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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 17 MAY 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In response to questions asked from the Member from Morell-Mermaid yesterday in regard to PEI health cards. There were several there.

I'd like to, as a result of some research done last night, bring some clarity. Every individual is required to go through the application process for a PEI health card. It's not automatic. When an individual receives permanent residency that's when they get it.

The individual has to be physically present when applying for PEI health card. When receiving an application our Medicare officer does not consider any of the documentation pertaining to the Provincial Nominee Program, as they are not relevant to health coverage.

Every applicant is required to provide specific supporting documentation to the PEI Medicare Office, such as their permanent residency documents, work or study permits. With all permanent residency documents, the PEI Medicare Officer validates this information through the citizenship and immigration Canada portal.

If citizenship and immigration Canada portal cannot validate those documents or our Medicare Office with submit (Indistinct) report so that the federal government can investigate further.

It's only after the PEI Medicare Office receives a positive validation from the CIC that it will process the application and provide the health coverage.

The PEI Medicare Office works closely with the PEI association of newcomers, though to Canada to ensure that individuals, who are new to the province understand the process and requirements when applying for a PEI health card.

As well, if approved a PEI health card for a foreigner is only valid for the same period as the terms of their permanent residency, work

permit or study permit. Also, the renewal process involves submitting up-to-date and valid permanent residency work, study documentation. Again, these documents are vetted through citizenship and immigration Canada portal for validation before the individual's PEI health card is renewed.

As well, while I'm to my feet; in response to other questions regarding out-of-province monitoring, from the same member, the out-of-province claims department of the PEI Medicare Office reviews all claims for payment before payments are processed.

They look at the individual's health claims history, as well as the eligibility of the client and the claim. If there are abnormalities in the claim history, the PEI Medicare Office follows up directly with the individuals to confirm their residency status.

Health PEI does not have an out-of-province referral program policy. Or, sorry: does have an out-of-province referral program policy. In section 3.1 of the policy, which I will table here later today, it outlines that: PEI Medicare will provide coverage for out-of-province health care costs only in the instances of extreme emergency, sudden illness or if they have written approval or referral directly from Health PEI.

Furthermore, on a monthly basis, there is inter-provincial file sharing as it relates to provincial health cards. This ensures that there is no abuse of provincial Medicare coverage, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Trauma, mental health and addictions all live in the same house.

Government's failure to mental health issues

My first question is to the Premier: Premier, why has your government failed to take all the necessary steps to support Islanders

suffering from trauma, mental health and addictions issues?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's been said on many occasions that there's more to do.

But let me be sure and be clear to the House that many steps have been taken. In our current Budget, an additional \$4 million in 2017-2018; steps taken to create the school support teams; the walk-in clinics; the seniors resource team to add resources, including the hiring of additional psychologists.

This is something that we take very much to heart, and have been acting on with resources and with a plan and a plan that we're living up to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The ongoing crisis around mental health in this province is feeding an epidemic of trauma for Islanders.

Premier, your government has had 11 years to take meaningful actions, but your priorities, unfortunately, have been misplaced.

Leave for victims of violence and trauma

To the Premier: Why has your government never legislated any leave, paid or unpaid for Islanders workers, who are the victims of violence and trauma?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as the House will be aware, we did, indeed, bring forward, through a policy at the Workers Compensation to ensure that workers who have traumatic injuries. And we've moved away from a standard that required it'd be a single event. This was something that was done in interaction with

public unions and with paramedics and first responders.

I'm aware that our departments of workforce and our department the status of women have, indeed, been working together on the question of leave related to traumatic conditions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The epidemic of trauma affecting Island families and communities feeds into a cycle of trauma for those who are suffering. Hurt people can and do hurt people.

Today, our PC team is calling our bill that provides paid leave to victims of domestic, intimate partner or sexual violence to the floor.

Bill providing paid leave to victims

Question to the Premier: Premier, will your government support our bill, and if so, will it be passed and proclaimed in a timely manner?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the bill, of course, remains to come to the floor and I'm sure there will be a meaningful exchange.

We've studied the bill and we're sympathetic to its purpose and to the initiative. May I repeat that our departments had been working on something substantially similar and we're about to embark on a consultation process. It is something that I believe we can deal with here on the floor of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The epidemic of trauma is not a gender issue. It is a societal issue and it affects everyone.

Effects of violence in the labour force

Question to the minister of workforce: Can you explain the impact domestic and intimate violence and trauma is having on Island workplaces and on the labour force on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, very much.

I thank you for the question, hon. member. We take concerns of this matter very seriously. The Employment Standards Board looks after these things.

Anything that we can do as a province, and as a government and with the work of the Employment Standards Board to make people feel safe and be able to come forward with issues, we'll certainly support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The epidemic of trauma is greatly underreported and those people that are advocating on the ground and people like Theo Fleury are seeing the real truth. It's close to one out of every two people are affected by this trauma.

Currently, Island workers cannot access leave that would assist victims and survivors in such matters that relate to this type of violence. Islanders right now could face having their employment terminated if they have to take any time off.

Support of legislation for victims of violence

Question to the minister: Do you support the legislation that we have on the floor for Island workers, who are victims of trauma and of violence and abuse?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Before I answer, I would also like to welcome Mr. Fleury to the gallery.

We certainly take, as I said, very seriously this issue and our department was about to do some consultations over the summer. There is a bill coming forward today and we look forward to discussing this bill. We'll see where it goes from there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If you were going to consult on a bill this summer, it sounds like you support the idea. The Leader of the Opposition here has been quite active on the front of mental health. He has championed the cause. He's laid the whole framework for types of bills like this to be brought to this House. For years, this caucus has been advocating for improvements in our mental health system here on Prince Edward Island, and for more resources in addictions.

The member from Borden had a PTSD bill brought to the floor, which your government still – even though you voted for it, still hasn't proclaimed.

Question to the minister: Since it sounds like you support the premise of our bill, if you're going to go out and consult and do your own, why has your government failed to do anything about it in the past 11 years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I am very passionate about any measure that we can put in place for protection of those workers, who are experiencing affects of domestic violence and need to have that addressed.

I'd also like to note, as well, that the sexual assault response committee of the Premier's action committee on family violence. We

have, and do offer workshops for counsellors, victim servicing agencies, medical, health, human service, education and justice system professionals, and first responders.

We are continuing to work right across government, right across the province with the non-government organizations that also offer those kind of services and we work collaboratively with those to ensure people are aware –

Mr. LaVie: Should be a priority.

Ms. Biggar: – in the workplace of those issues.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Domestic, intimate and sexual violence is an issue on Prince Edward Island and right across Canada and I appreciate the minister's passion.

Support of legislation for victims of violence (further)

But minister for the status of women: Do you support the idea of paid leave for victims of domestic, intimate, and sexual violence?

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

Ms. Biggar: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and I support extended leave as well so that they can tend to the issues that they need to take care of as part of that. Paid leave and unpaid leave is necessary. Working with employers to educate them as well is very important as to what has to happen. It takes a lot of courage to step forward out of a relationship where you are physically, sexually, or emotionally abused and I do believe that their employment should be protected.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Violence has a lifelong impact on a person's physical, mental, sexual, and even reproductive health.

A question again to the status of women minister: Do you agree with and will you come forward and support better access for paid leave that could help victims of these crimes?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we have been doing inter-governmentally, with Victim Services. We have formed, actually, a family-friendly committee to bring that particular piece of legislation forward in addition to protecting those who have 18 month parental leave and a number of other measures. We have been working on that collaboratively with Victim Services to put together a comprehensive piece of legislation, including going further than this particular bill that's coming forward.

I will always support those kinds of measures to protect women – and not just women, but those who suffer because we do know that men, also, are victims of violence as well. We want to ensure that workers are protected and I will, as minister for status for women, support any measure that will protect women going forward to get them out of a situation of family violence.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know this is a societal issue, but some of this falls in your department, minister. Nationally, the annual economic cost of domestic, intimate, and sexual violence is estimated to be more than \$8 billion.

Research on Island re: domestic violence

Minister: Has your department ever commissioned any research into the economic costs of domestic, intimate, and sexual violence to the Island economy?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, as minister of status for women, certainly I work collaboratively with my other counterparts right across Canada. This is always something that is raised at our FPT table.

On PEI, we are the second lowest in the country in regard to sexual violence; however, any violence against women, in any regard, is not acceptable. That is why we partner with a lot of the groups that are across PEI to fund them and to raise awareness for that work. It starts at the community level. It starts right at, actually, birth and anything that we can do to educate our male youth will certainly go a long way to changing that culture of abuse in our society.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, incidents of domestic, intimate, and sexual violence are typically underreported to authorities across Canada.

Support of legislation for victims of violence (further)

Question to the Attorney General: Do you support the idea of paid leave for victims of domestic, intimate, and sexual violence?

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

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

Again, as has been indicated here previously today: That is something that broadly we think should be looked at and we're supportive of on this side. It certainly is an issue that has been seen time and again, not just in our province, but in other places across this country and that we do take seriously. We have done a lot, as I've indicated in this session, to move forward in attempting to tackle these sorts of issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Advocacy groups and investigative journalism like *The Globe and Mail's* Unfounded series highlighted the challenges around underreporting.

Importance of victims to be heard

Question to the Attorney General: Can you speak to the importance of victims of these types of violence coming forward so that their stories can be heard and acted on?

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

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

That's a question that I would probably do very well to try and answer in 40 seconds. I think there's countervailing principles there and an individual's decision whether or not to report is their own decision.

But what I can say, is that we are, at this point in time, looking at what we might be able to do to make things as easy for that individual to report as we possibly can – whether that be through enabling the preservation of key evidence for a period of time after the incident, or whether that be just in the way that we approach the incident and are forward-facing towards the victim of assault so that they may feel comfortable in coming forward, either through themselves, or through a third-party organization.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2017 alone, Island law enforcement agencies received nearly 500 reports of domestic, intimate, and sexual violence. That's over one a day.

Better access for paid leave

Question to the Attorney General: Do you agree that better access to paid leave could

help encourage more victims of these crimes to come forward?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The strength to come forward to report an incident encompasses more than whether or not you have paid leave. I fully support that, but we need to have pieces in place that when a person comes forward, they have the support, and the comfort, and sensitivity that it takes for that. Enhancing emergency sexual assault services and protocol policy is under development, which is expected to enhance the sexual assault response in the province.

We're working collaboratively with partners to look at introducing the third option for victims of sexual violence, which to explain, that means collecting and storing evidence for up to a year to allow that victim time to process and have supports to come forward with reporting that type of assault to police.

We're also – with your indulgence, because this is an important message for victims out there – that they can be comforted to come forward. There is support there through mental health, through PEI sexual assault rape and crisis centre.

But we're also looking – willing to work collaboratively with partners to consider a third-party reporting mechanism. We will continue to work to have those discussions. But I want to tell any victim who feels that they need support, please come forward in a way. We need to work together with our police forces, with our supports to ensure that there is a compassionate response and that they feel safe in coming forward and that they can get the support they need – including with their employer.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was pleased to hear this week that a dedicated Crown prosecutor for sexual violence offences is being established.

Need for Crown prosecutor

A question for the Attorney General today: Would you agree that the need for a dedicated prosecutor underscores the challenges we face as a province with domestic, intimate, and sexual violence?

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

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

I think that would be one facet of it for sure. Obviously, with these types of offences, they manifest in many different ways unfortunately. The prosecutor that deals with them would have, I would say, the misfortune of having to deal with all of them and all of them, unfortunately, have, over the course of time, occurred within this province. That's exactly what we're taking steps to combat.

I am proud to say that we are taking this step and that we're not only doing that, but we're setting it up so that this Crown prosecutor can work with policing agencies and Victim Services and others to improve the way in which we do that in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An innovative approach in response to issues of sexual violence reporting that we've talked about before in this House is something known as the Philadelphia Model.

Progress made to include Philadelphia Model

A question to the Attorney General: Can you update the House on what progress has been made to include the Philadelphia Model and how we improve reporting of sexual violence since we first raised this idea last year?

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

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

Again, as part of the addition of the new Crown and the additional steps that we're taking which also includes the formation of a committee that will be looking at our response to sexual assaults across the province – and as I indicated previously, looking at work related to how it might be made easier that victims would come forward, including the preservation of any evidence coming out of an allegation of sexual assault, possibly, for up to a period of a year and/or for reporting through third parties would all be envisioned as something that that group would look to tackle and to report on in the very near future.

The work is being done as we speak amongst the agencies, and a key part of that was getting this Crown position in place to move forward with a solid legal basis to do that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Basically, the Philadelphia Model involves bringing law enforcement and community advocates together around a table to review reports of sexual violence to ensure that these reports are being dealt with properly.

It's good to hear the minister talk about some progress. This model, used more and more across North America, improves communication and data management to respond more affectively.

Introduction of Philadelphia Model in province

A question to the Attorney General: Time is passing quickly on this. Will the province introduce the Philadelphia Model as an extra support to improve on how we respond to issues of sexual violence?

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

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

Again, as I indicated, I'm not going to sit here and say whatever model it is that we ultimately end up moving forward with will be the, quote on quote, Philadelphia Model, but what we are doing is putting a new dedicated Crown prosecutor in place.

That Crown prosecutor will work with victim services, policing agencies, and those sorts of resources to determine what best we may be able to do. In particular, if there are cases that are not dealt with through the court system, those will likely be reviewed by this group to determine what, if any, additional action can or should or may be taken to move them forward.

The other thing that I should point out here is that whether or not a matter proceeds to a charge, victim services is there for the victims of sexual assault and so we would encourage those victims, that they can come forward through our victim services workers and that they are trained to deal with victims of sexual assault. We think that they are very good in that capacity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things I found most surprising about the recently tabled *Electoral System Referendum Act* was that the referendum commissioner would hold office from June 1st, 2018. That isn't much more than two weeks away.

Appointment of referendum commissioner

A question to the Premier: What is the urgency for appointing the commissioner right away?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the point of tabling this legislation was to ensure that there was a level playing field, clear ground rules, and a key part of that is the appointment through this Legislative

Assembly, through legislative management, of a referendum commissioner and indeed, to have that commissioner in place as this process goes forward, as the bill is passed, or as the law presumably will be adopted by this Legislature with or without amendments. Then, to have the commissioner in place, it's obvious that that will enable the law to be implemented.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With these timelines, I must assume that you have already somebody in mind for this position.

A question to the Premier: Have you already identified our future referendum commissioner from the comfort of the fifth floor?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I won't make any comment on the comfort of the fifth floor. I think members opposite are trying to make it as uncomfortable as possible, but this is something, as is clear on the face of the bill, that will be dealt with by legislative management and will be further considered and only put in place with a two-thirds vote of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Legislative Management Committee must make a recommendation for the commissioner, but the committee is controlled by government members and meets behind closed doors.

Again to the Premier: Have you instructed your government members of the Legislative Management Committee to rubber stamp your choice for commissioner?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, no I have not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the past, when the Legislative Management Committee was put in charge of recommending the appointment of an officer for the Legislature, they have advertised for the position, used a rigorous interview process to establish qualifications, but the timelines provided in this legislation would not allow that process to unfold.

If we abide by the fixed election date legislation, I see no need whatsoever for such rigid and accelerated timeframes. There is absolutely no rush here.

Confirmation of election timeline

Premier: Can you confirm for this House that there will indeed be no election this fall?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, on the question that led to the further piece that was asked here, about the timing –

Mr. Myers: Tories are ready.

Premier MacLauchlan: – I would not describe it as a rush.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

I believe there is a good –

Mr. Myers: Tories are ready.

Premier MacLauchlan: – reason, and it's evident on the face of things, and if you look at the –

Mr. LaVie: Not by the looks of last night (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – experience we had with the plebiscite in –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – in 2016.

When this bill becomes law, with whatever changes are made on the floor of this House, there's an obvious need to have a referendum commissioner and for the participants in the process of the referendum to proceed by the rules, and I took the third party to be in favour of that idea that there would be clear rules; that there would be a level playing field.

That's exactly what this bill does, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale, your first supplementary on your second question.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned earlier, the Legislative Management Committee is controlled by government members and meets behind closed doors. This can lead to dubious and self-serving decisions such as rejecting key recommendations by the conflict of interest commissioner.

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: Again to the Premier: How do we –

Ms. Casey: (Indistinct)

Screening process re: hiring referendum commissioner

Ms. Bell: – expect there to be public confidence in this appointment if there is no application or screening process and the decision is made by government members in secret?

Ms. Biggar: That's the chair right there, of the committee.

An Hon. Member: That's the chair (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I have confidence in the Legislative Management Committee and in its Chair, and in the good faith with which the members of this House meet, as they have done for many years, with the confidence of doing so in camera and with the reasons that are behind that.

I don't know that it's very helpful to all of the courtesy and the good grace that we expect in this Chamber and the way that we do work together through legislative management, to use the language that we just heard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As you can imagine, the rumour mill is working overtime speculating on who the Premier has hand-picked to be the commissioner. The name I've heard more than once is former chief justice Gerard Mitchell.

A question to the Premier: Is the rumour mill correct or have you chosen someone else to be the referendum commissioner?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, first we have to pass the bill, at which point the Legislative Management Committee will have a job to do, at which point this Legislature will have a job to do, to consider a resolution and at that point, perhaps the rumour mill will move onto something else.

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 Health and Wellness.

Minister, many couples and the national average is 16% are struggling with infertility issues. Many cannot afford the in vitro

fertilization or the intrauterine procedures that are offered off-Island.

Financial support for in vitro fertilization

Minister: Is there presently any financial support available to Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to in vitro fertilization or intrauterine insemination, we do not cover those by PEI Medicare at this point in time.

I am pleased to say that we do cover a lot of, I'll call, work-up service in this area. We do cover things such as blood work, ultrasounds, supports, other supports for anybody that is interested in this service. We will also arrange physical exams. We will work with the individuals to help them navigate and maneuver to services that are available in other provinces.

As well, though, we do cover out-of-province costs if the services are insured, but they must be done at a hospital setting, and not in a clinic type of setting, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For many people, who desperately want a family, they need help. This issue can lead to high levels of anxiety, depression, financial burden and put strain on the relationship.

Minister: Has your department considered, or will it consider assisting these people?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, the hon. member is correct. We do recognize that this places quite a financial and emotional strain and burden on these families.

As I mentioned earlier, we do provide some counselling services for families that are

going through this process. Fertility coordination and navigation, we are very pleased to allow supports there, as well.

As well, in recent months, our Women's Wellness Program has aided in supports for family in this area. We do recognize that this is a burden on families and we want to work with them when we (Indistinct) Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, this truly does affect the quality of life for these couples, who are having fertility problems, both emotionally and financially.

I'm glad to hear that your department is considering the delivery of clinical services such as IVF and the IUI treatment in the province and that you are considering it.

Tax break for in vitro fertilization process

In the meantime, will you, perhaps, collaborate with the Minister of Finance to consider a tax break for these Islanders, who made need this support, as it is in other provinces?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, indeed, I think that's something that we could probably begin some conversations with. I would commit to speaking to the finance minister to see if we have opportunity to do that.

As you say, hon. member, this is a very serious issue to families, who are trying to grow their families. We want to support them where we can. I will definitely commit to having those discussions with the finance minister to see if we can come up with funding.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, in 2016 and 2017 there was over 900 cases that were referred to Victim Services. In 29% of those cases,

there was a family-type relationship involved.

Support for paid leave for victims of violence

Question to the health minister: Do you support the idea of paid leave for victims of domestic, intimate and sexual violence?

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, certainly we do have a lot of supports for victims. I know firsthand as a survivor that a lot of these instances can go back to childhood.

Having the community around a victim, whether it's in the school, whether it's in the community itself, we do have services, community-based services that support a victim coming forward, whether it's in the immediate or from a past experience in a childhood trauma.

We have long-term care support including community mental health, Rape and Sexual Assault Centre. It's important that we involvement adult protection; that within our school system we look at child protection.

Victim Services and Child and Family Services work collaboratively to help address those issues and it does start at the community level, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, half of those cases involved female family or sexual abuse; 13% of the sexual assault matters referred to Victim Services involved male victims.

Support for male victims of sexual violence

Question to the health minister: What supports are available for your department for male victims of sexual violence?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I, like other hon. members of the Legislature would like to welcome Theo Fleury onto the floor of the Legislature. Obviously a well, well known hockey player in Canada, but also a well known advocate in areas of sexual violence and supports of this nature.

When it comes to our health care system on Prince Edward Island, every ER department and every hospital across our wonderful province have trained staff in this area. They know how to – they know what to look for. They know how to begin protocols, whether it's involvement of law enforcement where needed, whether it's, depending on gender, they may refer to our women's wellness centre, they may refer to some of our community folks, such as one of our two family service centres, or our McGill Centre.

They are highly trained in every ER across Prince Edward Island to deal with the situation. They do it with compassion. They do it with dignity. They do it when it needs to be done, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, we know there is a big demand for mental health here on PEI. The access to treatment can be very difficult.

That makes it even more important that victims have the flexibility to take the appointment when it becomes available.

Option of paid leave better access to services

Question to the health minister: Do you think giving people the option of paid leave could give them more flexibility to access services when they become available?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, this is a topic that does deserve attention. It does discussion. It does deserve a lot of focus on.

Obviously, over the last number of years this had become more prevalent in our little

province, but it's also more prevalent across Canada, across our wonderful nation. There are discussions going on in every province. Yes, absolutely, we, as a province, should be looking at, and having discussions; those very important discussions, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The provincial government is one of PEI's largest employers.

Support of paid leave to victims of violence (further)

A question to the finance minister: Do you support the idea of paid leave for victim of domestic, intimate and sexual violence?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: That's fantastic to hear, Mr. Speaker.

The province's Employee Assistance Program, EAP, opened 561 counselling files in 2015-2016 and closed 371 counselling files.

EAP files and victims of violence

A question to the finance minister: What percentage of those counselling files that EAP deals with would involve domestic, intimate or sexual violence issues?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm not sure of the exact figure, Mr. Speaker, but I think one is too many.

I think the initiative by the opposition today and the bill that will be coming on the floor, it's a great initiative. I think it opens up other conversations and I think we're all going in the right direction. Kudos to them and Kudos to the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning about talking about this before.

We'll certainly review the bill when it comes on the floor and I hope we can all agree.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It does seem like we're all on the same page, here.

It takes great courage for a person, regardless of gender, who has been a victim of domestic, intimate or sexual violence to come forward, share their story and seek help.

Experienced advocates like Theo Fleury, who is in the gallery here today, estimate that 50% of people experience trauma like this. That's with a lot going unreported.

Extra supports for employees

Question to the finance minister: What extra supports is government looking at implementing to encourage and assist employees, who are dealing with domestic, intimate or sexual violence situations?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I actually got to see Theo Fleury play in 1988. I think it was his first year in the NHL. I remember game six of Edmonton in the playoffs when he slid down the ice on his knees, waving his arms in the air. You know what? He left a legacy on the ice, but he's leaving a legacy after his professional career as a hockey player and I think that's really important. We'll do whatever it takes to make this right.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

According to the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre, children who experience abuse are found to be 30% less likely to graduate high school.

School mental health teams re: abused students

Question to the education minister: How do school mental health teams deal with students who may have seen or experienced abuse?

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

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

I don't profess to know or be able to indicate in 40 seconds how these teams do it, but what I will indicate is that they have some professional basis in this and certainly the new teams are geared to make referrals into the larger health community, whether that be two psychologists that we would have working in the department, which we now have a few more of, or whether it be in the health department, or whether it be the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre as another example within the community.

With my other justice hat, there are other services there and in family and human services, relating to child protection, as an example, that would also be involved in that kind of thing.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Children who experience abuse are four times more likely to become involved in the youth justice system – 26 more likely to experience homelessness.

Help for students in abusive situations

Question to the education minister: How can students who are in an abusive situation get help?

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

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

Another great program that's a new initiative of our government is the Bridge program, which brings together many of the resources that are called upon to bring to bear on these sorts of issues and really focuses them on the impacted individual. So that's one primary place where we would have a tool, if you will, to intervene where there wouldn't have been one a few years ago.

Let me say, as an example with the new student well-being teams, that's the purpose for the student outreach workers that are on those teams so that they know – they're on the ground level and they know what's going on with kids in their schools. That's been something that's been somewhat misunderstood in the communities, but I think as they have more and more time there, their role and their value will really be understood a lot more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Children who experience abuse are also four times more likely to access mental health services as adults, four times more likely to report self-harm.

Training for teachers and staff

Question to the education minister: What extra training is available for teachers and school staff to identify and help students who may be experiencing or witnessing abuse?

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

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

Again, I don't have kind of a list of training that teachers and support staff would go through, but I do know that there is some training in the identification of those sorts of issues. I can tell you, actually, that my wife has gone through an issue with a child in her class as recent as this year where child and family had to intervene.

I know that there is some in place, and I can tell you that between my department, and family and human services, and my other department in justice, they all had dealings with this young child and so there are services in place. Let me say that I think that we're doing a lot more in this area than we were even a couple of years ago. That's something that, as the hon. member has indicated, is hugely important.

Enduring that kind of abuse or any kind of emotional incident at a young age does have a very significant potential to impact a child for the rest of their life. It's something that it is very important that we get help to them as soon as we possibly can to help them to set on a path to healing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]