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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 25 APRIL 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, I raised the issue of doctor shortages in West Prince and the impacts of the health on the residents in the area.

We learned that 3,000 Islanders in West Prince, who have lost their family doctor are being told, by the government, by this government, not to put their names on their patient registry. Some of these individuals have been without a family doctor for well over a year.

Standard practice when losing doctor

My question to the Premier: Premier, is telling patients not to add their names to the patient registry standard practice when someone loses a family doctor?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, the situation in West Prince is that we are a couple of doctors short. Currently, those patient lists from those doctors, we've suggested to – that those panels stay together so that when a doctor is found you will be – the transition will be consistent to a new doctor.

Obviously, it's taking, perhaps, a little longer than we had hoped for recruitment of new doctors there. It is getting to the time period where some of those patients may do, indeed, decide to put their names on the registry. They are quite – possible for them to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Government states that there are 8,000 Islanders currently on the patient registry, plus the 3,000 individuals in West Prince that have been told, by this government, not to put their name on a registry, even though they're without a doctor.

Names of residents on patient registry (further)

Again, question to the Premier: How long does a person have to be without a family doctor before they're encouraged to put their name on the patient registry?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, Islanders health and positive outcomes for those with health issues is our department's number one priority.

When it comes to Islanders that do not have a family doctor, or who have lost their family doctor due to retirement, we work with those patients to maintain that registry, or their patient list, or their panel size, so that when a new doctor is found it provides that consistent transition. It also provides a new doctor coming that they do, indeed, have a panel size of X amount of patients. That allows them to come in and provide service for those Islanders that need that service, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It has recently come to my attention that a Dr. Barton, a family doctor in the Summerside area is leaving their practice in June.

Replacement for family doctor

Question to the Premier: Has a replacement for Dr. Barton been secured, yet?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, we do, as a department, we do our best to determine or work with doctors to determine when they are either leaving the province or are choosing to retire.

Obviously, we know that our doctors, a lot of them are looking to retire from practice in the next few years, so we are actively recruiting and working with other recruiters to try to determine doctors that would be available, that would come to Prince Edward Island, that, in particular, would like to work in rural areas of Prince Edward Island. That work is continuously going on.

We have a great recruitment team that put in full effort towards trying to identify doctors to come to all of our regions of Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

With Dr. Barton's impending departure from the Summerside practice, we are seeing something a little different here. We are seeing actually advertisements put up in the doctor's office, where the patients are being advised if they're looking to have their prescriptions updated and filled that they should be visiting the doctor's office before this vacancy occurs in June.

Patients are also being advised to have their name added to the patient registry.

Names of residents on patient registry (further)

Question to the Premier: Why are two groups of patients with the same problem being told two different things about putting their name on the patient registry?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, Islanders have a choice to put their names on the registry at any time. Currently, if you went through the registry today, there are patients that are on that list those looking for new doctors that currently have a family doctor, but they are choosing

to move to a different one if one becomes available.

Islanders certainly have their choice and their wish to put their names on the patient registry. It is, as I said earlier, it does provide that fluid transition, though, if you stay as a full panel size, if a new doctor is able to come and take on those patients.

We are currently looking at ways to maintain doctor service for those, including nurse practitioners. We have seven new ones that will be rolling out in the very near future, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We have two different scenarios that are actually identical because they're both the individuals in West Prince who have already lost their doctor. Many of whom have been without a family doctor for well over a year, and now we have a group of patients in the Summerside area who are going to be without a doctor very soon.

But, both groups are being told something entirely different. We have 3,000 Islanders in West Prince not on the patient registry, and a new batch of patients in Summerside who, as I said, will be soon without a family doctor.

Padding numbers on patient registry

Again, a question to the Premier: Why does government seem more intent on padding the numbers on the patient registry than actually providing health care services to Islanders by ensuring that Islanders have a family doctor?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure the hon. member that the numbers are not padded. He used the number today of 8,000, when in fact the number that I have is 9,300, Mr. Speaker.

Leader of the Opposition: I had 18,000.

Mr. Mitchell: When you look at those numbers, we are trying to get out and recruit doctors to come to Prince Edward Island, specifically in rural regions of Prince Edward Island, to take on this patient need right now.

There are various reasons why that is at 9,300 today. Yes, we have doctors that have left in recent months and years. We also have significant immigration growth in our province. So, all of these things contribute to that when people are trying to find a family doctor. But, we are working diligently. We are out every day. We are talking to people and trying to encourage doctors to come to Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From time to time, government uses and engages illegal actions with individuals, organizations, and businesses and sometimes even other governments.

Current legal actions of government

Question to the Attorney General: How many legal actions is the government currently involved in?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can say that I do not have a number on that here today, but that I will bring that back. That would be a number that would be fluent from one day to the next. As I committed in estimates here earlier, I guess it was last week now, this is something that we have been looking at within our department so I'm happy to bring that back.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Between 2014 and 2017, this government was involved in 86 legal actions.

Legal actions re: government is defendant

Question to the Attorney General: How many legal actions is government currently involved in where you are the defendant?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I don't have an answer for that at my fingertips, but I'd be happy to bring it back.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, legal actions can be costly and very time consuming, especially if outside legal counsel is required.

Legal actions using outside lawyers

Question to the Attorney General: How many of these legal actions involving government use outside lawyers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I don't have the answer to that at my fingertips, but what I will say, as I have said before in response to questions along these lines, is that I would be very careful to characterize the use of outside legal counsel as being something that we shouldn't be looking to do.

Coming from a private sector legal practice, I can tell you that we would have had a number of lawyers in our firm with expertise in different areas and that would likely be the case in any firm that would offer a full service legal practice to their clientele. We have some lawyers within government that offer services in different fields and have different areas of expertise, and different levels of seniority.

It's important for the effective provision of legal services that you take advantage of an effective legal team across those different variables.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These legal actions can range from participating in coroner inquests to adult protection hearings, to appeals of lower court decisions to lawsuit defenses.

Cost of outside lawyers for legal actions

Question to the Attorney General: How much did government spend on outside lawyers for government legal actions last year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I indicated previously in response to this question, we do not have a uniform number in relation to expenditures on legal counsel across all departments. Those are involved in each of the department line items, although we are looking at this issue and we have committed to, and we will continue to work towards a policy that establishes when and for what reasons we would look to retain outside legal counsel or to utilize internal counsel through government.

I should also note that a lot of the lawsuits particularly against government are handled through the risk management fund, who does that already.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Internal lawyers versus outside lawyers

Question to the Attorney General: Has your department ever looked at what it spends on internal staff lawyers working on internal government matters or lawsuits versus outside lawyers to see if it's the best value for taxpayers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The answer to that question is we are looking at that right now, as I've indicated, and going back to last fall when the Premier was minister of justice in response to a question at that time, he had indicated that we would look into that and we have commenced that work. We do plan to see it through to a further refinement of what it is that we do.

But let me say, again, we do have a number of internal counsel who are very busy every day doing the work of government that we would all expect them to do. There are certain things that when they come up, require the expertise of lawyers that practice in those fields and we're happy that Prince Edward Island has the capability within the private sector stable of lawyers to offer that service for us and in the times that we can't get that here, we recognize that there will be requirements that we might have to look further than within Prince Edward Island, and we do that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

One of the legal actions government is involved in is the \$50 million e-gaming lawsuit.

Cost to government on e-gaming lawsuit

Question to the Premier: How much has government spent to date in outside legal work on the e-gaming file?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This is ongoing litigation so I'm not going to comment as to the exact number.

Mr. Fox: Ballpark (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: I would note that in relation to proceedings that have taken place thus

far, there has been an order in respect of costs and a further order in respect of security for costs, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We heard yesterday from the Leader of the Opposition about the youth housing report and the good work that was done under Mayor Clifford Lee's leadership and the hard work of Alex Youland, Lydia Peters and Zac Murphy, among others.

One of the report's recommendations deals with what's known as inclusionary zoning. How it works is that a certain share of units in new projects gets set aside for people under a given income threshold.

Use of inclusionary zoning in PEI

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Is your government looking at encouraging the use of inclusionary zoning on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the member for that question, and it is an important question and one of fairness to all people on Prince Edward Island. I agree with the City of Charlottetown's report that zoning has to include areas for people with disabilities in buildings that are being constructed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, are you asking your department to follow up with the city on that specific recommendation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My department works closely with all municipalities across the province, and I know the mayor and I know most of the councilors in the City of Charlottetown, and I will be following up myself with the city because I think this is an important change that must be made.

I live in a community downtown. I remember years ago where we donated any land we owned in the City of Charlottetown for social housing and I can say today, it was the best thing we ever did for the people. They're not crowded into one area – they're within the community and it goes a long way to helping these people integrate back to the community.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's probably a good fit right now to have this member sitting in this row because you do understand the problems in Charlottetown around housing.

Another recommendation from the Youth Matters report is: to be more creative in the adaptive reuse of older buildings. Adaptive reuse retrofits older structures for a new use, as well maintaining the historic integrity of the property. An approach like this makes sense from an energy conservation lens and a sustainable development lens.

Reuse of buildings for youth housing crisis

Question to the same minister: What is the government doing to be more creative in promoting the adaptive reuse of buildings to help address the youth housing crisis?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have some people in the gallery here today that have spent a lot of money in repurposing their buildings, but they maintain the integrity and the heritage of the

building. I want to send out a big thank you for all of them. I also want to send out a big thank you to Catherine Hennessey, who is a big promoter of retaining buildings. I remember one time there were discussions at city hall to tear down city hall and make a new, modern, Jetson building and I think we made the best decision to keep with the old, to keep with our heritage, to keep with our tradition because it's a great symbol in the city.

I agree, one of the things we are doing through the department of energy will be new programs that are coming on board – will encourage the maintaining of these buildings in all areas of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another one of the report's recommendations involved revolving loan funds. Revolving loan funds are a creative financing approach for projects that may struggle with conventional financing.

Revolving loan fund re: youth housing crisis

Question to the same minister: Have you had any discussions with your municipal or federal partners about exploring a revolving loan fund to help ease the pressure of the youth housing crisis?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, another excellent portion of the report. I want to thank the youth committee here because they're the ones that are struggling in finding housing and anything that we can do to assist them in affordable housing is good for the Island, and good for the city, and it's good for them because it is important that we retain our youth here on Prince Edward Island because they are the future of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another area flagged by the report: was the need to better understand the impacts that the growth of the sharing economy is having on our local housing markets.

Impacts on local housing market

Question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: What work is being done by government to measure the impact that sharing economy tools like Airbnb and VRBO and others are having on our local housing market?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're continuing to evaluate across the province what are the inventories, what the take-up is from the consumer side and we're making sure that we manage those in a safe manner. Things like Airbnb, which is just another form of advertising, that we do manage that and we make sure that it is safe for customers and we'll continue to do that here on Prince Edward Island

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Often times in standing committees we hear about transit in PEI and especially in the city.

City transit aligning with provincial housing

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Could we look at aligning the city transit strategy to compliment our provincial housing strategies?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have funded the transit here in Charlottetown – the line that goes from Stratford to Cornwall. We've been partnering with them to ensure that they do have adequate funding and as a partner, but it would be up to the city to align where their routes go, not the government.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Often times, homes slightly out of our urban centres – about 20 minutes out or so – I'm thinking of a community like Mount Stewart are great spots for youth to own and live in. Of course, transit can be an issue there too, because as we all know, if someone is working in an urban centre, but living a little bit farther out in rural PEI, the cost of transit comes into play.

Will the minister look at, perhaps, aligning some sort of a transit strategy for rural PEI so that it aligns with the provincial housing strategy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have great conversations that have happened in the past around those kind of initiatives with the city – T3 Transit – but what we have done in rural areas is encourage people to car pool. We have provided parking spaces for people so they can park their cars and go to work. If you go to any of those particular parking areas, you will see that they are full and we're happy to provide more of those spaces in different areas. If it's an initiative that community and people want to do – to travel together – we'll be happy to work with them.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

I represent a rural district and like all MLAs in this House, many of my constituents are financially challenged, with a substantial number relying on social assistance. One expense, which is sometime predictable, but

it often is not, relates to the cost of attending medical appointments. With no local doctor currently available in the South Shore region, those with regular or unexpected medical issues must travel outside their community to receive quick care.

Medical visits on transportation allowance

A question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: Dr. Giordani who used to work in Crapaud and now practices in Cornwall – how many visits to a medical clinic in Cornwall would a social assistance client in Crapaud be able to make with their current monthly transportation allowance?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to rise today and answer that question because as I mentioned yesterday, we are very flexible with our clients and we work with their clients – with what their needs are. If a client had to travel extensively for medical purposes, we would ensure that they would not have any out-of-pocket expense. We do not want to see any of our clients worse off than when they started. So we work individually with our clients on a one-on-one basis to make sure that their needs are met.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, your first supplementary.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

A one-way taxi ride from Crapaud to Cornwall costs \$59 and if you have an emergency at 2:00 a.m. in the morning, it's impossible to get to the department to come up with the funds. Not many social service people will have \$59 sitting around to pay for that taxi. Since the transportation allowance is \$25 per month, a Crapaud social assistance client cannot even make one visit to a doctor in Cornwall.

Extending of exemptions for social assistance clients

Question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: Your social assistance policies have several very narrow exemptions. Have you considered extending those exemptions to all rural social assistance clients attending medical appointments?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, to follow up from the conversation I guess we started yesterday, our social assistance program is under review. As I stated in my answer to the previous question, we work with our clients and we are very flexible. Actually, we have a Chit system with many of the taxi services out there so that if one of our clients approaches them and they do not have the cash up front, they can go on a Chit system and get to where they need to be because, again, we do not want any of our clients while we are transforming and reforming our social assistance program to be any worse off than when they started.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Increase of transportation allowance

To the same minister: Yesterday when my colleague asked about social assistance claw backs, you were able to come back a few hours later to announce that the rates will be adjusted in June and I appreciate that. In addition to an exemption for medical travel, will you also consider substantial increase to the transportation allowance paid to all social assistance clients?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While all of our social assistance program is under review, we have been making changes – working with those clients on a one-on-one basis to meet their needs.

When we talked about a claw-back yesterday, we spoke about the Harvest and Prosper program. We also, the Premier has been on his feet, in this House, and he said spoken about the Canada Child Benefit, which we do not touch. That is money in each and every Islander's pocket. We do not claim that for child care subsidy, nor do we touch that. We're already starting to transform our programs and implement changes while the overall transformation is taking place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Minister, some constituents of mine have complained that at various waste management sites across PEI that they have different pricing for dumping of similar materials.

Pricing at waste management sites

Is it true that there are different prices at different waste management sites across Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We actually have six Island waste management sites across PEI. If you're going to any of those sites, the prices at all of those sites are equivalent. If you're going to a private site, obviously, a C and D site that might be a privately owned, that could be an issue that, perhaps, someone has incurred.

All the prices, all the rates at those sites are the same.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your first supplementary.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, minister, for that clarity.

I also have constituents, and also I see it on social media, that Island Waste Management employees, specifically in Brockton, are forcing people to sort their own garbage, even after they've sorted it properly before they went to the dump.

These people feel as though they're being interrogated each time they go there. I'm concerned that they may revert to dumping their garbage down some back road.

Accommodation of WM sites

Again, I had heard that they were more accommodating in another site, specifically in Wellington. Is that the case?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, the goal of Island waste watch management is so that people take their waste to the site. I'm not aware, personally, other than what you have told me about the social media. I will certainly go back to the manager, Gerry Moore, of Island waste watch site and raise it with him, and have it looked into. We want to have, and make sure that all frontline staff is helping Islanders if they have issues with sorting specific pieces of garbage.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your second supplementary.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, minister thank you for looking into that for me.

Nicer weather means spring cleaning has begun, and some Islanders have complained that Island Waste Management sites aren't open long enough during the days, specifically on Saturdays, which, I think, at the present time, is 12:30 p.m. that they close.

Extending of WM hours

Minister: Would your department consider lengthening the hours of these sites across PEI are open in order to meet the demands for Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a great time of year to start cleaning up yards, looking at other products that are laying around, whether it's fridges and stoves or old sofas. We want to encourage people to come to the Island waste watch sites to drop those off. Products like that can be dropped off free of charge.

Because of the spring cleanup coming, we are going to be doing a pilot project, this spring, for eight weeks up until the end of June, where all of our sites will be open until 2:00 p.m. We'll review that at the end of that period. I will look at extending that into the fall cleanup period, as well.

We want to encourage all Islanders to bring those products to our sites to have the time to do that in the morning and make sure they get there. But, we will be keeping track of the uptake on that, but I want to encourage everyone, and make them aware, again: you don't need to throw those fridges and stoves and all those things into the woods. You can go there free of charge.

Thank you.

Mr. R. Brown: Go to the dump; not the ditch.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Family and Human Services.

Minister: Recent statistics indicate that one in 59 school-aged children will be diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, and one in 42 will be boys.

The Stars for Life Foundation is currently working with 30 clients and have 40 others on a waitlist. The Stars for Life Foundation is grateful for the \$150,000 they received from the Department of the Family and Human Services, but, as you know, minister, this money only covers overnight and weekend staff for five clients, who require

24-hour care, and has nothing to do with day programming.

Supports for autistic students leaving school system

Minister: What is the government's plan for the hundreds of kids with autism spectrum disorder, who are leaving the school system, the hundreds more, who will follow them? Where are they doing live? What are they doing do? What supports will be available to them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: I was going to say, you'll looking at me and you want me to keep it to 45 seconds, right?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you hon. member, for this valuable question, and for your advocacy for Stars for Life and vulnerable Islanders on Prince Edward Island. I will say you are consistent.

I will assure you that Stars for Life is a valued partner, and they are a priority in our department. We value the important work that all of our community partners do with the programming that they provide and the residential services that they provide.

Actually, this year-end, we were able to approve and provide many of our community partners with over \$1 million in spending. Some of it did go to Stars for Life for their day programming, and others went for residential supports for QCRS and Inclusions East and West.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your first supplementary.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, programs offered through Stars for Life allows clients with autism spectrum disorder to lead long and successful lives, and they have many success stories to prove it.

However, before Stars for Life can offer a client a program, they first have to meet

with the individual, determine what programming is needed, they need to write an individual program, submit this proposal to the department, wait for approval, then they have to hire and train a person to work with the client.

The \$200 received from the Disability Support Program per client does not even cover anywhere near the work required to develop a program. Monies for this has to be raised through fundraising by Stars for Life.

Long-term funding for programming needs

Minister: What can groups like Stars for Life Foundation do to obtain long-term core funding to meet their programming needs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, just this morning, I met with over 30 of our community partners, Stars for Life included; Carolyn was there.

We engaged in a discussion about how we can all work together to meet the needs of Islanders. It was a wonderful meeting. It was a lot of collaboration. There were a lot of wonderful opportunities. We were able to share ideas and opportunities on how we can work together.

It was an open dialogue on the challenges that many of our NGOs face, community partners, but I will say that there was an awful lot of information that was gleaned from that meeting. I am very positive moving forward into the future that we will have a lot of very positive solutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your second supplementary.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stars for Life can only pay staff \$15 to \$17 per hour. Often, they train staff, and then they leave for higher-paying positions. QCRS, Community Connections and Harbourview all receive core funding. As a result they are able to pay their staff \$20 to

\$22 an hour and some of those are unionized.

Funding for groups for day programs

Minister: Why do some groups offering day programs have core funding, and groups like Stars for Life do not?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, appreciate this question, and appreciate your advocacy, and appreciate the wonderful work that Stars for Life does do.

We have engaged and hired an external consultant who has done extensive work with many of our sister provinces to help develop a funding model so that, not only government, but our community partners could get to work and keep working at what they do best, which is serving our vulnerable populations. I look forward to working with them all and engaging in all of them as we move forward with this new funding model.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our education system provides a foundation for success for young Islanders. I have tremendous respect for teachers, administrators, and support workers who provide this foundation for our children. But, occasionally they need a day off. We continue to hear about the shortage of available substitutes.

Shortage of substitute teachers

Question to the minister of education: Are you aware of a shortage of substitute teachers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I will say that I am aware of some concern in this area. This is something that we've done some looking into. There are a number of substitutes – there were actually 410 when I last checked on the substitute list, and that would be over a complement of about 1,600 or 1,700 teachers in the province.

I'm not sure that the issue is as much related to shortage of qualified substitutes in the province as it is in ensuring that they're engaged and in the places where we need them at a particular time. And that's something that as we start to staff up in our increases, we're going to have to keep our eye on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Years ago we had a surplus of teachers looking for work, but with the limited opportunities available in PEI many have seemed to have left or found new career opportunities. This means as vacancies open up, we have a limited pool of applicants to pull from.

Question to the minister of education: Do you share my concerns that if our substitute teaching pool is dwindling, it could mean that we may be up against a teacher shortage in the upcoming years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I do have a concern that we do have qualified substitute teachers there and when we need them, as I indicated. The irony of this is that when I first took over this position, which wasn't even six months ago, we were talking about having retired teachers coming back and substitutes not having enough opportunity.

Over the last 12 months, we have committed to hiring 151 new frontline staff for the education system in this province. That is something that I can say that we are proud

of, but that also has an impact, of course, on the substitute teaching list because that's where they come from. So it is something that we will continue to keep our eye on, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We see what we are up against with healthcare professionals in trying to recruit from off-Island. Let's not make the same mistake with our teaching staff. If we are experiencing a shortage now with substitutes, we need to see the forest through the trees and try and fix this problem before we see consequences.

Stats on current pool of substitutes

Question to the minister of education: Will you table the stats on the current pool of substitutes including the number of available substitutes in the province, whether they are certified or not, and if they are actively substituting with the Public Schools Branch?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I can endeavour to bring that information back, as I indicated. In my best recollection as of March break, we had 410 substitutes that were certified and on that list, and I believe there is another 25 or so retired teachers that would substitute. Again, the certification is required.

I will indicate that I have met on a couple of occasions now with Dean MacDonald at UPEI to discuss ways in which we can work together and they do have a good sized class that will be graduating this year, and that's something that they will have every year. So, there is a balance and we do need to ensure that we, as I indicated, keep our eye on that balance and keep it in balance and keep it in balance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know on that side of the House you only think in four-year increments, but on this side of the House we believe in a long-term solution.

Succession planning for retired teachers

Question to the minister of education: Does the Public Schools Branch have a workforce plan including succession planning for those teachers who will be retiring in the upcoming years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This is something that I can say we could likely use some more work on. I'm not here to direct the Public Schools Branch as to its hiring processes and its succession planning, but it is something that we do maintain contact with them on and as the Public Schools Branch moves through its evolution, it's something that I'm sure they will be looking to turn their focus to.

As I indicated, we're very fortunate to now be in this position where we are gearing up with young, new teachers and providing opportunities through great budget enhancements in the education system, and 17 million new dollars this year means a great deal to the students in the classroom and also to those teachers that are looking for work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Teachers and support staff are the key resource in our education system. There seems to be a trend where new teachers are leaving the system with five years of entering the workforce as a substitute because they can't find full-time employment as a teacher. Once they leave

and find alternate employment, the likelihood of returning to teaching is slim.

Certified teachers leaving system

Question to the minister of education: What are you going to do about this trend of having newly certified teachers leaving the profession within as little as five years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This, again, is an interesting issue and one that would take more than 40 seconds to fully canvass, but let me say this and try not to be cheeky in doing so.

That is that over the last number of years, we have been in a position where there have been more teachers entering the profession than there have been teaching positions available and through a great population growth strategy, that is now turning around.

As I indicated, we've managed to put ourselves in a position – we're investing in 151 new frontline teaching positions within this province over the 12 months since this time last year. With the great education that our teachers have, we shouldn't be surprised that that has happened in the past – that they have gone on to do other things, but right now, we have great work for them here in Island schools and we hope to put them to their best use.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, your final question.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Teachers are expressing concern with the amount of stress and pressure they're under. Class composition, class size, instructional time, and behavioral issues are all things that are weighing on teachers' shoulders.

Supports to teachers

Question to the minister of education: What supports are you providing teachers who are experiencing compassion fatigue?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This is an issue of which I'm acutely aware and one I've spoken on on a number of different occasions. I am very happy and proud to be on my feet to address this question, particularly as I indicated when we have had the opportunity to reinvest in Island teachers who are great and professional in all respects.

With 151 new frontline teaching positions being added over this 12 month window, we expect that a lot of the issues will be addressed – at least in part. That's to recognize there's always more work that could be done, but with our focus on education we are here and we are committed to helping our professional teaching staff and our students in the classrooms.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]