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of Prince Edward Island**

**Responses to Questions and
Oral Question Period**

(Preliminary Proceedings)

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No. 27

The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker

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[1:28 p.m.]

[Hon. S. MacEwen in the chair]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question to the Premier.

In the fall of 2023, the Premier was the Minister of Housing. He was in charge of the outreach centre file. At that time, the Premier admitted that government had allowed the use of illegal drugs on the former outreach centre property. He turned a blind eye.

In the fall of 2024, the Premier was the Minister of Education. He knew about the predator, Matthew Craswell, and again, he turned a blind eye.

Community Outreach Centre

Is this the Premier's default position, to do nothing?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I guess I made it just in time today.

The Leader of the Opposition is misrepresenting what happened at the outreach centre when it was up here on Euston Street. In fact, when I learned that clients of the outreach centre happened to be using drugs on a small corner of the property, just off the sidewalk, I made sure that it stopped.

[1:30 p.m.]

As Minister of Education, I became aware of the situation with Matthew Craswell at the same time the public did. There was much that we learned, a lot of communication between my department and the PSB, subsequent to me becoming the minister. That communication has continued.

We have a guilty verdict. The offender has pleaded guilty. The justice system has done its part. The school system is now undergoing an administrative process. The government has commissioned an independent review to find out what happened and make sure this never happens again.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Well, Hansard may have gotten it wrong because this Premier stood up and said he tolerated illegal drug use on the property of the outreach centre.

The Premier is also an MLA representing a city of Charlottetown riding. He has turned a blind eye to the actions of the Minister of Housing, who is very busy using a bulldozer to get his way with the facility on Park Street.

Is the Premier comfortable leading a government that overrides the will of elected officials in our province's capital city?

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

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think you guys and your caucus have to both get on the same side because I know the guy that sits right next to you is supportive of taking care of people, supportive of housing people, and supportive of doing the right thing.

I guess I question why you think we should let people die on the street and not take action to help people. It's deplorable. You're the Liberal Party. If the Liberal Party doesn't defend the most vulnerable people on Prince Edward Island, there's something seriously, seriously wrong with your party. Maybe that's why Robert Mitchell's back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Charlottetown city council and its mayor were elected by thousands of Islanders. That council has certain responsibilities, and they have decided – they have decided – that they don't want the facility to remain on Park Street, but the Minister of Housing said, "The mayor could

say ‘Put it on the moon,’ and I could care less what he thinks.”

Will the Premier please tell Islanders his reasons for allowing the minister to be so dismissive and so arrogant when it comes to grown-up, mature, and responsible dealings with elected officials?

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

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over the course of the last calendar year, staff of the department and ministers of the department have met with the mayor and members of his council seven times. Seven times.

The minister’s taskforce on homelessness on Prince Edward Island – the mayor was invited to take part, and he decided he didn’t want to take part in it because he wanted to be able to take political pot shots instead.

We put a lot of money into the facility that we have up there. We put a lot of effort into getting the staff to the level where we can actually help people; we are helping people. We have a tremendous staff at our overnight shelter who work really hard and are kind and have a really good connection with the clients that we have there every night.

It seems ridiculous that the Leader of the Opposition would support the mayor to move it to Acadian Drive. He wants to just pick spots all over town and say, “No, put it here,” and then he won’t like it, and then, “Put it there,” and they won’t like it.

I put this to bed once and for all because it was the right thing to do. I put this to bed because we need to take care of the vulnerable population on Prince Edward Island.

Quite frankly, I stand by that 100 percent, and I would do it again tomorrow if it meant that we could get people the help that they needed, that we could – these are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters we’re talking about here. This isn’t somebody’s stray puppy; these are people. It’s shameful that, once again, the Leader of the Opposition could do nothing – nothing – but take these cheap political ploys to try to win, one vote at a time, when quite frankly, they’re a disaster over there.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I’m going to, again, direct my questions to the Premier because if I want an adult response, I’ll ask an adult.

It’s been said in this House many times: the days of collaboration are over. We have known that since the beginning, since collaboration. Collaboration was just a political ruse meant to get this government through a short period of minority status not too long ago, but the levels of insults directed from the Minister of Housing towards the City of Charlottetown are beyond reasonable.

Has the Premier demanded that the Minister of Housing publicly apologize to the mayor, the council, the City staff, and by extension, every citizen in Charlottetown?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I just want to acknowledge, as the minister has pointed out, there’s been a long history of engagement with the city on the issue of the outreach centre and the overnight emergency shelter on Park Street.

[1:35 p.m.]

It was a significant move when we were able to move the outreach centre from Euston Street to Park Street at great expense. I think it works well to have the emergency shelter and the outreach services co-located in the same location.

Our commitment was that this was not forever, that we were in search of new locations and we also have a taskforce that’s working as we speak. They meet on a monthly basis to come up with a larger strategy; a strategy for delivering services to our vulnerable population.

But my understanding is the decision taken by council was based on a recommendation from planning experts that this property wasn’t zoned properly for the use there, and it was turned down on that basis – a technicality – when in fact, there’s a larger issue here that the minister has outlined that supersedes, I think, land planning issues in the short term.

We chose to make it a special planning area. These exist throughout the province so that we have control over a certain property. I don't expect this will last forever, but I think that we'll come to a point where we'll re-engage with the City and continue to cooperate with them.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: I certainly hope they do re-engage with the City. Part of their mandate is to not only respect but to communicate with municipalities across Prince Edward Island, not bulldoze over anything that they suggest. Mr. Speaker, again, it's just do nothing.

Question to the Premier.

In a recent letter, the mayor of Charlottetown and the police chief wrote a letter to the Province, and it says:

“The Province through its Department of Justice and Public Safety continues to demonstrate unfair and biased practices that place disproportionate burdens on our city.... Our ability to sustain these efforts without fair and consistent provincial investment has become unsustainable for our city.”

As a former city councillor and current MLA for Charlottetown, is the Premier comfortable with a funding formula that has been identified as unsustainable when it comes to preventing and dealing with crime?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Okay, Mr. Speaker. I think I heard something about the investments we're making in the city of Charlottetown. At great expense, we've set up facilities here to deal with our vulnerable population, where the City has spent very little money. At great expense, we've paid for additional police officers to work around the area to give a sense of safety around that property.

The City of Charlottetown runs their own police force. They're a full-service municipality that should staff their police force properly. It's also concerning that when major crime is a concern of the people of this city, the City of Charlottetown chose not to participate in our joint taskforce on major crime in this province.

Again, we will work collaboratively on solutions to problems within the city of Charlottetown, but

this is a two-way street, and we need a strong partnership with the City.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

From that response, it's obvious that the Premier is comfortable with this model.

Last week, the Minister of Justice said the following to CBC: the City feels “they have adequate resources to do their own work.” Now, this is clearly not the sentiment expressed by the City in their letter.

To the Premier: Which is it? Is the City right in saying that their work is unsustainable, or is the Minister of Justice right when he says they have adequate resources? The fact is they both cannot be right.

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

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

My comments were that the reason they weren't going to join our joint enforcement team was because they wanted to do it themselves. We do not control the Charlottetown police services; that's the City. The City runs their own policing. They underspent their budget by \$2.7 million. That's not our responsibility; that's their responsibility.

We want to ensure that the policing on this Island is safe. We'll continue to ask them to be a part of the joint enforcement team so we can fight major crime and the drug crime here on this Island. We'll always be open for more partners and a partnership with Charlottetown.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Again, it's obvious that this government is not listening. They're not listening to Islanders and they're not listening to municipalities.

[1:40 p.m.]

So, I want to go back to the Matthew Craswell matter. Now, we know that the incident involved multiple elementary-aged children that took place at West Kent School. That school is right

in the centre of the Premier's district, and I know many parents are very concerned about this apparent crime.

Safety of children in schools (further)

Has the Premier ordered a specific investigation into this matter to determine whether the ball was dropped by the PSB, the school, the former Education minister, or all three?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Those are all questions, member, that will be answered in our third-party review that has been initiated and has begun.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But the Premier is an MLA, and he represents a Charlottetown riding, and he lives in the district of that school.

I'm going to ask the question again: Premier, have you ordered an investigation into this matter to determine whether the ball was dropped by the PSB, the school, the former Education minister, or all three?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, very similar questions have been asked numerous times over and over here over the last 10 days, and the answer was just given by the Minister of Education.

Yes, these are the types of questions that will be answered by the independent review. We've got the terms of reference written up. We know that the work will begin soon. We hope that it will be thorough and answer all of the questions that have been raised – the questions that I have, the questions that the opposition has, the question that parents in the school community have. That's the purpose of this review, and that's what we expect it to uncover.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Another question to the Premier.

Islanders have listened to him for a couple of weeks now. He defended bureaucrats and refused to insist on institutional responsibility. He defended a government that did nothing for two years and offered nothing but empty apologies and a promise of a so-called review in a few weeks' time. In the meantime, he offers no answers.

Yesterday, the Premier supported the motion that called for public hearings into the Craswell scandal.

Premier, have you scheduled those public hearings yet, and will you be appearing, along with the Minister of Education and the failed Poilievre candidate in Charlottetown? You know, the one that campaigned on a tough-on-crime platform and the one that you're doing everything you can to avoid her running in the District 9 byelection? Surely, you can have her appear at this public hearing.

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

Hon. R. Croucher: There is a lot to unpack in all of that, member.

Again, I'm going to stand here and I'm going to repeat what I have repeated here a hundred times in this House. The facts are that what you call a "so-called review" is going to be a very thorough review, and when those terms of reference are finalized, I have told this House repeatedly, a number of times, that they will be shared, and they will, member.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre provides crucial trauma-informed counselling to Islanders who have experienced sexual assault or childhood sexual abuse. It's a not-for-profit organization funded by this government, and now, shockingly, we're hearing that those services are being paused.

PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre

Question to the Premier: Were you aware that the province's only specialized sexual violence counselling centre is pausing its services? If so,

when were you told and what did you do about it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I think that these are questions that I'll have to bring back to the member. I think there's probably a minister here that could answer those questions better than me, or not. Sorry, Mr. Speaker; not supposed to speculate on those things. My best answer is: I'll have to bring that back.

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

G. McNeilly: This is an important matter. The centre has informed clients that it's shutting down its counselling waitlist and winding down care for those already in therapy.

Question to the Premier or anybody else that knows what's happening here: How can your government possibly justify that? Survivors in the middle of counselling are being told that they're on their own. Where exactly do you expect them to go?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Yes, I recognize this is an extremely important service funded by government. I'm not in a position, briefed on the issues that you're raising, but I'll speak to the minister responsible and we'll give it the priority and consideration that it deserves, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Question to the Premier. The centre says it's shifting to a social enterprise model offering private counselling for a fee.

[1:45 p.m.]

Question: Is this government's idea of accessibility, forcing survivors to pay out of pocket for care they have always relied on publicly? Have you coordinated with the Minister of Health, Mr. Premier, to ensure no one is left without care because they can't afford it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

No, when we provide services in this province, they should be available to everybody. Obviously, the member is raising serious issues about the delivery of an important service. I apologize that I have not been briefed on the issues. I wish I could give a more fulsome response, but I commit to discussing it with the minister and coming forward with any solutions that are required to restore the services that should be in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much.

I will table the letter afterwards that starts off by saying: "...is placing a pause on our counselling waitlist." It goes on to further say – this is a letter to clients outlining all these things.

Question to the Minister of Health: Minister, you are responsible for mental health services. You know those services are already under extreme pressure. Why isn't your department ready to step in and fill the gaps left by this service pause? Are survivors of sexual violence just another group your government is willing to ignore?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I apologize for the confusion. Obviously, the Women's Secretariat falls under another minister, but I do agree that the mental health services do fall under my purview. That rape and therapy service is a non-profit, and again, not funded through Health, to my knowledge.

The open-access clinics that we've set up on PEI have virtually eliminated a lot of our wait times, with those seven centres across PEI. I agree; that's an important service that we need to provide to Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Question to the minister responsible for women.

In this letter, they're talking about the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre. It's a communication to clients, and it says they're shutting down services. It says, "We're asking all therapists to bring their current therapeutic services with their clients to a close."

Minister, can you explain what is going on? Why are we bringing this to a close for important Islanders that need this service?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. It is certainly a really important conversation, especially during this week, and any day, in fact.

We were notified that they were pausing some of their counselling practices for a period of time. They are looking to restructure to help support to the best of their abilities. They are going to work collaboratively with other organizations, and we are certainly there to help in any way that we can.

Thank you, hon. member.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, maybe the government can say, "Don't do this." Maybe the government can say, "Don't shut down services for Islanders when they're experiencing rape and sexual assault." I don't understand.

It goes on to say, in the same letter, to clients that have suffered this: "Please check our website on August 1st, 2025." That's completely unacceptable.

Minister, will you stand up in this House and not pause these services for Islanders that are coming to us and need this service to continue in the province of Prince Edward Island?

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

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

What I can say is I will stand with the organization to help them in any way that I can. I certainly know their services are extraordinarily valuable for people who are reaching out and need that help. They will still open; if someone needs help immediately, call, and they will help direct them in any way that they can. We will work with them to the best of our ability.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This week, we celebrate National Nurses Week, and also all of PEI's new nurse graduates who are excitedly embarking on their new careers. However, at the same time, we have to acknowledge this government's continued reliance on out-of-province travel nurses to keep our health care system afloat, spending over \$20 million last year with seemingly no plan to slow down. This ongoing trend reflects a growing reliance on financially unsustainable, temporary fixes, and also reveals deeper systemic issues with our health care workforce planning.

Travel nurses (further)

Question to the Minister of Health: What measures are being taken, minister, to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce our dependence on expensive travel nurses and invest in sustainable long-term staffing solutions for our health care system?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

[1:50 p.m.]

Yes, we're doing a lot to do that. This government expanded the nursing seats at UPEI from 72 to 98. We have more than 80 internationally educated nurses going through the TRNC, the transition to registered nursing program. We have the highest nurse practitioner ratio in Canada. We've added another 10 nurse practitioners to our system this year, and we also have had a net workforce growth of 405 staff overall in our health system this year. We're very proud and we're growing our workforce.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to reducing our reliance on travel nurses, other provinces across Canada are taking decisive steps to work towards that goal.

Nova Scotia, for example, has implemented a policy limiting travel nurse contracts to 180 days, with a mandatory one-year waiting period before re-engagement.

Quebec passed a law to phase out the use of private placement agencies by the end of next year.

Similarly, New Brunswick introduced legislation this spring that would cancel an expensive travel nurse contract, and British Columbia also plans to phase out its use of these agencies.

Question to the same minister: Given these proactive, targeted measures by other provinces to ensure fiscal responsibility and strengthen their public health care systems, will you, minister, be implementing any similar policies or legislation to reduce reliance on expensive travel nurses and invest in sustainable, long-term solutions?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Strange questions from a member who was elected based on what had happened at the Prince County Hospital. Two thirds of our facilities that are staffed in rural parts of PEI need to be maintained by these travel nurses. I don't want to shut any services down on PEI; I want to maintain them for patient safety and for our current workforce.

Yes, as I said to the Nurses Union the other day at their AGM, we want to spend \$20 million with them. We don't want to spend it with travel nurses, but we need to maintain those services. We've expanded our workforce. If he has any other suggestions on creating more nurses in PEI, I welcome them, but we're doing what we can to support our nurses, and we'll continue to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, \$20 million would go a long way in our public health care system. I'll say that again, and I'll say it again.

Several other provinces have recognized the unsustainable nature of relying heavily on these travel nurses and, as I've indicated in my previous question, have implemented concrete policy or legislative strategies to build a more stable and permanent health care workforce.

Our province, however, continues to see a growing dependence on these costly, temporary solutions with no decisive plan, which means our dependence and the resulting fiscal consequences will only continue to grow.

Minister, I'll ask again: As other provinces are already well underway in this, will you commit to developing and implementing legislation this fall aimed at reducing our reliance on travel nurses and ensuring fiscal responsibility and instead make these investments in our public health care system?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

The member should premise his question about which facilities he wants us to close because that's what he's advocating for in here. That's what he wants us to do.

Do you want us to maintain services at Colville Manor? Do you want us to maintain the critical care unit at the PCH? I know I do, sir.

We have worked on our workforce. We've expanded the seats at UPEI; it's the second largest nursing class in history that's graduating this week, so again, we are working on workforce.

I know they say I blame everybody, but we created the TRNC program last May and we have 80 international nurses that are coming through our system. Now, we've doubled it. We've seen it in the budget that we're investing more in TRNC so that we're going to double the output. We'll integrate those nurses into our system and help our existing workforce.

They know that we're working on it and we're increasing those numbers. We see positive growth in almost all of our allied health sectors, including nursing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

We have about 8,000 post-secondary students here on Prince Edward Island, and about 1,000 of them will graduate from the University of Prince Edward Island this week.

Convocation is always, of course, a joyous occasion, but behind the celebratory smiles and the pictures lies sometimes a much darker reality of what life can be like as a student on Prince Edward Island in 2025.

A recent report compiled for the UPEI Student Union entitled *Post-Secondary Student Housing Need for Publicly Funded Institutions on Prince Edward Island* tells us that poverty rates for post-secondary students on PEI sit at 40 percent – that's five times the provincial average – and that over 50 percent of full-time students' average monthly earnings go simply to paying their rent.

Student housing

A question to the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population: Clearly, housing costs are at the root of the financial struggle of many students on Prince Edward Island. What initiatives is your government bringing forward to alleviate this situation as soon as possible?

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

[1:55 p.m.]

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

We are very committed – I certainly am – to meeting with our student unions on a regular basis and to meeting with our universities to help support students where we can. Our George Coles bursary will be on the rise again to help students. We'll continue to advocate and help

them find housing when needed, and we'll continue to work with the university on those struggles.

Thank you.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: The George Coles bursary, of course, was promised to be increased to \$3,500 in your last provincial program, and it never happened.

Minister, population....

[Interjection]

P. Bevan-Baker: It rose, but it never got to \$3,500.

Population growth....

[Interjections]

P. Bevan-Baker: It's going to now, but it did not.

Population growth, a significant part of your portfolio, minister, is also a major contributing factor to the housing squeeze that so many Islanders, and especially students, are facing. The trailing five-year average – the prior five years – annual population growth on PEI in 2008 was 126; in 2018, 10 years later, it had grown to over 1,000; and by 2023, to 4,102. That's a 30-times increase – not twice, not 10 times: 30 times increase in population growth.

To the same minister: 40 percent of Island post-secondary students indicate that housing costs were impacting their academic success, and over 20 percent of students have considered quitting their programs as a result. This is a really serious situation for the students, for the academic institutions, and for our province.

What are you doing to ensure and to ease these financial pressures on Island students?

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

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

One of the initiatives, of course, is the George Coles. It is being raised to \$3,500 for our students to help support. We continue to

communicate with our post-secondary institutions, and we continue to work with our students to help where we can. We are working across government with our Housing department; we'll continue to do so and work together collaboratively to help students find accessibility to housing.

I do know, speaking with the university, they are having less and less of a waiting list on their residence in their schools – Holland College being the same – which is promising to ensure that students are studying and having living ability on their campuses, making it close to school and the support systems there for them.

Thank you.

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

P. Bevan-Baker: That's interesting because UPEI and Holland College, of course, have housing capacity on their campus, but it represents about 1,000 units – 12 percent of what students on Prince Edward Island need. It's a very small amount.

Rental housing availability off-campus has declined dramatically over the last decade, and students, of course, are forced to adapt to that in a variety of ways. They are living probably with more people than they would prefer, they're living further from campus, they're spending more time and more money on travelling to get back and forth, and they're working more hours in jobs – full-time students – than they used to.

To the same minister: Housing is an issue that straddles all levels of government. You mentioned collaboration, and unfortunately, relations between the PEI provincial government and the City of Charlottetown are, one could say, currently strained.

What are you doing on behalf of students to ensure that your government develops a more collaborative and productive relationship with the City of Charlottetown when it comes to providing affordable student housing?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

One thing that I'd like to point out: As we all know in here, there's a very active student union at UPEI and Holland College. Our government

partnered with the student union/student leadership at our universities and colleges to undertake a student housing needs assessment. I think it was an important first step – a very good engagement with the student population themselves. They come to government on a regular basis with their priorities, and student housing was one of them.

So, we provided them with funding to undertake a student housing needs assessment, and it's an important first step because a needs assessment is often a prerequisite to access federal funding. I can assure the member that we'll use that tool to access funding programs and partner with the federal government and municipalities to provide better student housing.

[2:00 p.m.]

Obviously, students are suffering from a lack of housing like everyone else, and we'll work towards improving that situation. But I can tell you I'm looking forward to the City of Charlottetown's long-awaited amendments to their official plan and zoning and development bylaws, which I hope will enable better housing options for students and other people looking for affordable housing in the capital city and around the province, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, since Hurricane Fiona, many Islanders have told me they feel uneasy heading into storm season. That storm left people shaking, and it's not something they've forgotten. As summer approaches, there's a growing concern about whether we're ready.

Emergency preparedness

Can the Minister of Justice and Public Safety share how government is preparing for the 2025 hurricane season and how those preparations will help reassure Islanders?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question.

June 1st is officially when hurricane season starts in the Atlantic region here. There's been a lot of trauma since Fiona, and it's good that we keep

being reminded of this. The member and I – even before Fiona, it was Dorian, and the member’s district got hit pretty hard there. I remember touring with him at that time.

EMO has staffed up greatly. They have worked with communities across this Island to ensure that their emergency preparedness is ready. They’ll continue to do that as we get ready for hurricane season.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, Islanders remember what it was like to be without power, fuel, and communication. I know investments have been made in backup generators and community infrastructure, but people want to know what supports will be when it matters the most.

Can the minister speak on how those preparations will help keep essential services running if another storm like Fiona hits?

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

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

I’ll invite the member to the EMO office. Every year, we put on an EMO presentation, and I invite all the MLAs. If you want to come down and pick up the Member from Rustico-Emerald, and perhaps the opposition, too, if there’s room in your truck.... There probably is.

[Laughter]

Hon. B. Thompson: To be all serious, we have a serious risk here on the Island. We lost power across this Island, but through the gas station resilience program, 75 percent of all gas stations on Prince Edward Island now have backup power, which was a major gap in Fiona. So, we’ll see that. We also have designated emergency centres in each of our areas on this Island, each county. Each capital region has designated emergency shelters.

I’d gladly have EMO present to the member and anyone else who wants to join him.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

M. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Communication was one of the biggest concerns during Fiona. For most Islanders, cell phones didn’t work. Networks were down when people needed information the most.

Can the minister speak to how government will make sure Islanders can stay informed before, during, and after a storm if that happens again?

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

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

This is a good question. That was another major gap in Fiona: our cell phone towers had no power, and they had no backup power. Now, our communications companies that own these towers are equipped with backup on, I’d say, 98 percent of the towers here on this Island during an emergency. We continue to have that conversation with them to ensure that cell service will be actually there when we need it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today marks Family Violence Prevention Week. Today is Wear Purple Day; we notice that many people in our Chamber today have purple on. It’s a time when Islanders can raise awareness and show support for those impacted by family violence. It’s an opportunity to promote prevention, encourage open conversation, and highlight the available resources.

Currently, PEI has limited shelter options that accommodate children affected by family violence. This often forces families to leave communities, their children to have to change schools, and families being separated from their support systems.

Family violence

Question to the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population: As the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, has there been any discussion around expanding shelter services across PEI to allow victims of

family violence to remain closer to their home communities and to their support networks?

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

[2:05 p.m.]

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

I certainly, as all of us do, recognize the importance and how critical housing is for those that are suffering with and being victimized with family violence. We do work with our Family Violence Prevention Services to ensure that the services that are offered, such as Anderson House, LifeHouse, and Blooming House – but also secondary-stage housing, because it's not just in the interim. A big part of family violence and helping and supporting those that are struggling with it is long-term so that they can transition out of that life.

What I would say is I am committed to working with organizations with the Department of Housing to ensure that we can work to a place where women and those that are victimized through family violence can have those supports.

Thank you, hon. member.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In January 2024, PEI established its first specialized domestic violence court. This therapeutic court aims to address the root cause of domestic violence through a collaborative approach. It focuses on case management and coordinated support services to improve outcomes for victims and offenders alike.

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Can the minister provide an update on the operations of the domestic violence court and its effectiveness in addressing domestic violence in our province?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, and thank you to the member for the question.

As the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, I'm quite proud of what my department has been able to do with developing the domestic violence court. It's such an upstream approach and a new way of looking at the justice system.

To date, it's a new court, but I think they've had almost 45 cases in front of the judge with all the wraparound services. I had the Minister of Health – I invited him, and we sat through some of the proceedings. You really see that therapeutic approach of getting at the root cause of domestic violence and seeing how we can prevent it. We can't just keep incarcerating people for domestic violence. We have to change people, and the therapeutic court is a first way of doing it.

I look forward to expanding those courts in the future – whether it's mental health and addictions – and going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Clare's Law, formerly known as Interpersonal Violence Disclosure Protocol, allows individuals to request information from police about a partner's history of violence. This proactive measure aims to protect individuals from potential harm when they feel they may be in danger.

In 2023, I met with the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to discuss implementing Clare's Law here on PEI, and the potential benefits it could bring to Islanders at risk of domestic violence. Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Newfoundland have implemented Clare's Law, while Manitoba and New Brunswick have passed similar legislation and are just waiting for proclamation.

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Given our previous discussion on Clare's Law and the adoption of this law in other provinces, has your department looked further into steps towards implementing this legislation to enhance the protection of individuals at risk?

[Interjection]

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question and her advocacy for Clare's Law, and the Leader of the Third Party for her advocacy as well for this.

We are monitoring the other provinces that have it. We're collecting that information and seeing how we can implement it here. I look forward to updating you in the future, and I hope that it's something that really can impact people's lives here on this Island.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, final question.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the minister responsible for women.

In this letter from the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, this was communication again to clients, so they're experiencing this. This letter, for them, is traumatizing. There are a lot of issues that are happening right here. One, in particular, says they will not have the capacity to continue with their current program in this letter.

[2:10 p.m.]

**PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre
(further)**

Minister, if they don't have the capacity to (Indistinct) with the current program, what are you doing? Is this a funding issue? Will you make sure you stand up today and say no services will be removed for clients experiencing rape and sexual assault in Prince Edward Island?

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

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

I know how important this is for all Islanders and those, especially, that need these services. Certainly, the decision that was made is a difficult one.

They are restructuring their therapeutic programs and services to better meet the needs of the survivors in 2025 and to help the supports needed.

We will help with them. It has been indicated it is not a funding issue. We will work with them and continue to communicate to ensure they have those, and we'll make sure we've been working with them so that they can have the communications out to where those that need help can get help. We will continue to work with them.

I know it's hard, and I will continue to help with that.

[End of Question Period]