creating their laws and engaged in, I don't want to say consultation, but, you know, speaking with the elders in their community, speaking with the youth in their community, speaking with the matriarchs in their community, what those—they want those laws to look like. What I can share with you is that, you know, I think that the next that will come online, I'm hoping, is going to be MMF, which is going to be extraordinary and historic, and again, I think that we can all get behind that.

I went, I don't know when, but we travelled out to—before the holidays we went to Brokenhead Ojibway First Nation to meet with all the folks that they're doing—there's jurisdiction transition team. That's really exciting. We just had a meeting with Interlake tribal council, with all of their chiefs and their folks that are working on jurisdiction and making their laws. And I just want to point this out as well—and I said this to our Chairperson here—say for my amazing colleague that I love, at the end, I mean, this table is, right, today is made up of all women. And a lot of the work that's going on with jurisdiction is being led by our matriarchs and our women.

\* (11:40)

And, again, I think that that's something—it's indicative of the priorities of women—all women—but it's also indicative of, you know, the role that matriarchs have always been in our communities and in our nations.

And so, like I said when we were in Brokenhead, a lot of that work is being done by matriarchs, so it's very, very exciting.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, honourable Minister.

**Mrs. Stone:** Appreciate that.

That concludes my questions for today.

**The Chairperson:** Are there any further questions?

Seeing no further questions, I will put the question—now put the question on the report.

Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023—pass.

The hour being—

**MLA Fontaine:** I understand that MACY's elder would like to do a closing prayer, which I think is very appropriate, particularly for the work that we're all engaged in.

And so I'm hoping that the committee will allow the elder to do so.

**The Chairperson:** Leave has been requested for Elder Louise Lavallee to conduct a closing prayer.

Is there leave for Elder Lavallee to approach the table and conduct the prayer? *[Agreed]*

Elder Lavallee, you may approach the table and begin when you are ready.

**Louise Lavallee (Elder, Office of Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth):** *Michif spoken. Translation unavailable.*

I am Sitting Turtle. I belong to Turtle Clan, and I'm fifth degree Medewin. That's what I said.

And the language that I usually use is Michif, it's one of my languages, and it's a little bit of this, a little bit of that, and this, and we have Michif.

*Michif spoken. Translation unavailable.*

Miigwech. It's a wrap.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Elder Lavallee.

The hour being 11:43, what is the will of the committee?

**An Honourable Member:** Rise.

**The Chairperson:** Committee rise.

**COMMITTEE ROSE AT:** 11:43 a.m.

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