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of Prince Edward Island**

**Responses to Questions and
Oral Question Period**

(Preliminary Proceedings)

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No. 25

The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker

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[10:24 a.m.]

[Hon. S. MacEwen in the chair]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Safety of children in schools – CRIA

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Third Party asked about the implementation of the child's rights impact assessment across government.

A child's rights impact assessment, or CRIA, is indeed a vital tool for ensuring children's rights are fully considered in the development, implementation, and review of policy, legislation, and practices. Our government has made substantial progress on protecting child rights, including the addition of the new Child and Youth Advocate in 2020 and the proclamation of the new *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* in 2024.

[10:25 a.m.]

The policy team in my department is fully trained in CRIA and is actively using it. The development of the dedicated CRIA tool is currently underway under the leadership of the Interministerial Women's Secretariat. This process involves careful consideration prior to any full implementation. Even in the absence of a standalone CRIA tool, the policy development process has consistently included and encouraged the consideration of impacts of children.

Having said that, we recognize that having a defined tool can enhance consistency and transparency, and we continue to work toward that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Minister of Social Development sat there nodding along every time the Minister of Education or the Premier rose to offer excuses for this government's inaction and refusal to accept accountability for allowing a pedophile to abuse children in our school system, even after complaints. And when the media asked for an interview, the minister refused. That's a masterclass in stonewalling Islanders, at the expense of transparency.

Safety of children in schools (further)

Question to the Minister of Social Development: Why are you hiding from the media? Is it because the Premier told you not to speak in order to cover something up, or because you simply don't care about keeping parents informed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As for the media, there was a request for a technical interview, so that was done through the department. I'm certainly not hiding behind anyone. This is a terrible situation, and our department is doing everything we possibly can to work with police services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

A media request is a media request, and you refused that.

For years, we've demanded answers, and we've been stonewalled at every turn. It's clear that the Premier and his ministers are more focused on protecting themselves than giving parents the truth.

We know that on May 1st, a father and his daughter reported the incident at Glen Stewart to the principal and the Public Schools Branch. That alone should have triggered a call to Child Protection.

To the Minister of Social Development: Should Child Protection have been contacted at that point, and why wasn't it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Child Protection was contacted in August of last year, and I guess when the investigation is completed, we'll find out whether that was an appropriate time or not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: So, I'm going to ask her again, the same question.

Should Child Protection have been contacted at that point, on May 1st – not August; on May 1st – when the father and daughter reported this to the principal at the school and to the Public Schools Branch?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we will wait until the third-party review is completed, and then we'll have the correct answer. I don't want to give misinformation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much.

Well, we all know what the correct answer is. Everyone knows what the correct answer is. Obviously, you don't.

We've confirmed that the Minister of Social Development was made aware of this horrifying situation back in August of 2024. What happened since then? Nothing. Yet another minister sat on her hands and refused to act.

To the minister: You found out last August and you did nothing, yet you stood here yesterday praising a review that won't even begin until June. Minister, why didn't you initiate a review back then, when you first learned students had been inappropriately touched at this school?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're back to a full week of this line of questioning, and....

[Interjections]

Hon. R. Lantz: It is a very serious subject, and we're taking it very seriously.

I want to recognize that our education system is full of people who care deeply about our next generation.

We can't ignore that this situation has taken place, but we have to recognize that this isn't the norm in our system. I found it very interesting; last night, there was an interview on *Compass* with Noni Klassen from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. The Public Schools Branch has been engaged with this organization since last fall, since after these charges were announced. Many things have been happening, but the information provided last night in that interview was very interesting.

[10:30 a.m.]

She highlighted a real grey area where professionals in our school board are not necessarily trained to investigate and understand these situations, and we're moving towards that kind of training. There are lessons to be learned here, and we are moving forward with actions – a third-party investigation of which findings will implement greater safeguards in our system.

We'll respond to the questions from the opposition as long as they wish to ask them, but we're moving forward and trying to make improvements in our system.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier has to respond because this minister seems unable to grasp the seriousness of her inaction. So, I'm going to ask the Minister of Social Development a question. You've failed a core duty, which is protecting Island children.

How exactly do you expect this review to change anything when no one in government – no one in government – is willing to admit that they made a mistake? How can you fix a problem if everyone pretends they did nothing wrong?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No one is pretending here. No one is deflecting. We have taken the responsible actions to order a third-party review by what is considered to be one of the most regarded individuals in the province here. In fact, I, too, listened to the interview with the director of education with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, and I will quote: “The independent review is important, and to have someone with that caliber with that expertise look at that thoroughly is really important.” Now, that came from an expert with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection.

So, we are taking all of the steps required to flush out where the system fell down and we will....

[Interjection]

Hon. R. Croucher: They don’t want to listen to this, no. And we will implement any recommendations that come from that review from the Honourable David Jenkins.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Nothing unusual from this government; they always find something else to hide behind. The duty to report is a legal obligation. If you see something or hear something from a child, you must act; it’s that simple. But here, multiple students spoke out, parents spoke out, and instead of reporting it, officials swept it under the rug, allowing a pedophile to keep teaching. Now, that’s sickening.

To the minister who is legally responsible for child protection: Whose legal responsibility was it to contact Child Protection when the complaint was made to the principal and Public Schools Branch? Was it the principal and the Public Schools Branch, or the parent and the child?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll take this one.

The third-party review will determine that. Member, Leader of the Opposition, you are not the expert in this, nor am I. That’s why we took on an expert to get to the bottom of this. If there were problems that occurred, if there were mistakes that were made, we will deal with them.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, I am no expert in this, and I will admit that. Obviously, no one over there is either, but there’s a legal responsibility here.

I’m going to go back and ask the Minister of Social Development: Whose legal responsibility was it to contact Child Protection when the complaint was made to the principal and the Public Schools Branch? Was it the principal and the Public Schools Branch, or was it the parent and the child?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I will go back to the third-party review that our department has ordered and has initiated and has begun. When those details are available, I will bring those back to the House.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: It’s pretty sad, Mr. Speaker, when you’re here asking questions to the Minister of Social Development and she’s hiding behind other ministers and won’t answer the questions; hiding from the media on such a serious, serious matter that parents deserve to have some answers to.

To the Minister of Education: Once again, I am asking for information that we’ve been demanding on behalf of Island parents. Now, I asked this question earlier this week; the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty asked it yesterday. I’m again going to ask it today because the public deserves to know how flexible the Public Schools Branch was in assigning this substitute teacher.

Minister, how many schools did the Public Schools Branch allow Matthew Craswell to teach at, and which schools were they?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

[10:35 a.m.]

Hon. R. Croucher: Okay, so, as the member should be able to appreciate, the PSB is responsible for the day-to-day operations of our Island schools, and that includes informing school communities of such situations when they occur.

As for how many schools that this individual taught at, I am waiting for the review to be completed to get that final number, not that I'm looking forward to that review – it's necessary and I'm waiting for it.

Member, again, all of these questions will be answered, and all of these questions will be fully transparent when that review is finalized.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, shame on you. Shame on you. These are parents who have students in schools, and they want to know what happened, what schools, if their child may have been put into a situation like that.

Shame on you for putting it off down the road – a review that's not going to happen for another month, and we don't even know when it's going to be tabled. Shame on you for that.

To the Minister of Education, I'm going to ask –

[Interjection]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor, hon. members.

Hon. H. Perry: Question to the Minister of Education.

Here's what worries me: Why won't the minister be forthcoming with this information? He says there is nothing to hide, but yet parents are being kept in the dark.

I asked yesterday whether Matthew Craswell was interviewed after the incident at a

Charlottetown school. Can the minister confirm today: Was he interviewed following that incident, the one that the Public Schools Branch claimed wasn't sexual in nature?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to reiterate what our Premier said a few minutes ago about our education system being full of educators, administration staff, custodial staff, bus drivers.... All of those people that make our system as great as it is, and all of those people that care deeply about the safety and the wellbeing of our children.

We have one individual; that should not reflect on the entire profession. I'm not going to allow you to try and spin this any other way.

The second school that Matthew Craswell taught at was West Kent Elementary.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to be tabling a letter sent from the director of the Public Schools Branch to parents of students at Glen Stewart School in response to questions they themselves had put to education officials. As you will see, the letter, in my opinion, is dismissive of their requests, and once again, void of accepting any accountability or responsibility for the crimes that occurred under this government's watch.

Question to the Minister of Education: Parents of Glen Stewart have asked for a public meeting where they can voice their concerns and ask questions that they have not been able to get any answers to, yet the director of the Public Schools Branch dismisses this request as an ad hoc meeting. There is nothing ad hoc about a concerned parent's demand to have their questions answered.

To the Minister of Education: Is it also your opinion that parents of these students should not be permitted to ask questions to Public Schools Branch officials? Are you really going to tell these parents that your department and the school board have no interest in responding to their requests?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our department is and has responded to each and every request that has come through my department. In fact, I responded personally to one this morning before I came into this Chamber.

I am going to let this process play out. I'm going to let this review happen, and rest assured that whatever actions need to be taken, they will be taken.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The majority of the students at Glen Stewart live in the Stratford area.

Question to the Minister of Finance: As an MLA for the Stratford families, do you share the opinion of your Minister of Education and the director of the school branch that your constituents and the families living within your district should not be permitted a public meeting where they can voice their concerns and have their questions answered?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[10:40 a.m.]

The Leader of the Opposition, a few questions ago in his preamble, admitted that he's not an expert. Well, last night we heard from an expert – Noni Classen from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. She was asked about accountability in this case, which you've asked about, and there should be accountability. I admit that. But her answer was: We don't have all of the facts. She could not assign accountability in this case.

You've talked about legal responsibility here today. The legal process has played out and the perpetrator has been held accountable in this case. We're now undertaking an administrative process, a review of the administrative policies and procedures in place. We expect, if there's

accountability, if there is blame, it will come out throughout that process.

But what you're asking for is to shoot first and ask questions later. I would again ask that everyone in this room allow the process to play out so that we can get the answers we need.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

But you know what, policies are already in place, and laws, and they were not followed. Parents were left waiting for – they're going to be left waiting another month for a policy.

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: So, this Premier and his ministers can hide behind whomever they want.

And last night's interview – she didn't know the facts. She did not know the facts in this particular case, but parents want to know what the facts are, and you guys are keeping them quiet; you're hiding them.

Question to the Minister of Workforce and to the Minister of Finance: Both of you represent the Stratford families. Do both of you – whoever wants to stand up – stand with parents of your district who want a public meeting and want their questions answered, or do you stand with the director of the Public Schools Branch and the Minister of Education who have dismissed these parents' concerns and demands?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Does the Leader of the Opposition understand what a review actually is?

Hon. H. Perry: This isn't a Question Period for you.

Hon. R. Croucher: I'm just thinking out loud. Once our review is completed, we will bring back everything from that review to this House.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Moments ago, the Minister of Education just said that the other school in question was in Charlottetown, and it was West Kent. At the time, that is the Premier's district. He was also the Minister of Education.

Safety of children in schools (further)

Mr. Premier, what did you know? Have you reached out to the kids at West Kent? What information did you know and when did you know it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I've answered this question twice in the past week here. When I became Minister of Education in October of 2024, the individual in this case had already been charged several months prior. Both events that we're aware of that came to light throughout the judicial process happened months and even years prior. Much of what I've learned about these cases was learned throughout the judicial process.

Again, many of the facts that came to light are now on record as a statement of facts in the courts. We're going to learn more about the administrative process that took place around this and any of our safeguards that failed. We'll move forward with new policies and procedures to protect children in the future here, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: But if we're just hearing this now – you're both the MLA, you were the Minister of Education, and now the Premier. People in that West Kent-Brighton area are going to need answers to this.

Minister, what has been done since that time since they knew – we're just finding out about this today. What has been done to protect the safety of children at West Kent School?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have been engaged with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. There is a

centralized tracking system that's been put in place; the Commit to Kids training for our educators is implemented.

Again, I answered this yesterday, as well. I just want to thank all of our educators and all of our staff within our system that are doing a tremendous job day in, day out. Everyone is taking this seriously, okay? Everyone on this side of the House. Everyone in our system. Everyone is hypervigilant right now. Our main priority is the safety of the children in our system.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Follow-up question from yesterday to the Minister of Education.

[10:45 a.m.]

Yesterday, I asked the minister to clarify details about the serious incidents at two schools, specifically the request that was supposed to be back to this House by May 8th: a full timeline showing when the current and former Minister of Education were first briefed on this matter, starting from May 1st, 2024, onward. You stood up in this House and said no one is deflecting on this side. Well, that's all we've gotten over here today is deflection.

To the minister: When are you going to provide this information? Islanders are still waiting.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did not stutter yesterday in my answer. The main focus right now – 100 percent of our focus – is on making sure that we're moving forward with this review. That letter is important; we recognize that. There are some timelines in there that were not 100 percent reasonable as far as allowing us the time to get you accurate and factual information.

As soon as I have that, it will be tabled in this House.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2019, the CBC did excellent reporting in the wake of the Roger Jabbour case. To summarize some of the coverage:

Principals had received complaints about his behaviour but determined they were not sexual in nature. He was later charged with sex-based offences. Sound familiar? One community advocate at the time said they wanted to see, “a clear process for documenting complaints and recording what action was taken.” That was in 2019. A centralized reporting mechanism – suggested to this government five years ago.

Safety of children in schools (further)

The public understood there was a gap years ago. Can the Minister of Education please explain why it was never taken seriously?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I cannot speak for 2019. I can speak for what I have done since I have been privileged with taking on this portfolio, and moving forward, member. The results from this third-party review are going to highlight some of the areas that absolutely need to do better, and we will do better.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yeah, you do need to do better, and that third-party review needs to be independent, as was stated by the expert that you’re quoting here this morning.

In 2020, I conducted public consultation on an act to amend the *Education Act*. The purpose of the legislation was clear: it would require education authorities to report annually on reported incidents of sexual misconduct in schools. Instead of adopting a law to do this, this government said it would issue a ministerial directive, a draft of which I will be tabling later today.

Can the Minister of Education tell us why no ministerial directive was ever put in place that would require school boards to report on incidents of sexual misconduct that could have protected Craswell’s second victim?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is exactly why we sought the guidance and the expertise of the Honourable David Jenkins: to answer questions exactly such as those.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Shame on your government.

In 2021, hundreds of Island students walked out of their schools protesting the treatment they experienced. According to CBC, the students said that when they complained about harassment and unwanted touching, the response by school administrators and the Public Schools Branch fell short of what they’d like to see.

In an email from the minister at the time, he committed to having the reporting mechanism in place by the fall of 2021. But yet again, nothing was done, and to this day, we continue to experience the consequences of that inaction.

Question to the Minister of Education: Would you agree that Islanders’ skepticism regarding this government’s commitment to children’s safety is well deserved?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: I would agree that the public is looking for some reassurance, some answers, and some leadership on this. I assure that that is coming from this side of the House. I assure you that that is coming from our department, my department. I assure you that we have the very best person available in the province of Prince Edward Island to conduct the review into these questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

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

I read with interest the response from the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population to the petition that was tabled here in the House back on April 16th on the plight of immigrant workers working in the child care sector.

[10:50 a.m.]

In her response, she says that the child care will “remain one of the three priority sectors.” Last month, the Province issued the fourth draw of the year for permanent resident candidates already living and working on Prince Edward Island in priority occupations and sectors.

Early childhood educators (further)

A question to the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population: The three priority sectors are clearly stated in the invitation to apply in this draw as health care, construction, and manufacturing. Why is the child care sector absent from both the Atlantic Immigration Program and the PNP as a priority sector, as you claimed it was in your written response?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question.

Certainly, through the two programs that we have – one being the Atlantic Immigration Program, where we made some changes there – the drawing is still happening for our early years centre through our PNP programs, and we made a number of draws for that sector in the last draw.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Again, I reiterate, it is not stated specifically to be a priority sector, as you claimed in your response, minister.

One of the criteria for acceptance into the draw is that they are working full-time in the province that they are living in and that they work in a priority sector. Government has repeatedly stated that the new Islanders who are working in child care are welcome to upgrade their credentials by going back to school here on

Prince Edward Island, but of course, it’s absolutely impossible for them to do that and to work in their job.

To the same minister: Why are you creating literally impossible demands on workers that we desperately need, and in so doing, forcing them out of their jobs and out of the province that they love and in which they are loved?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know we’ve talked about this in length. I do appreciate the advocacy from the member’s questions.

I do think it’s very important that we have qualified staff working in our early years centres. We’ve had to create a level of eligibility when we’re making the draw. There are many who are looking to work within our early years centres who are at a level 3 currently, and would like to stay. There are students graduating from Holland College, both domestic and international, who are looking to stay and work in our early years sector. We’ll continue to ensure that child care is deemed a priority. This year, we have committed to 117, as we did last year, and we will support the early years centre with that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

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

Well, rather than clearing up the confusion of the prior answers into this matter in this House, and indeed your response to the petition, and your answers today, this does nothing to un muddy the waters, and it absolutely doesn’t ease the concerns of the workers, of the child care operators, or of the families who are involved.

To the same minister: Why is it seemingly impossible for your department and the Department of Education to get your act together on this critical and urgent matter and ensure that all the vital and much loved child care workers who are being forced to leave because of your poor policies and lack of action can actually remain here on Prince Edward Island?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly appreciate the line of questioning. We did have a meeting with the Early Childhood Development Association; approximately 25 early years centres were there. We did work through the details around immigration and those who are pursuing their work permits and PNPs through the Province. We will continue to work with those who have questions around, whether they're centres or those seeking their nominations, to help support where we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Two days ago, the new provincial joint enforcement team executed its first major operation in Summerside, seizing cocaine, hydromorphone, crystal meth, and prohibited weapons. This arrest marks the launch of a long-awaited initiative aimed at tackling drug trafficking and organized crime across PEI. Islanders are encouraged to see real action, but many still have questions about how this new unit will function in the long term.

Joint enforcement team

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Can the minister outline how the joint enforcement team is structured, how it will operate province-wide, and what outcomes Islanders can expect in the months ahead?

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

[10:55 a.m.]

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for these questions. It was a great first week of the JET team. The joint enforcement team on this Island is something that I've been a big fan of for a while and wanting to finally come.

The joint enforcement team is made up of seven officers from across the Island, across multiple forces that are addressing the complex challenges of the drug trade. They're there to

stop the drug movement coming onto the Island and moving through the Island. It's a great initiative, and I support them 100 percent.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a great initiative. Kudos to the minister for making this progress.

This week's JET-led arrest involved officers from the RCMP, Summerside Police, and Kensington Police, I believe, but it's still unclear which agencies have committed to sustained involvement going forward. With several distinct police jurisdictions across the Island, coordination is key.

Question to the minister: Which local police services have formally joined the JET initiative, and are there plans to bring in additional partners to ensure Island-wide coverage?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The JET team right now consists of the federal RCMP – the L Division RCMP – Summerside, and Kensington. Charlottetown Police Services – the mayor said they weren't interested at this time, but that invitation is always out there. I hope that they have a change of mind because I think it will even add to the enforcement here on this Island to fight the drug crime on this Island that we've got to get rid of, from tip to tip.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, indeed; it does seem that for the JET to be effective, Charlottetown should be involved. Hopefully the City does make that decision to join the JET.

While this first arrest is a strong start, it happened in an urban centre. For rural Islanders, where gaps in enforcement and response times are a concern, there is hope that this new unit won't be limited by geography or jurisdiction.

Question to the minister: How will the JET ensure it reaches rural and remote parts of PEI, and what mechanisms will be in place to make sure all communities benefit equally from this new enforcement model?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The drug trade is felt across this Island. There is no community that's not affected by these terrible drugs on this Island. The joint enforcement team – that's why we're bringing it. I think it's going to make enforcement on the rural communities even stronger. We've had the JFO working in West Prince for quite some time, and it's done a tremendous job. This is just going to add to it. It's going to add to the eastern end of the Island.

Anyone involved in the trade here: Whether you're bringing them on, or you're selling them, or you're trafficking them, be on notice because this government is serious about stopping the drug....

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing that is for sure is that residents around Summerside and this whole Island are pleased to hear that the ICU at the Prince County Hospital will be reinstated to its original capacity this summer.

Another thing the residents are pleased about is the fact that the wait times in emergency rooms are consistently going down, in the right direction. There are still a number of questions around the delivery of health care, so let's go to the Minister of Health and Wellness for some questions.

Physician recruitment

Minister, one of the key factors that helps bring down the wait times is having a family doctor to go to and not having to sit in the emergency room. Minister, what are we doing to recruit family doctors in the Summerside area?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank the member for the question.

The question is challenging. The family physician sector, I guess, in physician recruitment is extremely competitive. I think a recent study showed that Canada has a deficit currently of over 13,000 family physicians across the country, so it is very difficult to recruit family physicians to any location.

We have some success at the outer tips of Prince Edward Island this year in Souris and Tignish, which we're very proud of, but I agree with focusing on Summerside.

Again, I think the new CHC which is scheduled to be completed in early 2026 will help us, for a new facility. I think we've seen in Alberton that it helps attract physicians.

Also, another thing we've done is we've expanded family residence positions from five to seven. Those two extra ones are actually designated to the Summerside area because we know that when people have residency placements in those areas, they tend to stay. So, that's another good move for Summerside.

[11:00 a.m.]

Again, we can talk about the medical school. Every time I reach out to Dr. Preston Smith, he's either doing a tour or finishing a tour, so it becomes a very strong recruitment tool in all of our physician recruitment across PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There were some pretty great initiatives that the minister listed there, and the new CHC that's being built in Summerside is a pretty big building and looks like it's going to be state-of-the-art. Hopefully it will attract a lot of new doctors.

Let's go back to that same minister.

Minister, it's been a while since a family doctor came to Summerside to start a new family

practice and took on a new contingency of patients. We've seen a number of family doctors come to Summerside and take over practices. So, people that have been waiting for a family doctor didn't get to move anywhere closer.

Minister, what are we doing different now? What are we doing different, going forward, so that we can attract new family doctors to Summerside to get the patients off the registry?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, another good question. Back to the college; in November of 2023, now allow licensure in the U.S. So, we can accept a U.S.-trained doctor in as little as two days from an application.

I do know that our recruitment team has at least eight trips to the U.S. this year for physician-based conferences, so that's a step in the right direction. We also have a marketing campaign in the northeastern U.S. that's generating some enquiries.

A lot of those physicians are Canadians that couldn't get a residency placement 10, 15 years ago and had to more or less be forced to go to the U.S. with a barrier to returning to Canada. We've taken down those barriers, so I think we've seen that some of the interest is from some of those orphaned Canadians that have had to practice in the U.S. We will continue to do those things.

It's important that we have incentives too. Summerside and that area is a second-tier incentive, so there are increased financial incentives for family physicians to practice in Summerside.

And we can't forget that April 1st was the first day of our PSA, which has been recognized nationally for family physician compensation. We've had some articles, and I know Dr. Michael Green from the College of Family Physicians of Canada has talked about it repeatedly at some of the conferences I had. We hosted a rural physician conference last fall and that was his remark.

So, we're doing lots of things to improve Summerside recruitment, and we'll continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do agree with the minister. The PSA that was signed is a great tool, and we've already seen a number of doctors come. I just hope that it can translate to family doctors.

He talks about red tape, and whether it's red tape in health care or red tape in (Indistinct), it doesn't matter. It's great to see that we're removing it, and if we can get doctors here from the States quicker, that's even better.

Let's go back to that same minister.

Minister, one thing that would be a help for residents in the Summerside area who do not have a family doctor now is having a walk-in clinic that they could access. Yes, I know; I've brought this up every sitting of this House, and it's an issue that still hasn't been resolved.

Minister, is there a way that we can incentivize these family medicine doctors that are coming in to open a walk-in clinic in Summerside, as you have outlined in the past that government does not operate and run these clinics themselves?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A walk-in clinic is an option, but our focus is really on primary care. Obviously, we want continuity of care from our physicians, so a walk-in clinic is not stood up by government. These are fee-for-service physicians that rent space and hire admin staff in order to run these clinics. They're very effective, there's no doubt, but from a primary care perspective, we certainly want our physicians to have access to a primary care provider. So, that is our focus: to support it.

Again, we've outlined the PSA and all those things we've done to make sure that PEI is one of the best places to practice family medicine in Canada, and I think we've done a good job. That market supply is always a challenge, with the deficit that we've had; that's why we have a medical school with those great students that were in the other day. We have to produce our

own, but we're certainly recruiting, and I think we punch above our weight for recruitment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Recently, New Brunswick Power has asked its provincial utility regulator to approve a \$301 million grid upgrade to its power distribution network. Those 345-kilovolt projects for Saint John, Salisbury, and the New Brunswick-Nova Scotia border will have significant upgrades to the ability of NB Power to meet its needs of distributing power to growing demands between the two provinces.

[11:05 a.m.]

When Maritime Electric made a presentation to a legislative committee, it identified issues with the transmission corridor from Port Elgin to Cape Tormentine not having any extra capacity to transmit power to PEI.

Electrical grid (further)

Question to the Minister of Energy: Have you had any conversations with NB Power to have that transmission line upgraded to meet the growing needs of PEI residents, and why wasn't PEI included in those transmission upgrades as New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The answer is yes; our previous minister and I have as well.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Since you've had some discussions, how much do you estimate it will cost to upgrade that line from Port Elgin to Cape Tormentine?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

With Maritime Electric and the Energy Corporation, we are closely monitoring the project that is happening on the other side of the bridge. We will be working with our partners, NB Power. We will continue to monitor this. We will be looking at a transmission – a transformer, actually, that we're looking at in the Memramcook area substation to be able to help the grid here in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: I guess I'm going to add "monitoring" to that minister's portfolio – study, monitoring, and more reports.

Question to the minister: Will those upgrades be the responsibility of Maritime Electric, the PEI government, or NB Power?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Hon. G. Arsenault: I didn't hear the question, sorry.

Speaker: Hon. member, can you repeat that question?

R. Henderson: Sorry about that. I won't do the preamble.

[Laughter]

Speaker: Thank you.

R. Henderson: Will those upgrades be the responsibility of Maritime Electric, the PEI government, or New Brunswick Power?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Hon. G. Arsenault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We are working together in a very close relationship with Maritime Electric, also with New Brunswick Power. We will continue to monitor the situation, and we will continue to look into what we can do.

As you are well aware, the review should be coming out within the next week, and we will be able to have a very thorough look at what's happening here with electricity in Prince Edward Island. So, everything should be done, and we should be able to have a sustainable system for our Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Interjections]

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Hon. members, before I move onto other business, I just want to remind the House that when you are asking questions, if you could refer to a single minister. It is the right of Executive Council to choose who answers it, but when you're asking the questions, you do have to direct it to an individual minister.

So, thank you, members – just for a reminder.

Thank you to the second half of the Morell grade 9 class for being here. Appreciate it. Lots of familiar faces over there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]