

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

Chairperson
Mr. James Teitsma
Constituency of Radisson

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Thursday, April 15, 2021

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River)

ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Mr. Schuler, Hon. Ms. Squires

Mses. Adams, Morley-Lecomte, Messrs. Sala, Teitsma

APPEARING:

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux, MLA for Tyndall Park

Ms. Malaya Marcelino, MLA for Notre Dame

PUBLIC PRESENTERS:

Ms. Laura Burla, private citizen

Ms. Susan Prentice, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Ms. Jodie Kehl, Manitoba Child Care Association

Ms. Anna Weier, private citizen

Ms. Cindy Curry, private citizen

Ms. Brianne Goertzen, private citizen

Ms. Brenda Still, private citizen

Ms. Lynn Martin, private citizen

Ms. Colleen Lussier, private citizen

Ms. Heather Ashdown, private citizen

Ms. Melanie Fraser, Munroe Early Childhood Education Centre Inc.

Ms. Megan Turner, Making Roots Montessori Centre

Mrs. Kisa MacIsaac, private citizen

Ms. Stephania Kostiuik, Ryerson School Age Centre Inc.

Mr. Darren Stebeleski, private citizen

Mr. Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Ms. Sue Sydoruk, Red River College Early Childhood Centre

Mr. Mike Urichuk, private citizen

Ms. Renée Cable, private citizen

Ms. Jessica Perry, private citizen

Ms. Jill O'Donohue, private citizen

Mr. Ross Martin, private citizen

Ms. Orvie Dingwall, private citizen

Ms. Madelaine Dwyer, Canadian Union of Public Employees

Ms. Pat Furman, Inspired by Wonder

Ms. Claudia Colocho, private citizen

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS:

Corinna Valdez, private citizen

Phyllis Doyle, private citizen

Janel Wotton, private citizen

Hannah Gifford, private citizen

Samantha Henry, private citizen

Larissa Childs, private citizen

Melinda Walden, Red River College Early Childhood Centre Inc.

Keesy Rodewald, Child Care Parent Advisory Committee

Jana Currie, Laura Secord Community Child Care Inc.

Sheila Argue, private citizen

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Bill 47 – The Early Learning and Child Care Act

* * *

Clerk Assistant (Ms. Katerina Tefft): Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to order. Our first item of business is the election of a Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): I move, MLA Teitsma.

Clerk Assistant: Mr. Teitsma has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Teitsma is elected Chairperson.

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

Are there any nominations?

Mr. Schuler: I move, MLA Morley-Lecomte.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Morley-Lecomte is elected Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to consider the following bill: Bill 47, The Early Learning and Child Care Act.

I would like to inform all in attendance of the provisions in our rules regarding the hour of adjournment. A standing committee meeting to consider a bill must not sit past midnight to hear public presentations or to consider clause-by-clause of a bill, except by unanimous consent of the committee.

In addition, if necessary, the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet again to consider Bill 47 on Friday, April 16, at 1 p.m.

Written submissions from the following people have been received and distributed to committee members: Corinna Valdez, private citizen; Phyllis Doyle, private citizen; Janel Wotton, private citizen; Hannah Gifford, private citizen; Samantha Henry, private citizen; Larissa Childs, private citizen; Melinda Walden, vice-chair, RRC Early Childhood Centre Inc.; Keesy Rodewald, Child Care Parent Advisory Committee; Jana Currie, executive director, Laura Secord Community Child Care Inc.

Does the committee agree to have these documents appear in the Hansard transcript of this meeting? *[Agreed]*

Prior to proceeding with public presentations, I would like to advise members of the public regarding the process for speaking in a committee.

In accordance with our rules, a time limit of 10 minutes has been allotted for presentations, with another five minutes allowed for questions from committee members.

If a presenter is not in attendance when their name is called, they will be dropped to the bottom of the list. If the presenter is not in attendance when their name is called a second time, they will be removed from the presenters' list.

The proceedings of our meetings are recorded in order to provide a verbatim transcript. Each time someone wishes to speak, whether it be an MLA or a presenter, I first have to say the person's name. This is the signal for the Hansard recorder to turn the mics on and off.

Also, if any presenter has written materials—any written materials for distribution to the committee,

please send the file by email to the moderator, who will then distribute it to all committee members.

I thank you for your patience.

Bill 47—The Early Learning and Child Care Act

Mr. Chairperson: We will now proceed with public presentations.

I will now call on Norman Rosenbaum and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. *[interjection]* Moderator has informed me that Mr. Rosenbaum is not present at this time, so we will move to the next presenter. His name will be—Norman Rosenbaum's name will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

I will now call on Laura Burla, private citizen, and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting room.

I'd ask the Laura would please unmute herself and turn her video on.

Floor Comment: I'm here. Sorry, Zoom kicked me out.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, can you get your video going. I can—oh, there you are. Wonderful. We can see you now and I welcome you to this committee meeting.

You've got about 10 minutes to proceed with your presentation. You can go ahead.

Ms. Laura Burla (Private Citizen): Good evening. My name is Laura Burla. I'm speaking here tonight as a private citizen. I would like to thank the members for this opportunity to speak to you this evening, as well as to speak towards concerns I have regarding Bill 47.

I am an ECE III. I have a specialization in studies in Aboriginal child care and I have been working in this field for the past 22 years. I am the executive director of an enhanced non-profit nursery school here in Winnipeg that has been serving our community for the last 50 years.

I have a number of concerns with Bill 47 and its proposed changes to our sector. This evening, I will be speaking to what I feel is the most concerning, and that is the crisis facing our workforce. Trained, dedicated early childhood educators are the backbone of quality. They are the driving factor that determines whether child-care centres are truly meeting the needs of children and families, and our workforce is in a

crisis—a crisis that would be come much larger should Bill 47 pass.

When compared to the rest of Canada and the child-care spaces available for children in their populations, Manitoba is failing. We only have licensed spaces for 19 per cent of our children. That is a huge problem that does need to be solved, but we cannot begin solving that problem until, first, we solve the problem of our workforce.

In order to create more spaces, we need 'qualifee'—qualified, trained early childhood educators. That's how we're going to staff them. And I want to emphasize the key factor here: qualified ECEs, meaning those who have graduated from post-secondary institutions with accreditation in our province. But less and less people are choosing the field of early learning and child care, and those who are already in the sector are choosing to leave. This is a real problem.

The reason for both of these issues are the low wages. Not only are ECEs underpaid in relation to the scope of their expertise and what they bring to society in value, they cannot see a future where wages are going to improve. And that it is a direct result of the decisions made by this province. Advocacy campaigns regarding awareness of this crisis are not new. They've been going on for decades.

Our current government has frozen operating grants and parent fees for many years. The two main revenue streams for a non-profit child-care centre are our parent fees and our government-funded operating grants. With both of these streams remaining stagnant now for a fifth year in a row, child-care centres like mine are in crisis. And it is our workforce, our educators, who are bearing the burden of this crisis.

Their salaries account for 85 per cent of the operating budget for a child-care centre, and those are remaining frozen. We can't even afford to give them a 2 per cent annual increase for cost of living, and that's on top of their unbelievably underpaid salaries. And this is unacceptable. Our workforce is losing trained early childhood educators in droves because they can't financially support themselves and they can't financially support their families on these wages. And that's after completing a two-year training in a post-secondary institution. What other profession has barriers like this?

This isn't a case where, upon graduation, ECEs can't find a job. Centres are desperate to hire them. Most centres in Manitoba are operating on provisionals right now because they can't meet their trained

staff proportions. The case is that, even though these jobs exist, the ECEs coming out of colleges can't afford to take them. They can't afford to live off that small of an income.

This workforce also includes many untrained child-care assistants or CCAs. They have completed a 40-hour course, which is an extremely brief overview of early childhood education. What builds up their skills and knowledge is time in our field; it's working in licensed child-care centres and being mentored by trained ECEs. But we are losing the many outstanding CCAs we have during this workforce crisis, as their wages are just above minimum wage.

Minimum wage is intended for entry-level jobs at workplaces that do not require years of service or skill-building and knowledge bases. Yet, our CCAs, who have been working tirelessly in our child-care centres for five, 10, even 15 years can literally make more money if they go work at a fast-food restaurant. Our trained ECEs, who have gone to post-secondary school, can make more working at a grocery store. This is unacceptable, and everyone in this meeting and across this province should be outraged by this.

* (18:10)

The skilled, educated and dedicated professionals who are charged with the care and education of our youngest citizens cannot afford the rent on a two-bedroom apartment based on their current salaries. This needs to change because it's the reality of our workforce, a workforce that is proven to be fundamental to this Province's ability to both respond to and bounce back from this current pandemic.

Over the last 12 months, the government has routinely described non-profit child-care centres as, quote, independent businesses, end quote, which I find incredibly misleading to the public because we cannot take the same steps and actions that a business would take when they face a financial crisis. If a small business goes into the red, they have options: they can increase their prices, they can downsize their workforce, they can create flash sales or marketing campaigns to bring in more customers. That is what we, the public, think of when we think of businesses.

But non-profit child-care centres have none of these options. Our revenue is fixed, while our expenses continue to rise; rent, utilities, insurance, supplies, materials, all increase annually yet our budgets stay the same, which is why our workforce remains underpaid.

The only thing we can do is fundraise and seek donations. But a business model that depends on fundraising for financial stability is not sustainable, yet that is what child-care centres have been left to face for decades.

I do want to make one very clear point here. This financial crisis cannot be solved by moving this burden onto Manitoba's families. That is what Bill 47 is proposing. A family with two children attending preschool in Manitoba right now is already spending 22 per cent of their net family income on child-care fees. That number is too high, and that is making child care unattainable for many families.

Bill 47's proposed plans are the last thing directors like myself want to see happen. We don't think it will help our centres and we don't think it will help our families. What our sector needs is long-term, sustainable and dependable investment not just from the federal government but from the provincial government as well. We need our elected officials to start viewing child care as a fundamental right of children and families, and that it is a social service that is just as worthy of investment as infrastructure, health care or the education system.

We need Manitoba's government to step up like they've asked us to do during this pandemic. There are other options out there to modernize our child-care sector, such as progressive pricing. That will not only meet the needs of the Province for their fiscal planning but the needs for our sector, for our workforce, our families and the kids.

Bill 47 moves our sector towards privatization. After months of being told that privatization was not the goal for child-care in Manitoba, this bill and the newly released KPMG report make it clear that that is the goal. Publicly funded operating grants going to private businesses, the ability to sell and purchase licences and potential deregulation of school-aged child care is not what Manitoba needs. It will spell disaster for the quality of care and education offered.

Private companies offering child-minding services, such as the example of dance studios given by the Minister of Families, is not quality early learning and child care.

What is quality? It is programs operated as non-profits to ensure affordability, staffed by trained, well-compensated early childhood educators following curriculums based on pedagogical research and best

practices, with small group sizes and licensing regulations to ensure the health, safety and full developmental needs of each child are being met.

What is child-minding? It is warehousing children. It is a large group size staffed by untrained, unexperienced workers for minimum wage. It's what I call the lifeguard approach. Staff are there to ensure the kids all get home safe, but that's it. There is no education. There's no intentional, play-based inquiry. There's no curriculum coming from observed interests. There's no focus on the developmental growth of social, emotional, cognitive or physical development. It's simply babysitting, and it's a place to leave your child until you're ready to pick them up. It's a holding spot.

Accessibility does not only mean the ability to secure a child-care space. It also means being able to afford that child-care space. Privatization would lead to drastic increases in parent fees. Bill 47 would move our sector towards privatization and away from non-profit child care. Families would not be able to afford the substantially higher child-care fees even if spaces do become available. It won't matter if families have more choices if they can't afford those choices.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Burla, just a time check: about 30 seconds left.

Ms. Burla: Bill 47 will not solve the crisis our workforce is facing. Privatization cannot be the answer.

We can look to Australia as an example of the failures of privatizing child care. This cannot be the direction our province takes, and I hope that this committee hears out everybody's presentations tonight and comes to the same decision.

Thank you very much for your time.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Burla, for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Great. I just want to say thank you to Laura for her presentation tonight and, of course, our government appreciates the skills, knowledge and dedication of early childhood educators and child-care assistants in providing high-quality child care in the province. I especially want to thank them for continuing to maintain those high standards throughout the pandemic.

Just wanted to touch upon a few things in the presentation before I get to my question. One, just a reminder for Laura that we have capped parent fees for three years, and we certainly—our government has certainly never referred to child-care sector as a business. In fact, we recognize the challenges that the child-care sector has undergone throughout the pandemic and, in general, before the pandemic. And that is why we recently put in \$4.4 million to stabilize the sector by wiping away the deficit of more than 200 non-profit centres.

We also established a 11 and a half million dollar sustainability trust as a new revenue stream for child-care centres and are investing—budget '21 invests record level investments of \$25 million more per year in the child-care sector than any other government in the history of the province.

And so, with those record-level investments and new funding streams, we certainly do recognize the importance of the child-care sector. We have more work to do, undoubtedly. We certainly do need to build more spaces. We've got 541 new spaces that we just announced the other day coming online in the next year that will be fully funded and more funding for those spaces.

Bill 47 really does address the workforce—or allows us to start to address some of the workforce challenges. And I certainly do agree with Ms. Burla, as she outlined some of the challenges in the sector, and that's why we are proposing to streamline that certification process for early-learning and child-care providers to ensure that the qualified staff can get into the workforce faster and enable that concept of career laddering into the sector, to address the current gaps.

Right now, we know that there's the 40-hour program, in comparison to the two-year program and really nothing in between as a jumping-in point, and we've heard that some of the workforce practicum programs are incredibly beneficial. And that is something that we're looking to utilize more often.

So I just wanted to ask Ms. Burla if she thinks that there needs to be more career laddering into the sector to address the current gaps and if she thinks that workplace practicums could provide part of that solution.

Ms. Burla: My answer is no. We are losing trained staff because of their wages. So, unless you address the wage issue, no matter what ladders you put in place, people won't choose to move up them.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions?

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): What would you say to the minister, who's opposed—who is wanting to privatize child care with Bill 47, with this ideological approach?

Ms. Burla: I would say that it doesn't match the reality of our sector. It's not going to meet the needs of the families. Privatization, the outcome of that is proven through data. Private centres have a lower quality of care and education offered to families at a much higher rate per day. Manitoba families aren't going to be able to afford that.

The one thought that was floated out there recently was if 1,000 spaces are opened up in a for-profit system, that 1,000 high-income families will move to those, freeing up those thousand spaces for lower and middle-income families.

* (18:20)

As someone who's been in this field for 22 years, that's not going to work. That's not taking into account what we do as educators, the bonds we form with these families, the fact that they trust us with their children. They aren't going to willingly give up our child-care centre for another one that they then have to pay more for.

It's an idea, but it's not practical.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister, we only have about 20 seconds left.

Ms. Squires: So, in regards to the privatization that the member opposite is fear mongering on, I certainly wanted to put on the record that in Manitoba we have—5 per cent of our centres are under the for-profit; the Quebec universal model has 20 per cent for-profits, just by way of an example.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Burla, a brief response, if you wish—five seconds.

Ms. Burla: It has been said in multiple ways that we are independent businesses. That's all.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. I thank you, Ms. Burla, for coming out to the committee this evening and for giving your presentation, and also for taking the time to answer questions. Thank you very much.

We're now going to call the next presenter, so I'll ask—I'll call on Susan Prentice, and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. And I'll ask Ms. Prentice if she could unmute herself and turn her video on.

All right. I think I can see you now. Welcome to the meeting. You have up to 10 minutes to present. Go ahead.

Ms. Susan Prentice (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives): Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to you. I believe that's my brief being distributed, so I'll be able to speak briefly to my brief.

I'll open by saying that I think this bill is fundamentally a—dangerous and proposes risky changes to Manitoba's child-care architecture. It's premised on an unfounded belief that our non-profit model is to blame for an inadequate number of spaces, the constraint of parent choices and limited service deliveries—and in my expert opinion, this a wrong diagnosis, making Bill 47 a wrong prescription.

I'll move through a number of elements of concern. I'll start by saying that under what can be licensed as ELCC services in Manitoba is opened up by this bill in ways that are problematic. The provincial press release that accompanied the bill declared that, under proposed legislation, other learning and child-care providers beyond centres and family homes will be eligible for licensing.

And we, I suppose, have to wait for regulations to see what these new classes of prescribed service will be, but undoubtedly, these are monumental changes to the service landscape, and I would ask what these classes of service are.

I'll point out that under current legislation and in all other jurisdictions, it's the facility that's the provider of ELCC, and yet Bill 47 suggests that this will be persons, which I do not take only in the corporate sense. I assume this language is purposive. I find it opaque. It must have an intended effect and I would—and I expect others would like to know what that intent is.

A second point is that public spending on for-profit and unlicensed child care is both inefficient and risky. Currently, under existing legislation, only non-profit corporations can receive grants, and under the new legislation, that presumption will be reversed.

It would also enable grants to be paid to much broader range of recipients. This will inevitably launch a wave of for-profit expansion, and there's reams of evidence to show the troubles of a system with a large share of for-profit services—even in Quebec, where the minister has observed there is a high share, there are plenty of critics, myself among them.

I have researched child-care policy for more than three decades, and I know of no evidence that permitting the extraction of private profits encourages the quality of care.

I'll also point out that, under the proposed bill, eligible parents may receive financial assistance directly under situations where they licensed providers. In practice, this is going to mean public funding directed to the grey market of unlicensed care. I won't even get into the fact that it's not early learning.

I think this exposes the Province to considerable legal liability, and I would ask the committee if a risk assessment has been conducted to estimate the extent of provincial liability for harm to children in publicly subsidized and yet unlicensed care settings, and if not, why not?

My third observation is that child-care costs will increase, notwithstanding the temporary freeze—and I'll make a parenthetical note that, while this is very welcome to current parents, unless it's accompanied by increases in operating funding, it's damaging to programs trying to offer early learning.

We already know that for-profit child care in Manitoba is more expensive than not-for-profit child care. A recent study suggests that it's two and a half times more expensive than our not-for-profit programs currently are. We can anticipate that with a increased share of for-profit services and a diminished share of services that charge the maximum fee that parent choices will diminish as their costs go up. It will have particularly detrimental effects for parents in low income.

Under point four, I will observe that there is no evidence base for the proposals under Bill 47. Under Bill 47, for-profit child care can and undoubtedly will receive public funding. Licences can be transferred, which is enormously concerning. New classes of services are anticipated but not laid out. Persons can apply for facility licences, and this combination, I think, is directly in the face of all evidence about quality of care.

I'll make a specific note about the preservation of assets. If and when a non-profit centre were to close down, it's required to redistribute all of its assets to another non-profit organization, and this preserves public dollars for future public use. A commercially owned program, which we can anticipate will be expanded under the legislation, privately owns its own assets and can distribute them however it wishes. And this fails to steward public investments.

My fifth point is that quality of care will be negatively affected, and because I think you'll hear a lot about this tonight, I will declare it and leave my notes there.

On point six, I'll simply say that under section 8 of the act, provisional administration, only non-profit care programs are addressed. All for-profit commercial organizations are entirely exempted from the provincial oversight, even under the exact conditions that would generate public action through provisional administration if it were non-profit.

So it's effectively a special pass anticipated for for-profit organizations. They can't go into provisional administration. They can keep their assets on dissolution. They can receive provincial grants, and they can charge children and families higher fees.

So in summary, Bill 47 undoes prudent stewardship of the ELCC policy, and for the first time in Manitoba history, it will open up the care of children and families to subsidized profit making and the wilderness of subsidized unregulated care.

It fractures our famous funding model, which is well regarded across the country. New unknown and untested models are being enabled. Public dollars will no longer be protected for the future. Whatever potential benefits may accompany other dimensions of the legislative proposal, the overall risks outweigh them.

And I will say that it's a failure of imagination. Nothing in this legislation lays the groundwork of moving child care towards a public service with greater access, affordability and quality. It's quite backward-looking and regressive, imagining that the stewarding of a private market will suffice to meet 21st-century family needs.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Prentice, for your presentation.

We'll now move on to questions.

Ms. Squires: So, just wanted to, not really a question, but just really wanted to acknowledge the work of Dr. Prentice. Thank you for being here tonight. It was nice to see you, and I do appreciate the three decades of experience that you bring to the table. And I appreciate your document, as well, for consideration after committee for review.

One of the things that you did mention is that the Bill 47 is vague, and I would note that a lot of the work will be done in regulation. It is enabling legislation. And I would really invite an opportunity to sit down

with you and go over some of your points in greater detail, as well as walk through some of the things that we intend to bring about in our Bill 47 as we look to modernize early learning and child care in the province of Manitoba.

But wanted you to know that your points are well made, and I certainly know that you've got the backing of three decades of experience. So, certainly, some considerations there. And appreciate you coming out to committee and look forward to hearing from you again in the future.

So, thanks for being here, Dr. Prentice.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Prentice, a response to the minister?

Ms. Prentice: I do anticipate the regulation review process will be important, and I'd be very pleased to speak with you and your colleagues about it.

Mr. Chairperson: Other questions for the presenter?

* (18:30)

Ms. Adams: Thank you to Ms. Prentice for joining us this evening and for your years and dedication to child care. You have been an amazing advocate for child care, not only in Manitoba but across the country.

The main argument the minister has made to support Bill 47 is it would introduce and allow flexibility such as child care and dance studios overnight and weekends. What does—doesn't the current act already accommodate this? [*interjection*]

Mr. Chairperson: Ms.—sorry—Ms. Prentice, I have to acknowledge you first.

Ms. Prentice, go ahead.

Ms. Prentice: My apologies.

Yes, thank you for the question. You are correct. Under current operating procedures, we do have the flexibility to offer extended-hours care. There's a program of funding that provides one-and-a-half times the operating grant to programs that offer evening, weekends or extended-hours care. And, in fact, in a report I recently helped to co-prepare for the federal government, we singled out Manitoba's policy as a positive one.

So it is puzzling to me that, in discussions about flexibility, the fact that Manitoba already has this has not risen to prominence.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions?

Seeing no further—oh, sorry, Mr. Sala.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Thank you, Dr. Prentice, for being here tonight and for sharing your words.

I just wanted you to hopefully elaborate a bit on what you presume a more highly privatized system in Manitoba would end up doing to the cost of child care for the average family in Manitoba.

Ms. Prentice: Well, right now, for-profit child care in Manitoba costs more, so we can anticipate this historical trend will continue. We know that in any program that does not receive operating funding, a parent will not be able to use their subsidy. So, if you live in a neighbourhood that only has for-profit child care and you're a family with low income that needs a subsidy, you can't use your subsidy at one of these programs because it doesn't accept you.

This is also the case where there are family-home providers that choose to opt out of operating funding to charge higher fees. This makes a reduced pool of services that parents can use.

Of the services that remain, the costs will go up. Right now, parents pay approximately 58 per cent of the cost of the ELCC program, net, and under privatization, that share paid by parents will increase. This will have particularly deleterious effects on low-income parents.

It's also unlikely, if I may, to do anything to help the early childhood workforce because we have no evidence that wages go up in for-profit programs. Quite to the contrary, national and international evidence shows that, on average, wages are lower, training is lower and turnover is higher in for-profit child-care programs. Money typically is extracted in profits and does not go to care for children or staff.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Ms. Prentice, for your presentation and also for your willingness to—and ability to answer the questions posed by members of the committee.

We've come to our five minutes, so we're going to now move to the next presenter.

I will call on Jodie Kehl from the Manitoba Child Care Association, and I ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting and ask Ms. Kehl to unmute herself and turn her video on.

Oh, yes, we can see you now. Welcome to the meeting. And you have 10 minutes. You can start with your presentation. Go ahead.

Ms. Jodie Kehl (Manitoba Child Care Association): Super. Thank you so much. My name is Jodie Kehl, I'm the executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association. I thank the standing committee for my opportunity to speak to Bill 47 this evening.

MCCA is a not-for-profit registered charity established in 1974. We are entirely self-funded and have more than 4,000 members, which include licensed child-care centres, licensed home-based providers, early childhood educators, child-care assistants, students and associates. We are also the largest provincial child-care association in Canada.

The province of Manitoba has been a respected leader in our country for its established, highly regulated and quality licensed early-learning and child-care system, which includes children between the ages of three months to 12 years of age.

There are main strengths within this system that must be protected: regulated fees, government subsidy to eligible families, a predominant not-for-profit model, qualifications for ECEs, operating grants, pension plans, tuition support for ECE students, research-based regulations and the child-care-in-schools policy. These initiatives are examples that have allowed our system to be current, innovative and responsive to Manitoba's children and families.

The Community Child Care Standards Act established nearly 40 years ago enshrines a number of principles that have been used as the foundation to build this system in Manitoba. MCCA supports efforts to modernize and streamline legislation.

However, Bill 47 sets new parameters and a new tone for regulations to follow for the future. And while the regulations are not yet known, in the absence of some key foundational elements in the proposed legislation, MCCA is concerned that Manitoba might be moving in the wrong direction.

So we're asking the standing committee to consider the following recommendations as part of the legislative review.

School-age child care: that the provision of licensing, grant funding, fee subsidy and expansion of school-age care for children 6 to 12 must be included in Bill 47.

Manitoba has long been a trailblazer, pan-Canadian, with regards to its current 13,000 licensed school-age spaces. These regulated programs offer safe, healthy and educational environments for

school-aged children 260 days a year. All Manitoban families deserve to have access to this continuum of reliable, licensed, community-based services.

In addition, the MCCA recommends that the act includes what types of programs will be under the authority of the act and, subsequently, more defined by regulation and, ultimately, licensing. This includes infant, preschool, school-age facilities, home-based providers, group child-care homes and nursery schools.

Public funding: Bill 47 should define that government public funding will only be paid to licensed, home-based or group providers and not-for-profit corporations and co-operatives. Public funds should not be provided to any for-profit child-care centre or for-profit organization nor any individual or service that are not licensed, as cited as an exemption under section 36(2).

There's long-standing global research that supports the high quality of care in child-care programs under a not-for-profit model receiving public supply-type funding. These type of investments allow government to act as a regulatory body to establish quality targets, guidelines, regulations and regulated fees. In addition, these programs are equipped to attract and retain educated, skilled early childhood educators and experience less turnovers.

If we look across Canada, there is considerable evidence from other provinces demonstrating that fees charged by private, for-profit child-care operators are substantially higher than the regulated fees in the not-for-profit sector.

It is critical that a maximum daily fee for not-for-profit licensed facilities is included in the act. This will help to ensure that there's some equity among programs, regardless of where they're located in our province, and that the revenue they can generate is more equitable and diminish the risk of developing a two-tiered system. Accessibility and affordability must be a choice for all Manitoban families.

MCCA hopes that the lessons learned from the tragedies experienced in the many private, profit-making personal-care homes over the last year will not be forgotten as our government looks to expand and inform our system. Protecting the most vulnerable among us—both our younger and older generations—should be of paramount importance.

Before any changes are implemented with the current system, we implore that the Province review international studies that substantiate quality and

sustainability of publicly funded not-for-profit systems versus private systems. If anything, our province should increase public-supplied funding to not-for-profit centres to build a system similar to that of education or health care. There's no room for profit-making when facilities are allocating 80 to 85 per cent of their budget to staff salaries and benefits.

ECE training: under the current act, the wording of qualifications of staff and classification are used. In Bill 47, the wording has been replaced with employees who are certified. Although this training may be promised in regulation, MCCA believes that it should be stated in the act.

Specifically, Bill 47 should prominently include a commitment to strong post-secondary training requirements for ECEs working directly with children. Only educated ECE IIs or IIIs that complete a minimum two-year post-secondary diploma should be included in the proportion of trained staff. Anything less will weaken our established system.

Nearly 30 per cent of licensed facilities are already setting provisional licence for not meeting the regulated proportion of trained staff. All evidence demonstrates that quality systems—quality stems from educated and well-remunerated workforces.

Financial assistance to parents: under section 36(1), eligible parents may receive direct financial assistance. In the current act, section 36(2) refers to the payment of subsidies to parents or guardians. Subsidy rates in our province have been the same since 2013, resulting in less families being eligible for subsidized care. The indexing of these subsidy rates assists more low-income families to be able to secure and afford quality licensed care.

* (18:40)

Providing tax credits or vouchers directly to families for child-care services that may not be available, accountable, accessible or reliable will be ineffective in building an affordable, quality system, nor will it regulate child-care fees. In fact, demand-side funding of a system like this will likely perpetuate unaffordability and inconsistency.

The government of Manitoba introduced the registered pension plan and retire support—retirement supports for our workforce in 2010. This regulation is a separate regulation under the current act. MCCA wants its recommendation noted that this regulation be protected under Bill 47. Other than Quebec, no other jurisdiction in Canada can boast this type of progressive and unique support to their early-learning

workforce. It is integral to maintain this benefit to ensure an existing system—existing workforce is there for the future.

And in—with regards to parent fees, the Province has announced the freezing of child-care fees for an additional three years. MCCA believes in affordability. It's important for families as we continue to navigate through these uncertain times. However, this will result in 11 years of frozen fees.

These are the same fees that account for almost 60 per cent for licensed not-for-profit facilities, which is the predominant model in our province. Since 2013, nearly all other operating expenses have increased. In addition to the operating grants being frozen for the past five years, this is resulting in the existing sector being starved.

From the just-released KPMG report, workforce shortages, together with large numbers of qualified staff working in other industries, suggest that the pay offered in Manitoba's child-care sector are not sufficient to attract and retain a sustainable workforce. In addition, facilities are unlikely to be in a position to improve staff pay.

In light of the Province's direction to freeze child-care fees, the only alternative is to increase the supply-side operating funding to protect the financial viability of existing programs.

Last month a—Probe Research, 82 per cent of respondents agreed that a well-funded child-care system is critical to our province's recovery. Additionally, nearly 80 per cent of Manitobans broadly support increasing funding for child-care centres to boost staff wages. These respondents included Winnipeggers, women, younger Manitobans, university graduates and rural Manitobans. Clearly, there is resounding support to reinforce our current system.

Advocates like MCCA are hopeful that we are on the precipice of a national child-care system. As our federal government moves towards building a universal, affordable, accessible quality system, we anticipate that Manitoba will align with this monumental shift.

In closing, MCCA supports efforts to enhance and modernize child-care legislation in our province. There is room and flexibility for choices; however, the existing system must be supported and not abandoned.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Ms. Kehl, for your presentation.

We'll now move on to questions.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Jodie, for being here tonight at committee, and thank you so much for all the work that you do in the province for families and child-care workers and your contributions to enhancing our child-care sector in the province of Manitoba.

I know we've had some very productive meetings in the short time that I've been minister and I really look forward to continuing on, as there's a wealth of information and knowledge that you've provided for me thus far, and I greatly appreciate that and look forward to future dialogue.

Thank you, as well, for your presentation in written form, so I can take it and review it, as well, and share it with my officials.

I did want to just chat a little bit and ask you a question about that—I believe that's a little bit of misinformation out there about—in reference to the school-age child care and its regulation. And, of course, this bill does not change any of the licensing requirements regulated to school-aged care. In fact, school-age child care will continue to be regulated.

What we've done is we've included a definition of early learning which relates to the specific programming of infants and preschool children. And, of course, we don't—we didn't put that definition of early learning to school-age children. That doesn't mean that the school-age children are going to be in a unregulated environment. The licensing requirements remain the same.

It's just the definition of early-learning child care is for those children who will be in child care for longer hours. We know that a preschooler might be in child care from 7:30 or 8 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, whereas school-age children, it might be, you know, different hours. And, therefore, the curriculum will be greatly differentiated between the two types. But there's absolutely no change in the licensing requirement. So I just wanted to make sure that that point was clarified.

And I just wanted to ask your thoughts, Jodie, on that definition. The former bill—the former act did not have a definition of early learning—and just wanted to know your thoughts on the inclusion of that as a new provision for the first time in the sector, in the province of Manitoba, if you agree that it was vital to include that. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Kehl. Sorry, Ms. Kehl, go ahead.

Ms. Kehl: Thank you, Minister Squires.

I do like that it's been included. I think it demonstrates the acknowledgement that the work that early learning and child care does is foundational to children's development. You know, early learning and child care is fundamental for the first five years of children's lives, and we know brain development is the greatest during that time.

And so the work that we do is not just child care; it is about early learning and child care. So I am—I agree that the definition is—helps to substantiate the importance of the work that the sector does.

And I appreciate your comments about the school-age care. I think that it is a different type of care than, you know, a zero-to-six model, but as a previous school-age child care director for 17 years, I'm confident in the work and the care that we provided for our 184 children. And my program was educational and it served the needs of those 184 families.

And so I'm glad to hear that those—the regulations won't be changed for school age. I think that if we can ensure that those words of school age are in the current—the new act, I think that would help to support that even further.

Mr. Chairperson: Other questions? Ms. Adams, we've got just over a minute.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Kehl, for your presentation and the hard work you do.

The question I have is around school-age programming. I am concerned that because school age is not specified in the act, that it will not be included. So I would just like more information from you on what are the concerns by not having school-age programming regulated. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Kehl, you've got 30 seconds.

Ms. Kehl: Darn, that's hard to remember.

Okay. Great question, thank you.

I think that, you know, programs need to be licensed the same as the preschool programs. If there are no licensing or no regulations for those programs, it would concern me that those children are not getting the same safe, healthy educational environments. It would be a watering down, potentially, of the class of

qualifications. Currently, 50 per cent of staff need to be ECE IIIs—or, IIs, I should say, on a one-to-15 ratio.

We hear horror stories of parent-run lunch programs that look something like Lord of the Flies, with one adult and 35 children. We don't want that. Our school-age children deserve more than that. So we want to ensure that we're protecting that care for that six- to-12-year-old group, as well.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Thank you very much, Ms. Kehl, and appreciate your willingness to answer questions from members of the committee. We're out of time. And I appreciate, also, your presentation.

We're going to now move to the next presenter. So I'll call on—oh, actually, before I call on that, I just wanted to announce to the committee that Anna Levin has requested to present, and her name will be added to the bottom of the presenters list. So you can add Anna Levin to the bottom of your presenters list.

But now we'll move to the next presenter, and I would like to call on Anna Weier, and ask that the moderator invite them into the meeting.

Anna Weier, I just ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on. All right, I think I can see you now. Welcome to the committee meeting. You've got up to 10 minutes to make your presentation. Go ahead.

Ms. Anna Weier (Private Citizen): My name is Anna Weier. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the parent of a school-aged child who was in pre-school child care from age two to four.

I would just like to begin by saying that I think it is entirely undemocratic and unjust the way that the current government has tabled the bills in this sitting of the legislator—Legislature, without providing the text for those—for all of those bills.

This government has put forward a whole host of far-reaching bills in the midst of a pandemic. Everyone is under more stress than usual, and the majority of people have far less time to engage with the political process. And this government has made it more difficult by putting forward 19 of these far-reaching bills without any text when they were initially presented.

The text of Bill 47 was only provided recently, approximately one month ago. And then, even more recently, the government provided the text on their KPMG report on child care. This does not give enough time for organizations, parents and early childhood educators or other child-care staff to fully

engage with this bill that will impact them daily and for the foreseeable future.

* (18:50)

I am so dismayed with this process, and I hope that all the parties will work together to ensure that rules and conventions are changed such that this is never allowed again—to present so many bills without text in first reading.

I'm going to tell you a little bit about my family and what child care has meant to us. Child care has been really important to our family, as I'm sure it is for many families.

Originally, my family wasn't going to use the preschool child-care system. We'd worked out a plan where my partner, myself and my parents would take different weekdays off of work to be with my daughter during the day. My mother had been a kindergarten teacher in the school system and we felt like we could provide my child with a rich environment for her early learning and brain development.

This worked for us for the first year after parental leave was up, and then my stepdad became very ill, and neither he nor my mom could provide child care any longer. It was a very stressful time in our family. We put our name on the waiting list for a child-care spot and didn't hear back from any child-care centres. We had very limited time to be able to find a spot, because my stepfather needed treatment immediately and my partner and I needed to continue working.

Fortunately, for us, a child-care centre in our neighbourhood had just completed renovations on a whole new classroom and we were able to get a spot with them. The ECEs at our child-care centre helped us with so many things at such a stressful time and were well trained to provide great care.

They helped my daughter form trusting attachments with new adults, helped our daughter to learn to sleep on her own for the first time, helped her use the toilet, comforted her when she was hurt or sad, helped her to develop friendships and play with other kids, read to her, taught her language, provided activities and opportunities to play and they helped me and my partner to be better parents.

Child care can be a transformational force in the lives of children and families.

There are many things about this bill that greatly concern me, for the sake of families, children and the ECEs and other child-care staff who work so hard to

provide a rich, supportive and caring environment for our children.

As a parent whose child will be starting grade 1 in the fall, I'm very concerned about the fact that early learning and child care has been redefined to include only children who are six and under. That leaves a huge gap in years from age six to age 12, when children can legally be at home without supervision in Manitoba.

This will lead to school-age child-care programs being deregulated and privatized, and this will also make finding child care for school-age kids even more difficult, more expensive and less accessible than it already is.

Deregulated and privatized school-age care doesn't provide subsidies or funding for children with additional support needs or families who cannot afford child care due to low social assistance rates and an unliveable minimum wage.

With this legislation, this government is putting families in an impossible position, but it is not just families who will pay a high price for this; our society benefits when high-quality and affordable child care is accessible to anyone who wants to use it.

As a parent and also as someone who happily pays taxes so that our government can provide our communities with infrastructure and social services, I'm extremely opposed to the government providing public funds for privately owned, for-profit child-care businesses. Public funds should go to early-learning programs that are only—sorry. Public funds should go to public child-care centres that are accountable to the public and universally accessible, not to exclusive early-learning programs that are only accessible to the wealthy.

I do not believe that taking care of our children should be left to a business model where profits are prioritized over quality care.

I am deeply concerned that this bill will set up a two-tiered early-learning and -care system, when, really, the government should be providing a well-funded, fully accessible child-care program with worthy wages and a deep respect for early childhood educators and other child-care staff.

Manitoba should be working to eliminate child poverty through a public child-care system instead of entrenching child poverty into our public policy.

I am also so dismayed by the lack of respect that this government shows to early childhood educators

and other child-care staff. We have seen in—throughout the pandemic, where no additional operating grant money was provided for PPE, increased staffing needs or supplies for increased sanitation. We have seen a lack of respect through confusing and contradictory information provided to child-care centres by the government. And, in this bill, we see the lack of respect directly in the fact that the government is removing the child-care worker retirement benefits regulation from the child-care act.

The ECEs' pension plan is forward-thinking public policy that prevents the child-care workforce from becoming a drain on social 'servances'—social services when they retire. It also encourages educators to see early learning and child care as a career rather than a job that they would do while studying for a career.

Another demonstration of the lack for respect that this government has for ECEs, as well as the fact—is the fact that ECEs will be defined now as employees who are certified while removing references to quality and qualifications.

I do not want just anyone to look after my child and other children in community—in my community; I want children to be looked after by qualified early childhood educators who understand the importance of play, who know about brain development and who will do what is best for children.

I am also very upset that this bill does not address the fact that early childhood educators and other child-care staff are not paid adequately to take care of our children. I believe that Bill 47 will be detrimental to our child-care system and to families in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Ms. Weier, for your presentation.

And we'll now move on to questions.

Ms. Squires: I just want to thank Ms. Weier for her presentation today.

And just to reiterate some information about the school-aged stuff: so, the new Bill 47 establishes a definition of early learning and child care, one that was never used in the past in law. It was 30 years ago that the foresight wasn't there to define what does early learning and child care mean. And so that definition has been included in the legislation.

And, of course, it pertains to zero-to-six early learning and child care because it is very—it's a very

different program than one that is run for the before-and-after-school programs for school-aged children. And so the definition is there as it applies to children who may be in a centre all day. We know that it's very different for a three- or a four-year-old who goes to their child-care centre, or their provider, and might be there for seven or eight hours. And so that—the curriculum is different than it may be for a child who only goes to a before-and-after-school program.

However, the licensing requirements, the regulatory aspect of it has remained the same. There has been absolutely no changes to the requirements for the licensing of a before-and-after-school program. So just to rest assured that that provision has been maintained. In fact, we think that it is certainly a hallmark of child care in the province of Manitoba.

And we heard from our earlier presenter, Jodie Kehl, who is—the Manitoba Child Care Association, that, you know, we certainly do want to maintain the great integrity of the before-and-after-school programs as it exists right now. We couldn't agree more. And that is why our bill maintains that provision. And so I do believe that there was a bit of a misunderstanding about that component.

Regarding the pension, just a little bit confused as to why you brought up the change in the pension plan for the child-care-sector workers, because this bill is silent, if you will, on that because we're maintaining all the provisions that are not in the act but are in regulation, and those regulatory provisions from the 30-year-old existing act are being brought over into Bill 47. So just wanted to ensure that was presented to you as information.

And just wanting to know if you had any other concerns, given the fact that the pension provisions are being carried over into this—Bill 47 regulations.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Weier, go ahead, response to the minister.

Ms. Weier: Thanks for the additional information.

I am still concerned about the fact that school-aged children are not mentioned nor is funding mentioned for school-aged child-care programs. And so I think, to me, it seems that not including them and just defining preschool child care allows potentially for deregulation and privatization in future and it doesn't entrench funding for school-aged child-care programs.

I have nothing to say about the pension plan, so thanks for the additional information.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Weier, for your presentation and taking the time to join us this evening.

I share your concerns about school-aged programs not being included in the legislation and not being laid out in legislation, so I was wondering if you could go into a little bit more detail. You said your daughter was starting grade 1 in the fall, as is my son.

So I was just wondering what non-regulated after-school programming means to your family?

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Weier, go ahead.

Ms. Weier: Not having regulated after-school programs for school-aged children, I think, is a big problem for many working families. I think most parents who work outside of the home aren't able to take care of their children for the time kind of right before school and right after school, often.

* (19:00)

And just because my child is a little bit older than preschool age doesn't mean that I don't think that she should be in, you know, a regulated and well-supported child-care centre for before-and-after-school care. And I would also hope that those programs would continue to be funded to make sure that they're accessible to families and don't fall into kind of the privatization of child care.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Ms. Weier, for your time this evening and for making your presentation and also being willing to answer the questions and interact with the members of our committee.

We're going to move to the next presenter. And so I will now call on Cindy Curry and ask the moderator to allow her into the meeting.

Ms. Curry, I ask that you can unmute yourself and turn your video on. Oh, there you are. Okay, we can see you now. So, welcome to the meeting. You have up to 10 minutes to make your presentation. Go ahead.

Ms. Cindy Curry (Private Citizen): Thank you, Chair of the committee. Good evening, Honourable Minister Squires and other honourable ministers and members.

My name is Cindy Curry, and I am an early childhood educator and a parent who used child care when my children were young. I have been in this field for 32 years, and I've held various roles over

these years such as front-line staff, supervisor and director of non-profit programs. I currently operate a licensed group family child-care program in Portage la Prairie as well as instruct in the early childhood education program at Red River College in the Portage la Prairie campus.

I'm speaking to you because I am worried. I am worried about the children we all care for and their families that we support. I am worried about the families that struggle to make ends meet and can't afford child care. I'm worried about all the families who have children with additional support needs that can't find programs who can access funding to support those needs. And I'm worried about all the families that can't find quality, licensed care because there's not enough spaces.

I'm also worried about the early childhood educators who don't make enough money to pay their bills and are forced to live paycheque to paycheque, often having to take second jobs to make ends meet or are forced to leave the field completely for a job that pays more. And I am worried about Bill 47 and what that is going to do to the children, their families and those of us who care for them.

I appreciate that this government wants to make our child-care system better, but I wonder if anyone has actually listened to people with feet on the ground working in the *[inaudible]* every-by KPMG, who I've googled, by the way, and from what I found, they all come from a business background. Not one comes from child care, education or any other social sector that I could find.

There has been a parent advisory committee created, and there is a mass parent survey with questions that felt like they were very leading to participants down a predetermined trail. And at one point, there was the minister's consultation table, but that was to focus solely on the bilateral agreement.

So, unless I'm missing something, when have early childhood educators been asked about our concerns, our thoughts or our ideas?

Bill 47 is the beginning of changes. I understand that it is supposed to help streamline language and lessen red tape. But red tape cannot be completely eliminated. We need this act to give us the foundation with which to build our house. We need to know that we have a government that is clear and knows what it is doing to support child care and those who work in the field and who in turn care for the families in Manitoba.

We have a strong—if we have a strong foundation, then we can build a strong system up from there. Our foundation is becoming weak from all the pressure, and I'm not sure how much more it can take.

We all know the challenges of our current system: lack of spaces, challenges for families to be—to afford it, lack of funding for children with additional support needs, lack of funding to run programs and the difficult finding and retaining qualified staff.

Families are stressed and are looking for a space anywhere they can find one. Some are being forced to leave their children in unlicensed, unregulated homes with people who are not trained. Is this where you would want your child? Is this what we want to support? Yes, parents need choices, and we need a system that supports flexibility, but that flexibility needs to meet the needs of families, be licensed, regulated and accountable.

There is no doubt we need more spaces. I receive several calls every week looking for space, and I have to tell desperate parents that I have no openings for them, and it breaks my heart. Creating more spaces is needed, but we need trained early childhood educators to work in those programs.

Currently, many programs can't afford to pay staff fair wages. This leaves us with high turnover rate and many qualified staff leaving the field for a job in completely different sectors. This directly affects the quality of care. Many ECEs have to have second jobs to pay their bills. How many of you have a second job so you can put food on the table for your family? There is a shortage of trained early childhood educators, and I'm worried about the situation that the solution is to get more ECEs trained just to lower the standard of training.

If anything, we should be looking at raising these standards. A watered-down training system is nothing for the quality of care we offer children. When we speak of quality, we need early childhood educators who know what that means. That means building strong positive connections with each child. It means knowing what is developmentally appropriate, and by the way, that is not rote learning and worksheets. This is early childhood education. These are the young kids, and we know that our education—and the research tells us—it tells us play-based, child-centred, inquiry-driven practice is what will best prepare our children to head off to school and for life.

Quality-trained early childhood educators know about the importance of open-ended play and how

children grow and develop in all developmental domains and curriculum areas, which is through play.

We already have a curriculum framework. We need to build on that. Modernization should not mean privatization. Modernization should be making the system better, building on what is working and adjusting what is not. Creating and supporting for-profit programs with public money seems wrong to me. I don't want my dollars going towards supporting for-profit programs where the focus is the bottom line.

This feels like the beginning of a two-tiered system; that is not modernization to me. It is creating a system of exclusion. Manitobans deserve quality affordable child care. Early childhood educators deserve a wage they can live on and stay in the field, growing their experience and then creating long-term staff who can grow and mentor the new staff coming in.

I am a passionate early childhood educator and I am very worried.

Thank you for your time.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Ms. Curry, for making your presentation.

We'll now move on to questions.

Ms. Squires: I did want to thank Ms. Curry for her presentation and for her commitment to early-learning and child-care sector and for probably hundreds of children that you have helped educate and care for in your time in the sector. So thank you very much for the work that you've done for Manitoba families.

Our government also recognizes the need to build a strong child-care sector that is affordable and accessible. That is why this year, in this budget, we've invested another \$5 million and created another 541 spaces. Since we formed office in the last four, almost five years now, we've created almost 5,000 new spaces and have invested \$25 million more than what was ever invested before. So these are historic investments that we are making in our child-care sector while maintaining the second lowest parent fees in the nation.

In Manitoba, the daily parent fee for preschool would be \$20.80 and we know that that is second lowest in—even in Regina, just a short way up the road, a family would be paying nearly \$200 a month more—that daily fee jumps up to \$28.62. And in other places, like Kitchener, that parent fee is \$47, for example.

So we know that maintaining that low fee in the country is very important, particularly more than ever, now that we're in a pandemic and we need to stabilize the sector so that when families return to work in the post-pandemic era and when we're rebuilding our economy, the child-care sector will be there, will be poised and ready to provide the solutions that many families are looking for and help us rebuild the economy.

We know that we need to make investments in the child-care sector and that the child-care workers certainly need to be—attention be drawn to them. We need to bring more people into the sector and that's why the bill does have more flexibility for that career laddering, if you will. Right now, as you know, there's the 40-hour aide initiative that gets people working as a child-care aide and then right to the two-year ECE II level.

* (19:10)

And, you know, really, we are wanting to provide more flexibility. We think that career mentoring and the workplace practicum approach might be a solution so that we get more people who want to work in the sector and stay in the sector stay there.

And so wanting to know what your thoughts are in terms of getting qualified staff in the workforce faster, if you think that there needs to be more entry points into the sector.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Curry, response to the minister.

Ms. Curry: Training is very important. We need a qualified staff. We need people who have been through the training, through the education, so they understand how to provide quality care to children.

And, certainly, being more flexible is fine, but they still need to make sure that it's covering all the bases of the education that they're getting. They need to know the importance of play. They need to know the importance of care. They need to know all the pieces that are built into our curriculum framework.

And my strong concern is that there's going to be such a push to get more staff or more ECEs trained, that the system is going to be watered down and we're going to have early childhood educators that don't have a solid foundation of training underneath them.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions from the committee?

Ms. Adams, there's one minute remaining.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Curry, for your presentation today, and thank you for the hard work you do with the children.

The question I have for you is, would you like the minister to explain what the one-year training program means and would those staff be considered trained and counted in the ratio?

Ms. Curry: Yes, if she could speak to that, that would be lovely.

Right now, it is a two-year for full time and it's—there's a reason that it's two years, because there is a lot of information and knowledge to be gained through those two years. And I'm scared of what we're going to lose if we're shrinking this down to a one-year program.

Mr. Chairperson: Any further questions from the committee? We have 15 seconds. All right.

Well, I thank you very much for—oh, sorry, Ms. Adams. You know what, we only have five seconds, so I'm sorry to not have noticed you quicker. I'll keep an eye out. But we are now out of time.

So, I thank you very much, Ms. Curry, for coming out this evening, for making your presentation and also for interacting with members of the committee and their questions. So, thanks so much.

We're now going to move to the next presenter. And I will call on Brianne Goertzen and ask the moderator to invite Brianne into the meeting.

And I ask Brianne Goertzen if she could please unmute herself and turn her video on. There she is. It's good to see you once again, Brianne. We seem to be running into each other a little more often this week.

But, you have 10 minutes. Go ahead and make your presentation.

Ms. Brianne Goertzen (Private Citizen): Good evening. I would like to acknowledge that I am on Treaty 1 territory, the traditional territory of the Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene people and the homeland of the Métis nation.

Thank you to the members of the standing committee for having me and providing this opportunity to speak on this bill. My name is Brianne Goertzen, and I hold an honours B.A. and M.A. which focused on public policy and gender. But it is no secret that I wear many hats, but the most important role I have is that of mom.

I am a child-care advocate and have been a part of the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba and board member of Child Care Now, which is a national, non-profit organization dedicated—dedicating itself to advocating for publicly funded, inclusive, quality, non-profit child-care system.

I stand shoulder to shoulder with predominantly women who have come before me, calling on the government, both provincial and federal, to listen to the needs of working families of today; in particular, the needs of women and prioritized child care.

Child care is a gendered issue. Women are disproportionately responsible for care, and the field of early childhood educators is comprised mostly of women.

There are several issues with Bill 47, but chief among them is it truly lays the groundwork for further privatization within the child-care sector and, yet again, serves another example of this provincial government turning their noses up to the research and turning their backs to the needs of Manitoban women and early childhood educator workforce.

The pandemic exposed what child-care advocates have been saying for decades: child care is essential and is a key pillar to our economy, family prosperity and gender equity. The pandemic has been classified as a 'shecession,' not just because of the shedding of jobs that disproportionately impacted women but also the voluntary exodus of women as a result of the additional responsibilities as a result of losing access to child care.

As we know, the Manitoba child-care registry has approximately 20,000 children waiting for a child-care space, with the pool of available child-care spaces shrinking as a result of frozen operating funding by this government and the untenable situation created during the pandemic. Instead of taking the opportunity to invest and build our non-profit sector of child care, this government has chosen to introduce this piece of legislation, opening the door to the privatization, which will add to the scarcity, compromise affordability and accessibility, and the child-care crisis will persist, with both women and children bearing the brunt of the repercussions.

When we look at Bill 47, it clearly opens to child-care sector for private, for-profit corporations to begin setting up shop in Manitoba. The fact is that decades of research and international examples continue to prove time and time again targeted 'marketized' child care is ineffective and leads to deteriorated quality and exponentially increases parent fees. When we turn the

care of our child to the private market, it becomes a profit-driven endeavour. So in order to derive the greatest amount of profit, it results in lower wages to ECE workers and increasing parent fees, placing the ability to locate affordable, safe and quality child care out of the reach for most parents and placing the safety of our children on the line.

Bill 47 opens up public dollars to private, for-profit centres. Is this really a good use of public funds? To put it simply, no. Here is one example why: Much like our current Progressive Conservative government, the Australian government hoped that encouraging for-profit child care would lead to reduced parents fees, increased diversity of provision and quality and, perhaps most important, reduced government expenditures. Comparative research showed the opposite to be true. Australia's experiment with the mega-corporation ABC Learning showed diversity of provision decreased, fees skyrocketed and quality was weak. The corporation lobbied to keep standards low while the massive public funds gained by ABC were called a bonanza for business. At least 40 per cent of their profits were calculated to come from government funding.

Case studies in the United States and United Kingdom have also showed that promised benefits of for-profit child care are unlikely to materialize and good outcomes for children are put at risk because the potential child development benefits of programs are conditional on quality, frequently compromised by the pursuit of profit.

If this government truly believes in their mantra of cradle to grave of Manitobans, then a robust and effective child-care policy is part of this. And that must be predicated upon the facts and the reams of research that demonstrate a universal, publicly funded, non-profit system is higher quality, affordable and a good use of public funds.

Again, we have decades of research demonstrating the effectiveness of this model. For example, Pierre Fortin's research has repeatedly demonstrated the effectiveness of the Quebec universal model, and the evidence is overwhelming. And yet, Bill 47 ignores the facts and places ideological, ill-founded reforms at the centre.

Access to quality child care means ECE workers who are trained professionals that are treated with dignity and respect through meaningful compensation and consideration. A universal child-care model allows for child care to be accessible, but it also provides an avenue for women to enter the workforce

at greater rates. And, in fact, Fortin has pointed out, to upwards of over 70,000 more women working in Quebec's workforce than without the child-care program.

A driving force on women re-entering and entering the workforce after children is access to child care. Additionally, access to child care has also proven to keep women in the workforce and without interruption, which directly impacts their overall earning potential.

Fortin and his colleagues also highlighted the financial impact of having the influx of women entering the workforce. They found that the long-term impact on provincial gross domestic income was an increase of around \$5 billion, or 1.7 per cent growth.

If our government is serious about making sound fiscal decisions and wants to ensure that the Manitoba economy bounces back from these unprecedented times, a universal system of child care is not a net-loss endeavour. Instead, it is a net-gain policy initiative, which categorically improves the lives of children and their families, lifting folks out of poverty, as my friends at Make Poverty History Manitoba would attest, and providing them a pathway to employment.

I will close with thanking all of our early childhood educators, including those executive directors and numerous boards that are ensuring the lights stay on for Manitoban families in the face of a government that clearly does not care or understand the important work they provide to the future of Manitoba. My family will be eternally grateful for the quality of care they provide for our child and so many children in this province.

I implore you to change course and place the needs of children and the ECE workers who are shaping the future as the top of mind, as opposed to passing the buck to the private sector, where our children become a profit-generating venture.

* (19:20)

Please, rethink Bill 47.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Ms. Goertzen, for your presentation.

We'll now move to questions.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Ms. Goertzen, for being here tonight, and I do want to just take the opportunity to first of all say congratulations. I believe the last time we spoke, which was quite a while ago,

I don't believe you were a parent. So this was news to me tonight that you are a parent and utilizing our child-care sector. So I do want to start off by saying congratulations. It was nice to see you here tonight.

We do agree with you that a strong child-care sector that supports all Manitoba families with affordable, accessible child care is a priority for our government, for our economy, for our province and, most importantly, for our families. And that is why we invested this year \$185 million in the child-care sector, which is \$25 million more than any other government in history in the province of Manitoba.

And I do want to also point out that we've created nearly 5,000 spaces—541 new spaces this year alone. We know that getting child-care spaces—funded child-care spaces—online is a priority, and we're working through that as quickly as possible.

You mentioned the wait-list, and I do want to highlight some of the challenges that we've found with the wait-list. And I've heard three numbers now, just this week alone, as to what this wait-list actually has, and I believe that there's a lot of misinformation, largely because this wait-list is not managed effectively and is not where parents necessarily want to go. I've heard of many, many families that will put their names on this central wait-list that was created by the previous government, as well as put their names on the wait-list of their child care of choice.

And we've heard, and especially in our EngageMB survey, that parents predominantly want to put their children—put their names on a list at the child-care centre directly and not going through a centralized process, as well as they want to have communication with that child-care centre in which they wish to receive a spot.

So, I thank you for highlighting the challenges with that wait-list, and that is something that our government is committed to revamping immediately.

You also mentioned the Quebec universal model, which certainly was very interesting to me that you had referenced that. I would also point out that the universal model in Quebec uses a 20 per cent for-profit mixture: they have 80 per cent of their child care—is non-profit and 20 per cent in the for-profit sector. That, in comparison to the Manitoba model, where we've got 95 per cent of all our licenced spaces are in the non-profit model and only 5 per cent in the for-profit model.

So I'm just wondering if you believe, with the Quebec universal model, of moving towards more for-profit centres?

Ms. Goertzen: First, I want to thank the minister for wearing a mask this evening. And then I will follow up with, just as Dr. Prentice had said in her comments, there are some flaws within the Quebec model, but the higher infiltration of the private market is a direct result of government decisions that slowly eroded that system.

So I do want to make that point known, as well as the registry was taken offline, so we actually don't have accurate count of how many parents are currently waiting for child care within the province. So, respectfully, there are some differences of opinion here this evening. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Goertzen.

Other questions from the committee?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Goertzen, for joining us this evening, and thank you for your presentation.

Earlier in your presentation, you talked about the sherecession and how that is impacted and is made worse by a lack of access to child care. I was wondering if you could go into a little bit more detail on that and how the private sector—how privatizing daycare will have negative impacts on women in the workforce.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Goertzen, you have one minute.

Ms. Goertzen: Okay. So the private system actually increases the amount of money you have to pay to get your child within the centre. And so, for women who are working, we actually earn less than men in comparable jobs, so we're already starting at a disadvantage, financially, when we go into the job market.

And so, any exponential growth within our expenses—such as child care, which is what we need to gain employment and keep that employment—are actually compromised by higher parent fees and prevents a—creates another barrier as well as this 'shecession' demonstrates that women are actually engaged in more precarious part-time employment because of these care responsibilities.

So if we, in fact, had a universal system of child care that was accessible and affordable, we'd have more women working in full-time employment as opposed to piecing together precarious employment.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much. Ms. Adams. Do you have a quick follow-up? You've got 15 seconds.

Go ahead.

Ms. Adams: I was wondering if Ms. Goertzen could—if she has knowledge on what the Quebec government did to erode the public system to have the private sector play a role, and what lessons the minister could learn from the failures of Quebec adding in a more private model.

Mr. Chairperson: We are out of time, Ms. Goertzen, but I'll give you maybe 10 seconds, if you may.

Ms. Goertzen: Oh, as—again I would point to Dr. Prentice's research. She demonstrates clearly the impact to changes to the child-care system in Quebec within her research.

And I would also implore the minister to consult all of that research that has been peer-reviewed and data-enforced to ensure to make the corrections to this bill necessary.

Mr. Chairperson: All right, thank you very much, Ms. Goertzen, for your presentation this evening, and thank you also for answering the questions posed to you by members of the committee.

We're now going to move to the next presenter and that is—I will call on Brenda Still and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting.

And I ask Brenda Still if they could unmute themselves and turn their video on. *[interjection]* I can see you now, yes. You can go ahead. You have up to 10 minutes, Brenda, to make your presentation.

Ms. Brenda Still (Private Citizen): I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for allowing me to present on Bill 47.

I'm speaking to the committee as a private citizen but also as an educator that worked in the early childhood sector for over 30 years. My roles within this sector have included front-line educator for children ranging in ages from two to 12, as a supervisor of programs for both preschool and school-aged, and as an ECE instructor at the college level here in Winnipeg and in northern Manitoba and as an active volunteer through the Manitoba Child Care Association and the Canadian Child Care Federation.

I view my work within the ECE sector as more than a job. It is a vocation that I am passionate about. I have demonstrated this through continual education, education that has had personal value to me but not

financial remuneration. In 2019, I completed my master of arts from Athabasca University with my capstone work being a study of school-aged child care in Manitoba. It is this topic, school-aged care, that I will be talking about.

Regarding Bill 47, it is vital that the backstory to school-aged care in Manitoba be understood. Organized child care in Manitoba goes back to the 1900s with day nurseries. The purpose of these programs was to assist women who were heads of households with children under 10 years of age.

In 1974, with the help of the Canadian Assistance Plan, the Province established the Child Day Care Program. The focus of this was on infants and preschoolers. With more women entering the workforce, the need for school-aged care was becoming an obvious issue.

In the 1970s and '80s, the term latchkey kids was being used to describe a generation of young children that were being dismissed from school to spend the next few hours at home unsupervised. During this era, several charity groups started offering lunch and after 4 o'clock programs, but these were sparse. The documents from the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and the Manitoba Legislature from 1975 to 1980 illustrate the pressure that was being applied to fund school-aged children at the same level as preschool children.

In 1980, the door to funded school-aged care opened a crack when the budget included money to be used to meet the needs of families with school-aged children. Over the next few years, there was a great deal of activity in relation to child care for all children up to 12 years as the Province and this child-care sector geared up for the 1983 Community Child Day Care Standards Act. With this new act, the care of school-aged children was under the same umbrella as their younger peers.

I share this story with you to help you understand that historically there has been a bias within this government's system towards child care for children under the age of six compared to children in the elementary grades. Six-year-old children and their families do not cease needing quality child care—quality child care—simply because they have moved from kindergarten to grade 1.

My concern for the future of school-aged care has been fueled by a recent engage Manitoba survey, Early Learning and Child Care Modernization. This survey was intended to collect the thoughts about

child care from Manitoba families. I quote question 14 of the survey: To what extent do you agree or disagree that early learning provided by a licensed child-care facility is more important for younger children ages zero to six than for school-aged children ages seven to 12 who generally attend school full-time? To me, this question demonstrates a strong favouritism towards licensing care for preschool children over their school-aged peers.

* (19:30)

As someone who has helped navigate families through the transition from a preschool program into a school-age program, I can tell you that until a parent is facing down the panic of not having quality child care for their child once their kindergarten class is dismissed for the last time in June, they do not have the qualifications or knowledge to respond to this type of question.

School-aged children are still children. Manitoba has an Early Learning and Child Care Program that has served Manitoba families for over 35 years. This program has evolved and grown as the science of early childhood has expanded our appreciation of child development.

Manitoba's early-learning and child-care curriculum framework for preschool centres and nursery school is an excellent example of how the ministry of families has utilized this research to modernize our ELCC system.

What I am extremely disappointed in is how the school-age portion of the ELCC program has been allowed to stagnate, considering the evolving understanding of the psycho-social development of school-aged children. If, as the minister has stated, school-age care will continue to be funded, I would challenge the committee to develop a definition to be included in this bill.

When people think about the extraordinary growth that has happened in childhood, they think about birth to five years but there is equal dynamic growth that occurs in the—in middle childhood. When a child enters their grade 1 class, they are still very dependent on their adults to guide them. Grade 1 children that attend the licensed ELCC program I work at have an advantage over their peers.

Most of our grade 1 children start out as kindergartners in our preschool program. This gives them the opportunity to spend some of their summer break, which would be seven to nine hours a day, between kindergarten and grade 1 with one of—with us in the

school-age program. The shock of transitioning to grade 1 and school age is reduced, and both child and parent enter grade 1 with more confidence.

In preparation for this presentation, I gathered data on school-age care programs across Canada. The question I wanted to answer was: what are the qualifications needed to work within a school-age program in each province or territory in Canada.

What I discovered was Manitoba has some of the highest standards for school-age educators in this country, currently requiring 50 per cent of the educators to be ECE IIs, which means they have a minimum of a two-year diploma. Minister Squires has stated that deregulation of school-age care spaces is not planned but this does not bring me comfort because of the language around qualifications of those who work in the sector.

What I am most worried about is that Bill 47 will reduce the educational standards of school-age educators in hopes to save money. This is demonstrated by the Quebec model, which does not include school-age care and is left to school boards to—and schools to independently generate before-and-after-school care for the children ages six to 12.

This might—the idea of reducing the qualification standards might look like a great way to save money but not all children come equipped with well-developed social skills, self-confidence and self-regulation. It is important to illustrate what happens within the school-age programs when part of the education–educator team has extensive knowledge in relation to child development.

I will share with you how my education and years of experience support the educators I work with, half of whom meet the standard of child-care assistants. The educator recognizes that a particular child is struggling to control their emotions but they're not sure what to do.

I take this opportunity to teach about frustration tolerance and how all people's emotional regulation can be day and event specific. We create a plan to increase the child's capacity to tolerate frustration and I provide them with how–ideas on how to build connections with this child. All these skills are transferable between all children.

If the expertise of how to support a variety of children's needs is not within the team of educators, that child and their family are at risk of losing their child-care space. Child care is vital to the economic

well-being of most families with children under 12 years of age.

Without ECEs with advanced training in child development, the educator team will only be as strong as their most knowledgeable staffperson. Currently, preschool programs require two-thirds of the team and school-age requires half, 50 per cent. It is imperative that this committee is not tempted to think reducing qualifications will produce financial savings. The quality of early learning and child care for both preschool and school-aged children are strongly linked to the standards and relevance of education the practitioners have.

The question this committee must consider, is early learning and child care in Manitoba about high-quality learning and growing opportunities for children ages zero to 12, or is it about custodial care, a place for children to be housed while their parents are at work?

Right now, our Province is wanting to modernize child care. If school-aged care is not respected as a critical piece of our ELCC programs, Bill 47 will take us back in time and not serve us well in the future.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Still, for your presentation

We'll now move on to questions.

Ms. Squires: Well, I just want to start off by saying thank you so much to Ms. Still for your very detailed and passionate presentation and for that history of school-aged programming in our province. That was very insightful.

And also, I haven't heard that phrase, latchkey kids, in a long, long while. That is certainly a phrase that I was familiar with, you know, in my early years in my era that I grew up in. And very grateful that we no longer have a society of latchkey kids.

I'm in full agreement with you in that school-aged programming is—in our child-care centres is equally important as early—as the early-learning and child-care centres are. Even though they're providing different care, different ages and different times, that curriculum and that structure is vitally important.

And I can assure you that while the bill does include a definition of early learning as it pertains to the younger cohorts—the zero to five—and isn't prescriptive in a definition for school-aged programming, it's certainly something that I would be

willing to include in the bill in regulation and would certainly wonder—would like to ask you if you have a definition that you would like to see included.

Ms. Still: Thank you, Minister. Right off the top of my head, I wouldn't be able to generate a definition for you, but I would certainly be more than willing to supply to the committee and to you, Minister, something in writing in regards to that.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Still.

A follow-up from the minister?

Ms. Squires: Just want to say thank you so much for that willingness. And I apologize; I did not mean to put you on the spot like that. I know it's impossible to come up with something right off the top of your head. I didn't mean to put you on the spot. But thank you for your willingness to work with me and my department, and we'll reach out, and let's find a definition that you're comfortable with for consideration.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Still, any response to the minister?

Ms. Still: Yes. I'm more than willing to jump in and help out however is needed because, as I stated, this is a vocation, it isn't just a job.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Still.

Other questions from members of the committee?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Still, for joining us this evening, and your presentation was really wonderful.

I was just wondering if you would like to see the minister protect school-aged programming within the legislation and not just regulation which can be changed with a stroke of a pen at the minister's whim.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Still, would you like to respond?

Ms. Still: Yes, thank you. I think it is vital that school-aged child care is protected within legislation.

I would like to make a point that she's talking about the quality or the need being less. That's not true. I connect on a daily basis with the teachers and the other professionals within the school. Building up a strong plan for the children that work within and are better in that school and then attend our program; it's called a seamless day for a reason. Those children start off with us. We send them to school. I meet with them after school. I have connections with those classroom teachers, and they have a seamless day. So

a professional practitioner that can navigate all of that is vital.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Still.

Further questions from members of the committee?

All right, seeing none, I thank you very much, Ms. Still, for taking the time to join us this evening and for making your presentation and also for answering a few questions. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move on to the next presenter. So I'd like to call on Lynn Martin, private citizen, and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting.

I'd ask Lynn Martin if they could unmute themselves and turn their video on. All right, I think I can start to see you. There you are.

* (19:40)

It is good to see you, Lynn Martin, and you are welcome to this committee meeting. You have up to 10 minutes to make your initial presentation. Go ahead.

Ms. Lynn Martin (Private Citizen): Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to influence the decisions that impact the future of Manitoba through this democratic process.

I'm not a politician or a public speaker. I'm an early childhood educator with over 25 years' experience in nearly every aspect of the field. I'm currently the director of a nursery school and school-age program in Thompson. I feel like this is where I have the greatest impact.

Early learning and child care has historically been a women's issue, and despite the fact that many studies have shown that investment into early learning has a tremendous effect on our education, justice and social services sectors, it continues to be promoted as a women's issue.

As reported by the Centers for Disease Control, and I quote, the first eight years of a child's life builds a foundation for future health and life success. Thus, the cumulative and lifelong impact of early experiences, both positive and negative, on a child's development, can be profound.

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit shared The Economics of Early Childhood Investments report, published in 2014 by the US government. In this document, it's suggested that expanding early-learning initiatives would provide benefits to

society of roughly \$8.60 for every dollar spent by the time these children are adults.

Early-learning programs assist families in identifying developmental anomalies and implementing interventions sooner, thereby better preparing the child for school with less need for support in the classroom. Children that attend quality early-learning and child-care programs are more likely to access higher education and earnings as adults and are less likely to require the use of social assistance programs and enter the justice system.

Yet here we are, seven years later, with cuts to early learning. I don't know about you, but I'd rather invest my money on building a child up than fixing a broken one.

Section 3, subsection (c) of Bill 47, The Early Learning and Child Care Act states that the purpose of the act is to, quote, provide funding to ensure quality and accessibility of early-learning and child-care services, end quote. However, 70 per cent of the operating grant from the program I manage has been slashed by this government. A cut like this will have a negative impact on the quality and accessibility of the program we provide. Operating grants in Manitoba have not increased since 2016—five years—despite the ever increasing cost of operating these programs.

Parent fees have been frozen for eight years, and this government is committing to another three. While it is nice to boast that Manitoba has the second lowest fees in the country, it is at the expense of the quality of the programs we offer, and Manitoba children deserve better.

The current funding model for early learning and child care does not take into account the unique issues outside the Perimeter. Northern regions have longer, colder winters, equating to high overhead costs as well increased costs of supplies due to shipping. Are you aware that the Gillam child-care centre cannot recruit staff—qualified or not—from outside of Gillam because there's no housing—none. Housing is reserved for Hydro employees only. When they do manage to hire someone from inside the community, they face the issue of training. None of the colleges in Manitoba offer early childhood courses through distance education in a timely manner, and UCN's workplace training program only has an intake every two years.

One of the biggest barriers to accessing—to accessibility for families in the North is reliable public transportation. The City of Thompson runs two public transit buses that are frequently reduced or not

operational due to mechanical issues. Cab fare to drop off and pick up children from the areas where housing is affordable for these families would be about \$30 per day. How does Bill 47 address these issues?

Section 4, subsection 4 promotes inclusion, respect and accommodating diversity in early-learning and child-care programs. If you haven't spent much time in an early-learning and child-care program, I'm not sure you completely understand what this looks like. Let's take the program that I have here in Thompson. This program services 70 children, two to six years of age, on a weekly basis. We have three rooms that have 10 children and one staff. That's the ratio for nursery school: one to 10.

Based on my current enrolment, which is a bit low because of COVID, 35 per cent of these children are immigrant children, 10 per cent are children in care, 8 per cent have additional support needs, two are waiting for a diagnosis, and 46 are developing as expected.

Now, imagine your early-learning room: toys, tables, chairs, books, art supplies. Your 10 children are arriving, and you have all these great activities planned. Three to four of them are now crying because their parents left and they're scared and overwhelmed and don't speak English.

One child is a child in care and is often aggressive and pushes others to get the toys they want. One has additional support needs—autism, significant developmental delay or severe ADHD—or is waiting for such a diagnosis, plus our four to five typically developing children.

ECEs are amazingly skilled and caring people, but how can one person provide a quality program in this situation? And, you know, even our so-called typical children need extra support from time to time.

I'm sure many of you are thinking that you would call a co-worker for support. Remember that 70 per cent cut in operating grant? There is no more support.

Funding for quality programs must take into account the individual needs of all children and the realistic ability of a human being to be able to manage the needs of all children.

ECEs are often the parents' first contact when it comes to the development of their children. It's important that ECEs create trusting, respectful relationships with all families to guide and support the

parents and empower them to become strong advocates for their children.

Early childhood educators and child-care assistants do not just babysit children, and their qualifications must reflect that. Micro-credentials or a reduction in the qualifications for an early childhood educator would discredit the field, and I fear that this is where the government is headed in section 25 and 26.

It's important to note that early childhood educators are well versed in child development and developmentally appropriate experiences for children, and the wages and recognition they receive should reflect that. There is no mention of wage support or pensions in this bill. Recruiting trained staff will be next to impossible without it.

Manitoba needs child care to work, but also to ensure a future of emotionally intelligent, capable Manitobans to carry on the Province's goals.

In section 32(1), the act no longer specifies that grants will be provided to non-profits and co-operatives. This leaves the door open to support for-profit centres. Have we not learned anything from the privatization of long-term care?

Profitable care is an oxymoron, and it has been made clear, especially during the COVID pandemic, that profits will supersede care, and this puts not only the quality of the program but the actual safety of the children at risk.

I, for one, will never support a profit-support profit in the care of another human being while riding the backs of the provincial coffers.

This government eliminated the enhanced nursery school grant on the grounds that it created a two-tier system but is in favour of allowing private early learning and child care for the wealthy and a public system for the blue collar workers.

This is not the Canadian way. This is not the ideology of a universal child-care system where no child gets left behind.

I appreciate that subsidy for nursery school programs is available for families regardless of employment status, but the financial assistance must eliminate all barriers to attending these programs and ensure all children have access and opportunity.

I will leave you today with one thought: when you read Bill 47, when you speak about Manitoba's child-care system, can you confidently say that this is what

your son, daughter, niece, nephew or grandchildren deserve?

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Lynn Martin, for your presentation.

We'll now move on to questions.

Ms. Squires: Thank you, Lynn, for your presentation, and thank you for the service that you provide each and every day to the children of Manitoba as you work in Thompson in the child-care sector.

* (19:50)

Really appreciate your presentation and some thoughts about Bill 47 and about the importance of the sector in the province of Manitoba.

And we certainly do agree that a strong, stable child-care sector is integral to Manitoba—to many aspects of our society, whether it be our economy or our—the wellness and our way of life here in Manitoba. And it certainly does deserve to be protected.

I wanted to mention—or to—just to highlight that you'd mentioned the silence about the pension plan in the act, and it is currently in regulation and it certainly will be carried over in regulation and so, that there are certainly no changes in that regard.

Our government agrees that we need to make strong investments in a accessible public child-care system. That is why, this year alone, we've invested \$185 million in the child-care sector and 95 per cent of all those spaces are non-profit. Only 5 per cent of the licensed spaces that in—that are in the province right now are under that for-profit model.

We also know that creating more child-care spaces is something that is integral, and that is why we've created nearly 5,000 new spaces in the last five years. This year's budget created 541 new additional spaces to come online in the coming year to serve families.

We know that we need to stabilize the sector. Right now there is currently 4,600 vacancies in child care throughout the province, whether you're, you know, in Winnipeg or in rural Manitoba; it's a mix. It doesn't differentiate by region, but as a whole, there are 4,600 vacancies.

And—but we know that that is a strong anomaly. That's never happened before in our province and we know that when the pandemic is over and Manitobans get back to work in full capacity, that these vacancies

will be utilized and eliminated and, once again, we will be needing to ensure a robust child-care sector that can be reflective of the needs and adaptive. And so that is certainly what our intent is with Bill 47 and really wanting to make enhancements.

I—because you are somebody who works in the sector—just wanted to hear your thoughts. Right now, as you know, we've got the entry point into the sector, which is the 40-hour training program to come in and be an aide, and then it goes up to the two-year ECE and then a four-year ECE III.

Wondering if you have any thoughts about the co-workers that you're working with or your education that you've received, if you think that there's perhaps a greater enhancement of a workplace practicum program that could be utilized in the province to entice more people coming into the sector, and what are some strengths of the sector right now and what can we work on.

Mr. Chairperson: Lynn Martin, a response to the minister?

Ms. Martin: Well, we already have practicum students coming into our centres, and while my staff are amazing, I don't think that they have the time—given that they care for 10 children on their own—to mentor somebody who doesn't have the theory background required to do the job.

The ECE program needs to remain at two years or higher. I do think that a longer mentorship period after they've received the theory background is important, but in order to recruit and retrain—and retain staff, we need to pay them wages. Staff cannot be working two jobs just to make ends meet.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions? Ms. Adams, we're at about 40 seconds.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Martin, for your presentation. Also, thank you for the great work you do at Kiddies Northern.

The question I've got is: Can you say how the nursery grant program cut has affected your centre?

Ms. Martin: Well, we have had a cut of 70 per cent. Therefore, we need to double our parent fees in order to make up that deficit. This is the time of year where we currently do our enrolment. Typically, we are full by this time for the upcoming year. At this point, because of the cost of the program, I still have 20 open spaces.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Lynn Martin, I thank you very much for your presentation and for your willingness to answer the questions that were posed to you.

And I will now move on to our next presenter. So I'm going to call on Heather Ashdown and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. And, Heather Ashdown, I ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on.

I'm afraid Heather Ashdown is not in the meeting, so we will move her name to the bottom of the list.

And we'll now call the next presenter, which is Colleen Lussier, and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. And, Colleen Lussier, I'd ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on.

All right. I can see you now. So, welcome to the meeting. You've got up to 10 minutes. Go ahead and make your presentation.

Ms. Colleen Lussier (Private Citizen): Good evening. My name is Colleen Lussier, and I want to thank the standing committee for allowing me the chance to speak tonight.

I'm here tonight speaking as a mother of two children who are currently enrolled in full-time child care and KinderCare, respectfully, and as a ECE III who is a director of a 100-space infant and preschool program.

While I am happy the current government is taking a close look at child care in Manitoba and wanting to make changes to support all Manitobans, I'm worried that they are going about it all wrong with the recent creation of a parent advisory committee for the Province, the survey sent out to Manitobans about their child-care needs, yet nothing asking the front-line staff, the people who are working every day with the background and knowledge of the early-learning field, what they feel should be changed.

Minister Squires has said Bill 47 will expand supports that better meet the diverse needs of families, especially those most in need of early-learning and child-care services. The mention of educators in Bill 47 is few and far between. The wording actually refers to educators as employees who are certified.

How will knowledgeable early childhood educators meet certification process under the bill? Will their two-year diploma equal the new streamlined certification process for early-learning and child-care providers that Minister Squires has spoken about?

Working in child care myself, as well as having my children be provided the most amazing start in their early-learning programs, it's clear that Bill 47 missed the mark on what should be at the centre of any speak surrounding early years: the educators.

These people spend more time with our children than we do. They set the foundation for learning as they educate children through play, they guide and teach social and emotional skills, they build bonds that will last for the years to come and allow children a safe place to test their boundaries cognitively, physically and emotionally. The first five years in a child's life are critical for brain development, and quality early learning is key to this.

Manitoba currently has qualifications that each centre must meet for trained staff. I know of many centres who have requested exemptions from their province on their licence because they do not meet the proportion of trained staff. It is 66 per cent in preschool, which, when you think about it, is not very high. It equals about one trained staff per group of 16. So if you have two educators in a classroom, one has to be trained.

The reason they do not meet the proportion is because educators are leaving the field at an alarming rate. If we go back to the idea from Bill 47 of streamlining educators, how are you going to retain them? The reason they are leaving is wages. There have been wonderful educators who provide quality care structured and catered to each individual child's needs who have left because they make \$18.11 an hour—and that's a high end of the wage—after they have attended post-secondary for a two-year diploma.

The MCCA has done the work and, in 2007, retained People First HR Services to provide professional assistance in establishing a market-competitive wage scale. This wage scale was created based on job duties and education requirements for employment in the early-learning field.

The \$18.11 hour wage offered to ECEs right now—that's on the 2014 scale, a wage scale from seven years ago. The 2021 wages scale states that an ECE with base experience should be offered \$20.77 an hour based on inflation and comparable jobs.

I can tell you, as a director, there is no way that I can pay that. Even as supervisors, they do not make this wage, as it is just not in the budget.

These educators are relied on to be current with curriculum. They need to be able to speak to professional partnerships such as speech therapists,

occupational therapists and professionals within the medical field about children in their care with additional support needs.

* (20:00)

They need to be able to have relationships with different family dynamics and understand the way each of them work. They need to recognize the needs of each individual child in their group and they need to be a mentor to the peers or the students in their program. They're an ear for parents as well as a source of advice, and they wear so many other hats. They are truly superheroes. They do all of this while providing quality care.

As a director, retaining these educators have become increasingly difficult, as jobs that require little or no experience can offer them a more enticing wage, and as much as they love the field, love doesn't pay the bills.

Bill 47 wants to create more spaces, but who is going to work in these spaces to keep the quality we need to have trained staff members? However, there is numerous open jobs for ECEs in the province because, again, educators are leaving the field.

I agree Manitoba needs more spaces, as I get countless calls each day of parents begging for child care and I have to turn them away. I can't imagine how the new spaces will be staffed or, even if they have evenings and weekends, how that will even be possible for staffing. As I said, educators are leaving the field.

With no sign of increase in funding from parent fees or operating grants, how are staff members supposed to retain these amazing educators? Non-profit, licensed centres only have two revenue streams and they are handcuffed by the government. Appreciation weeks, gift cards to Tim's and thank yous only go so far. There is no incentive to go to school for these educators, so they stay as CCAs making minimum wage and using this as a stepping stone for something better.

I'm thankful every day for the educators at my centre who stay and provide quality child care and are currently, in the words of Minister Squires, meeting the diverse needs of families, especially those most in need of early-learning and child-care services.

Without a direct investment into the existing early-learning and child-care system, facilities are unable to attract and retain the highly skilled, knowledgeable, trained ECEs to provide quality early

learning and care. This devalues parents' expectations for the type of care their children deserve. A year after the onset of the pandemic, the sector has been there for the province and for Manitobans. It is critical that existing programs receive increased funding so that they can continue to exist. There would be no economic recovery without child care and there will be no child care without the funding it needs.

The current government has invested \$185 million to help ease the financial burden placed upon the centres. However, obtaining these grants are difficult. The margins to qualify for these grants are extremely small and many of them are so specific and cater to niche markets. Many centres do not qualify for these funds. Without access to the money allotted to child care, I ask the current government where is it going? Is there data on how many centres have been able to access these funds? As nice as the grant opportunities are for each centre, it's a drop in the bucket of a stack of overwhelming bills that each non-profit is facing.

In closing, I ask the committee to re-evaluate Bill 47. As I said, child care in Manitoba definitely has room for improvement, but let's not abandon our current model, which is providing quality care day in and day out.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Lussier, for your presentation.

And now we'll open it up for questions.

Ms. Squires: I just wanted to thank you very much, Ms. Lussier, for being here and I wanted to just say how incredibly grateful I am for the work that you do on a daily basis with serving the families in your community. Appreciate your presentation here. And you talked a little bit about the consultation and the input that we've received thus far.

And you're right; we do have the Parent Advisory Council. And I do want to take a moment to thank the members of that committee who have worked incredibly hard thus far and continue to work. We met as recently as last night for another two-hour meeting and receiving input from them.

We did the EngageMB survey and heard from 4,500 Manitoba families on their requirements and their thoughts on early-learning and child-care sector reform and modernization.

And then, most recently, we have a ministerial consultation table, which is based—that is sector-

driven and the folks around the table that are working through initiatives with me are sector experts and directors and providing a variety of input.

And in regards to the qualifications, of course, that is something that we're consulting on a variety of ideas, and that will be, certainly in any—in regulation. That's where it currently is and will remain in regulation.

But we'll be certainly looking to you for your feedback and your input into that as we develop those regulations and then put those out on a 45-day consultation. So I will—I'll remember to ensure that members that have presented at this committee are invited to provide that input at that later stage.

Just, really—again, not really a question, just confirming that we do have the same vision of creating a strong sector. That is why recently—as recent as last week—we did announce more money for more spaces, and certainly wanting to continue to gather 'feedbook'—feedback from you and others in terms of how we can stabilize the sector.

We recognize that there was a significant upheaval during this past year with the pandemic and, right now, we were able to work with all the child-care centres, the non-profit sector who had deficits and we were able to provide them with funds to clean off that deficit, to wipe that slate clean so that they can prepare themselves for starting this new, hopefully, soon-to-be a post-pandemic era and opening their doors to greater numbers of families without that burden of a deficit. And so we were very pleased to work with the sector in that regard and we'll certainly be mindful of the needs on a day-by-day basis and responsive to the needs of the sector.

So, thank you again, Ms. Lussier, for your presentation tonight.

Mr. Chairperson: Colleen Lussier, response to the minister?

Ms. Lussier: No, just thank you for your reply.

I do really ask that, if you are going to create—well, you have created the parent committee, but that it's open to all parents within Manitoba. I know that there is—be numerous parents at my centre who would have—want to have a say in what is happening with their child's care.

This parent council was created, and it is a great idea, I agree that parents should have a say in it but, again, we really missed the mark on not having early

childhood educators and front-line staff have their say in what is happening in the sector.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions for members of the committee?

Ms. Adams, we have less than a minute.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Lussier, for your presentation, and I'm happy you were able to join us.

I would like to know a little bit more about how the government's funding freeze has affected your centre. I'm a little concerned when the minister says she wants to protect daycares when she—child care—when she has kept their funding levels frozen.

Ms. Lussier: Absolutely.

So, the revenue streams that come into my centre are parent fees and operating grants, and that's it. With no increase in the past 11 years, we cannot—the cost of living has gone up for Manitobans, so to not be able to pay wages—80 per cent of my money goes to wages. And then I have 100 spaces at my centre. I have a very large centre. So, on top of that, I have overwhelming bills that I need to pay.

That doesn't include snacks; that doesn't include provisions; that doesn't include anything like that, where parents would enjoy to be able to know that we're providing those quality snacks, so that's put back on the parents to provide those kinds of things as well as any sort of materials. You have no idea how much a can of paint costs.

So, just little things like that add up. So, having no increase in funding has really handcuffed us in the child-care sector. And, like I said, wages are the No. 1 thing about retaining staff, and not being able to increase that—as I said, my centres pays high for early-learning centres, and that's at 2014 wage scales. So, again, that just goes to show you.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank you very much, Colleen Lussier, for making your presentation this evening and also for being willing to answer questions from members of the committee.

After—I would ask leave of the committee if we could revert back to the presenter, Heather Ashdown. She was on but unable to connect due to a technical issue, and I'm certainly familiar with those. So I was just wondering if that would be okay with everyone. Yes? *[Agreed]*

Then we'll ask—we're going to call on Heather Ashdown and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. And I would ask Heather Ashdown if she

could please unmute herself and turn her video on. And hopefully her—the technical issues have—

Floor Comment: Oh, hi.

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, that was getting there. There we go. All right, I can see you now. I can see you now. There you are.

Floor Comment: Okay, hold on.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Just the one device will work the best. And once you are able to get going, I'll—*[interjection]*—all right.

* (20:10)

Floor Comment: I don't know why the computer one won't work. I will leave the meeting on my computer.

Mr. Chairperson: Perfect. That will work, I think, for our Hansard branch. So, if we can have you start whenever you're ready. You've got up to 10 minutes. Go ahead, Heather Ashdown.

Ms. Heather Ashdown (Private Citizen): Sorry about that. That's so strange. I do Zoom meetings all the time, and I haven't—it's something about inviting me or something. So, I'm glad that you can hear me.

Hi, my name is Heather Ashdown. And just before I begin, I—when considering how to introduce myself today where a statement like a land acknowledgment might be expected, I spoke with Seraph-Eden Boroditsky who's the founder of Guided Conversations Canada and we ended up focusing on how important it is to be intentional about the language that we use. And so I wanted to centre my talk today on the language of Bill 47 in particular.

But before I do that, I'd like to finish introducing myself in a way with the intention to be accountable to the Indigenous people of this land, and those impacted by this bill in particular, by saying that my name is Dr. Heather Ashdown, my pronouns are she/her and I'm a white person from European background joining you today as a very unsettled settler on violently settled land. I'm also a physician and the senior psychiatric resident at the U of M department of psychiatry, but I'm speaking today as an independent person and as a mother.

So, from my understanding, the most significant change proposed in this bill can be found in section 32, where the bill no longer references non-profits when outlining funding structures through provincial grants. And then there's clause (a) that specifies licensed providers, but clauses (b) and (c) do

not, which can create the opportunity for grants to be given to providers that aren't licensed.

So, I asked my much more politically literate brothers to translate what that might mean for me, and they explained to me that this section of the bill would open the door to a two-tiered system based on models of profit-driven child-care facilities—they put it—my brother said 'McDaycares' is how he put it—like they have in the States.

But I'm still kind of left to wonder, like, what that really means—especially the term two-tier, because I worry that some people might think that some Manitobans who can access the top tier could be better off. And what I'd like to do is start by questioning that assumption.

So, to start, I understand that some parents who are able to pay to send their children to expensive, profit-driven daycares have been lobbying the provincial government to receive financial support for the past few years. And I understand looking for that support, especially when people don't have the option of choosing non-profit care because the waiting lists are too long. And so, those families do need support, absolutely. And I wonder about providing that—I worry, sorry, about providing that support in the form of investing in privatized care.

And I just want to take a moment to think about this idea, because it seems very counterintuitive to think that something that costs more might have lower quality or even be dangerous. But my concern here is that, by their very nature, profit-driven care facilities can become dangerous because they are less accountable to the public.

So, if I could put it in a way that makes sense to me, without strong, good strings sort of attached to funding in the way that it is for non-profit centres, the motivation to make profit then can dominate over safeguards to assure adequate quality of care. And that is what we saw play out during the pandemic in our profit-driven, long-term-care facilities. It was an experiment that no ethical researcher would ever undertake, but it showed us that when we compare publicly funded care facilities with profit-driven ones, our profit-driven facilities have worse outcomes.

The lessons learned from this need to be talked about when we talk about daycare facilities, because if we did the same kind of unethical experiment by comparing outcomes for children who attend non-profit versus profit-driven daycares—sorry—with the types of licensing and classification streamlining

that's proposed in this bill, I believe that we would encounter the same theme of negative outcomes in these kinds of hypothetical Revera-type daycares.

And as we currently ride the third wave, when caregiving is on the political and public agenda like never before, I'd like to propose that we start to talk about child care using different language that I think better reflects the reality of the value of child-care work.

There is fascinating literature—this is my field—related to neuroscience and developmental psychology that are advancing our understanding of epigenetics and neuroplasticity. Those are terms that describe the amazing ways in which child-care environments can literally shape our physiology, influencing our biological and psychological capacity for resiliency in mental health.

And so I think that a true modernization of child care in this sense would put value on child-care providers, not just as babysitters, to help us recover from the 'shecession,' so-called, but as developmental guides to help future generations to develop positive internalized object relations and stable attachment relationships and strengthen the neural networks in the prefrontal cortex to, you know, support higher cognitive function.

And so when I use this language, I know it's not meaningful to everyone in the same way, but I use it in order to give greater weight to the statement that we need to be treating our child-care providers as some of the most highly valued members of society.

And speaking of words with impact, Minister Squires has described this bill using the term equitable, and when we know that it can cost more to send your child to university than to send them to daycare as an infant and that there are something like 18,000 people on the waiting list right now, I can't fathom how any change that doesn't address that in a real way could be called equitable. For me, this term also brings up the fact that child-care workers are just about entirely women, and many are Black, Indigenous or people of colour. And it's, therefore, unsurprising that they are obscenely underpaid and undervalued. It is surprising—unsurprising, and I would argue, unjust and inequitable.

Almost like a cruel joke, I've met way too many early childhood educators who postponed returning to work full-time after having their own kids because they can't even afford to send their children to the daycares that they work at. And I said it before,

absolutely, all mothers and other parents deserve child-care support, and, of course, I believe that wholeheartedly. And at the same time, we have to reconcile the fact that the people who care for our children cannot afford their own services.

Those of us who are privileged to continue to progress in our careers regardless of our reproductive status have to understand that we are doing so within an inequitable system where we have advantages that other people do not. And to sort of translate what that language to me means into action, it means that if child-care workers do not accept the changes in this bill, then neither should we.

You don't have to be a parent to understand why child care shouldn't be used for profit; however, I needed to become a parent to understand what it actually feels like when the person that you love most in the world, who feels like an extension of your own body and soul, is cared for by somebody who is not in it for the money. Like many moms, I processed very difficult feelings when I first sent my baby to daycare, to go back to work at the hospital to take on my role as primary income earner for my family. And I had no idea how well she would be cared for and how much she would thrive there. And I could never find the right language to thank my daughter's caregivers for what they've done for our family.

So, to close, I want to speak directly to our daycare family. We see the work that you do and we value you. When the pandemic hit and we had to isolate, you were the first people that my daughter asked about. She loves you the way that she loves other members of her family, and you've given her gifts that she will share with the world throughout the rest of her life.

So I want to end by thanking two sisters, who I think embody the way that the concept of family should be centred in our discussion of true quality child care. Mary [*phonetic*] is one of my lifelong friends who has dedicated her life to caring for children in what I might call the modern way. And when I'm with her, I can almost feel my own neurons firing, fostering new connections and helping me to develop into a more confident parent.

* (20:20)

And finally, to her sister, Rose, who is my daughter's first formal teacher. I want to say that I could not be more honoured to stand side by side with you as part of my daughter's circle of nurturing, care-focused, non-profit care providers. Thanks.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Dr. Ashdown, and I thank you for your perseverance in finding a way to join us at committee tonight.

We'll now move on to the question period for five minutes.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Dr. Ashdown, for your presentation. And it wouldn't be a committee or it wouldn't be a day complete in my life if there wasn't technical difficulties in this era of Zoom, and so, greatly appreciate your perseverance in working through the technical challenges. Very happy that you were here tonight. Really appreciated your words. Very, very thoughtful, insightful presentation. And definitely research driven based on your background and your qualifications. And it was just very, very insightful.

And I—I'm just incredibly touched as well that you took the time to mention your own daycare family and those that you have relied on as you've returned to the workforce post having children. And as a mother of five children myself, I know that in my family circumstances, I would not have been able to continue on in developing my career and achieving my goals if it weren't for a strong child-care sector. And so I'm eternally grateful to the child-care sector who helped me and my family and who taught my children when I was in—whether it be pursuing my academic goals or my career. And so I was touched by that portion of your presentation.

Just—I didn't really have a question for you, Dr. Ashdown. Just wanted to let you know that I appreciate you being here tonight and your insightful words as we move forward with modernizing and creating a child-care sector that will continue to meet the needs of families for generations to come.

Mr. Chairperson: Dr. Ashdown, any response to the minister?

Ms. Ashdown: Well, you didn't ask me a question, so I don't have an answer to any questions.

Am I allowed to ask questions?

Mr. Chairperson: You're welcome to try, but there's no guarantee that anyone will answer them, so it's entirely up to you.

Ms. Ashdown: Such an honest response. Thank you.

My question is: you know, at—in what way could changes be made to increase the—like, to pay child-care workers more? Like, where is that in this bill, or

where could it be in this bill? I think they should be paid more. Let's start with that.

Could that happen?

Ms. Squires: Appreciate that.

The structure that we have right now with our relationship with the child-care sector is our non-profit sectors are governed by a board, and they are, like, completely independent from government. We provide them with their operating grants and we regulate—we provide them with the licence. So we ensure quality standards in the facility. We ensure that they have—that they're adhering to the regulations, the set—the ratios of parents to child-care workers, whether it be an ECE II, child-care aide or an ECE III.

And—but the board of directors is responsible for the wage that they provide the employees within their centre. They're not—the wages are not prescribed or dictated by government. And, certainly, if you have a perspective on that, I'd be open to hearing that.

Mr. Chairperson: Dr. Heather Ashdown, you can respond.

Ms. Ashdown: Thank you. Thank you for answering that. That makes sense. I really don't know about the structure, so I'm always happy to learn about that.

I'm wondering, then, what specifically could happen so that boards were then able to pay people more? Like, what would need to happen, and how can we make that happen, because that's what I'm hearing people want to do. I mean, I—or, at least that's what I want. I want to be able to send my child to a daycare where I know the people are being paid well.

And also, I think there's a lot of people missing from the workforce in terms of child-care employees, as I mentioned, who can't afford to go to the places that they work at. Like, that makes me feel sick when I send my kid there. And I know that. I know some of these staff, right? So I know that that's a goal.

So, how can, then, the boards make that possible, in your view? How can that happen?

Mr. Chairperson: We only have 30 seconds left. Are—*[interjection]*

Ms. Squires: Sorry. I'd be more than happy to continue the conversation with Dr. Ashdown.

In the fairness of time, I do want to give my opposition critic an opportunity to ask you a question. But I'd love to continue this conversation with you offline.

Mr. Chairperson: Other questions?

We have literally five seconds but, you know, I'll give you a little bit more grace here.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Dr. Ashdown. And the answer to your question is, the government needs to give child-care centres more funding so that parent boards can provide those necessary wage increases.

But I'm wondering, what does public child care mean to you?

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Ashdown, a brief response, if you may.

Ms. Ashdown: Well, I think that's what my talk was about, and it means quality is assured because money isn't the primary goal. I mean, we're all using lots of language—ECE, all this stuff—and this isn't my area so, I'm not used to any of that. And what I really just want to say is that I think it's safer, and I don't think it's safe or appropriate to make profit off of this type of care. As a doctor, that's how I feel and as a mother, that's how I feel. It's really important.

And you can make it happen. You have a lot of power. I think you should use it. I think it would be really good if you did that.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Thank you very much, Dr. Ashdown, I appreciate your perseverance once again in staying with us and in answering the questions and in a unique and fairly rare case, asking some questions and even getting some answers from members of this committee. So, thank you once again.

We're going to now move on to the next presenter, and I will call on Melanie Fraser and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting.

And, Melanie Fraser, I just ask that you could unmute yourself and turn your video on so that all the committee members can see you.

Floor Comment: Hello, can you hear me?

Mr. Chairperson: I can hear you, Melanie Fraser, but I cannot yet see you. So if you can get your camera on, that would be appreciated.

Floor Comment: Okay, there we go.

Mr. Chairperson: There we go. Now I can both see and hear you.

So, welcome to this committee meeting this evening. You have 10 minutes to make your presentation. Go ahead.

Ms. Melanie Fraser (Munroe Early Childhood Education Centre Inc.): Thank you. My name is Melanie Fraser and I thank the standing committee for allowing me to speak.

Despite the words that school-age child care is not being forgotten, I still want to be heard because without the words school-age child care in the bill, it still does not exist. I still worry that, although the integrity of the school-age care may be maintained, will the funding? Will the importance be seen?

I've been in the child-care field now for 43 years. I have hung on all those years thinking always, someday, that we will be recognized how we should be. I hate to think that at the end of my career, that—which, who knows when that's going to be, maybe sooner than later if changes aren't made—that there haven't been some amazing changes.

In my time, I've seen good changes and bad and I've worked hard to advocate for this field. And I'm proud of how far we've come, but we still have miles to go.

In the beginning, I worked with preschool children. And back in the day, that's when family units were a mom and a dad and kids; moms were just beginning to have careers. And about 15 years into my career, I started to notice that when people left our preschool program to attend the school-age programs—or, not school-age programs but to attend school, there was no quality care for children at all. So often moms had to quit their jobs and just stay home with the kids then.

Once I did the groundwork and worked with the neighbourhood schools, we opened the school-age programs and it was immediately full. We now have three very busy programs in different schools in the Elmwood area and rarely, in normal times, are there vacancies in the programs.

When we began these programs, family dynamics were starting to change. Families were starting to separate and, usually, mothers were left to try to work and raise kids. School-age child care was such a bonus to them, affordable, and it gave them the peace of mind that the kids were safe and cared for and they were able to get better educations and better jobs.

Schools began to depend on the school-age programs. Still, today, school enrolment depends on if a child-care option is available within the school. Manitoba needs licensed, affordable, school-age child care and Manitoba needs the qualified staffing that we have worked so hard on. Manitoba school-age is

affordable, but if it's pushed away and it's made private, I fear that—what families will need to pay. We need to keep it this way for families, which is affordable.

* (20:30)

While I understand that fees are not to go up for families, if school-age care is not going to be recognized, then this is what can happen when forced into privatization.

Currently, in Manitoba, the school-age fees are \$8.60 per day for before and after school. In-service and summer care is \$20.80 per day. Toronto currently is 'averaging'—averaging before and after care, \$32.67 a day. And that's the before and after care. And the summer care is \$51.05 per day.

Now, I know that our finances are a little bit different in Winnipeg, but it just gives you an example where things can go if it's not regulated. Edmonton is \$22.80 per day for before and after, and in-service and summer days are \$32 per day.

Can our Manitoba families afford to pay these fees if school-age child care is forced to go private? If we are not considered in the new provincial plan, I fear what's going to happen to school-age care.

We recently have looked into two schools in the Winnipeg area, and both are wanting to replace the unlicensed care with licensed providers. They see the value in the quality that we provide, and the schools have no interest in running these programs any longer, as they're not profitable for the school. And they're hard to manage without regulations.

Children in the areas I work in, they don't have the opportunities for sport or after-hour recreation. They don't attend gymnastics or any clubs, and there's no longer any more school activities, not because of COVID, but because the teachers who used to do those activities now go home at 3:30. They don't stay any more to provide any activities.

These kids depend on us for safe, quality care. So where will these kids go if school-age care is phased out? If affordable care is taken away from families, will these children be left on their own while families work? Will these children end up on the streets? More children may end up in the juvenile system, as families may need to leave them alone. And if there is no before and after school care—yes, latchkey kids. There's the word again.

I worry with this pandemic, now, that it was not a good time to change things within the child-care field

and reduce what we have worked so hard on. We have been there since the beginning of COVID and we want to continue to be there while we get Manitoba back to work.

School-age programs have opened their doors in pandemic times to be sure that children ages six to 12 had a place to go when schools closed. Yet we were not recognized in the COVID funding that was sent out—only preschool centres.

I want mothers and fathers and families back to work. I want early childhood educators to remain valued. You keep talking about creating new spaces, but when this—when is this government going to look after the spaces that we already have?

You also keep enticing—or talk about enticing people into the sector. No one wants to be in our sector these days. Schools offer untrained people \$20-per-hour salaries with no training. I don't think anyone's going to choose a minimum wage salary in child care.

Many centres have lost staff in the pandemic, as the schools are poaching our staff or for higher salaries.

Please put the child—please put school-age child care back in Bill 47. Please put quality back in Bill 47. Please put all we have worked for so hard back in Bill 47.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Melanie Fraser, for your presentation.

We're going to go right into questions. We've got five minutes.

And we'll start with the honourable minister.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much for being here today and making that presentation, and really appreciate your input and your passion for—predominantly in that school-age sector. I couldn't agree with you more in that it is vital that we have a strong, you know, non-profit school-age child-care sector to fit the needs of our families throughout the province.

And one of the things that our government has recognized is that while there has been an enhanced focus on funding those early-learning spaces, those preschool spaces in the past, that was a trend initiated by the previous government that we know—and we know that the funding for the early-learning and child-care spaces are integral, but we also need to prioritize the funding for those school-age spaces in our centres.

So that is a shift that we're going to be making and increasing more spaces in that portion of the child-care sector in the, you know, time to come; certainly do prioritize that.

Now, the bill is maintaining the quality and the integrity of the school-age—there's no differentiation between the regulated licensing system for school-age spaces that currently exists under the previous act and under Bill 47.

And I can assure you that, while the definition of early learning was specific for those preschool learners because we recognize that there is a difference—not a difference—on the importance scale, but just in a difference in the type of care that they may require at the age of two, or three, or four, when they're in a full day program at an early-learning and child-care centre versus what they need in the before-and-after-school program.

But really, greatly appreciate the value that you do as a before-and-after-school-program provider and want to assure you that our government is maintaining that structure and that licensing regime for the school-age programs.

And, wondering what you would like to see to solidify that so that you've got that recognition that the school-aged sector is equally important because it is to our government and it is in Bill 47, but just wanting to know what you think is required for that reassurance.

Ms. Fraser: Well, first off, I think the wording has to be changed so that it's, like, right out there. There's no wording in the—in what we're reading right now that assures us that it's really going to happen, that the school-age program is not just going to disappear.

And I also really would like the government to look at the existing spaces before they're creating new spaces.

Mr. Chairperson: Other members for—or, other questions for members of the committee?

Ms. Adams: And thank you, Ms. Fraser, for your presentation and your work in child care.

I would like more information from you on the importance of having a school-age program in legislation and not just regulations, where the minister can just change it at the stroke of a pen and on her whim.
[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry—Melanie Fraser, I have to acknowledge you first before you can speak.

So now I've acknowledged you, you can go ahead.

Ms. Fraser: Thank you. And that's exactly what, you know, we keep getting the reassurance that, you know, things aren't going to change, and yet nobody's sort of turned around and put school-age wording into the new legislation.

So, without that, there's not even a stroke of a pen; it doesn't even belong there right now. So who's to say that they're going to put it back in despite all the reassurances? You know, we really need to keep school-age child care in there. All schools have turned around and they don't want to do it on their own. They want other people to be running it.

So they want quality care and parents want to be able to work. Parents aren't school teachers. They need to work all summer. They need to work longer hours. They don't work school hours, and that's where school-age has already, you know, filled in all those gaps. So we can't be forgotten.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Mr. Sala, you've got 30 seconds.

Mr. Sala: Thank you so much for your presentation. I really greatly appreciate it.

Just wondering if you can elaborate on how the last five years of operating grant freezes have affected your operation.

Ms. Fraser: Well, staff are—you know, first off, school-age care is hard anyways because the staff is a split shift. So they have to come in between 6:30 and 9:30 in the morning and then return again at 2:30 to 6:00 every day.

Now, really, that's a feat in itself for people to be doing that. We can't pay our staff any more so we—you know, everybody has a pretty high turnaround in staff. So—and you can't—there's no increase in parent fees and there's been no increase in operating grants, so it's been really difficult to make ends meet.

We actually just recently have cut out serving food to children. Now, how horrible is that, because we need to make choices of actually paying our staff or feeding the children. So that's where the cutbacks have come in.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Melanie Fraser, for your presentation and for being willing to also answer questions from members of the committee.

Our time is up for that question period, so we're going to move to the next presenter.

I'd like to call on Megan Turner from Making Roots Montessori Centre and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. Megan Turner, I'd ask that you'd unmute yourself and turn your video on.

All right. Megan Turner, are you there?

Ms. Megan Turner (Making Roots Montessori Centre): I'm here.

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, there you are. All right. Wonderful. I was afraid we were having more technical difficulties, but I'm glad to see your face up on the screen.

So you now have the floor. You can present for up to 10 minutes.

* (20:40)

Ms. Turner: Thank you very much for having me this evening. You'll have to bear with me here; my notes are in several places because I'm having technical difficulties.

So I just want to start by saying, you know, a great big thank you again for hosting this forum. I am, in fact, owner-operator of a private preschool, and I just want to talk about how divisive that can be because we're really focused on inclusion, and this bill focuses on a lot of wanting to be inclusive. And so what I want to say is, as a private centre, I don't think there's value in further creating a divide. I'm not here to suggest for one second that operating grants for anybody isn't important, although that's not the way we sustain our business, and we rely on parent fees, we have the same challenges, we have the same struggles in staff retention, in training, in spots for parents.

One of the things I want to address specifically is that because we are a private centre and because we don't take taxpaying dollars to operate, we are also not allowed to take inclusion markers. So in my time as a—I've been in this field for 25 years in some capacity or another; I've had the pleasure of owning my own preschool for eight—but in my time, the amount of conversations I've had with parents who have inclusion workers in place, who aren't able to access our programs simply because we're a private centre, it's heartbreaking. When I have a parent who has a subsidy in place who'd like to choose our program, they're unable to because we're a private centre. So I think that needs to be addressed because, again, I understand the way a not-for-profit model works. I understand the importance of good-quality child

care. I don't think that it's safe to say or fair to say that as a private centre our standards are less. We follow the same rules. We follow the same guidelines.

Madam Vice-Chairperson in the Chair

We follow the same ratios. We have a curriculum. We have all the same things that a not-for-profit centre would have in place, and I don't want to be divisive anymore. We are child-care workers. We are early childhood educators, and we are here because we're passionate.

I didn't fall into this job; I chose it. I didn't fall into this career; I chose it. I chose it because I believe in it. I also believe strongly that the staff that I have and the fees that I charge that go towards paying the staff that I have are worth just as much as anybody else.

So, regardless of where they choose to work or the—of choice, why are they demonized because it's a private centre? I can assure you that quality is the utmost importance, and I think you could—you'd be 'emiss' to find any parent of the 40 students we have enrolled that would tell you otherwise. We take a great deal of care and concern over the children, and it is never been profit driven for me, and I can tell you for sure it's not profit driven for my staff either.

These are a dedicated group of women; we've been together a really long time. Our model's a bit different, so in Montessori, we all have to really be able to communicate without even speaking. So we know each other, and I would—it would be—I would be 'emiss' to say that they don't deserve the same respect as anybody else.

And so it worries me. It worries me, this divide that's been created. It worries me that people are under the impression that because we're private that we don't provide a quality program. What providing a quality program means is investing in your staff. I would love to be able to send my teachers to further their education. In fact, I had one teacher want to remortgage her home because we don't have access to the same staffing grants as a not-for-profit.

So now, I have a woman who wants to be an E-C three; she wants to go through the training, but she can't because she has to remortgage her house. That, to me, is inequitable. And so, although I would never ask for an operating grant because that's what the parent tuition is for, what I'm begging for is equality for my staff, equality for the children I teach, equality for the families. If you're going to support one sector to do training, to do—for PPE, don't give the private centre the money; it's never been about that. Provide

it to the parents, provide it to my staff; they shouldn't be punished for choosing to work for us.

For eight years, I have watched people come and go, 320-plus families who all, I think, would tell you they had a great start and a great experience and who were loved. When people walk through the door and they look at me and say, good morning, Ms. Megan, and the family says to me, it feels like home here, that means something to me. And I didn't do that for the money. I did that because I believe in the education of children; I believe in giving them a good start, and I believe in the staff that I've employed; they are valuable, and they are worth it, and they are worthy of support. So not to the centre, perhaps, not to the business that I am, but to the staff and to the children and to their families, please give them the same access to these government supports.

I have friends in both sectors. I am a director of mine—jack of all trades. But it's true when we say, like, especially in a pandemic, not only were this—were they—we their second home before, now more than ever, we're their everything. We're the only people they see outside of their families.

And so I don't know how we can put a value on that, other than to say that as a private centre, I'm not looking for not-for-profit centres to lose their funding. In fact, this freeze is ridiculous. I don't understand it. I mean, it's hard enough for us to do it without raising fees because that's been an integral part of our piece as well. I can't look at parents in the face in a pandemic and say you have to pay more because I'm not eligible for the same supports as everybody else. The deal is that child care has been a mess for a long, long time, and the structure needs to be changed. And I don't think that ostracizing one sector of this is it.

I heard someone say the McDonald's of—or the—'McChild-care'. Like, I am a small-business owner. I'm a small fish in a big pond, and in no way, shape or form am I looking to take anything away from those centres that are different than mine. I'm just asking for the same respect. And I want people to understand that just because we're private doesn't mean there's no quality, and just because we're private doesn't mean it's a dirty word. It's child care, and we're here for the children.

So, other than the fact that my notes are all over the place and I probably missed half of the things that I wanted to say, I just wanted to make the point that private isn't dirty. We're all here for the right reasons, and I don't know a single early childhood educator that jumps out of bed for any other reason than because

they care for children and because they care for their families.

Thank you.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Turner.

A question period of five minutes will start.

Ms. Squires: Thank you so much, Ms. Turner, for being here today. Thank you for your passion and your service to those 400-plus families that you've provided service to. And I'm incredibly sorry to hear that you have experienced divisiveness, and certainly know that we value the service that you're providing to those children and their families each and every day. And so please express my gratitude on to everyone who is also working in your sector.

And just wanted to hear your thoughts in terms of the—you mentioned the inclusion support program and how right now your children are not eligible for supports under that inclusion support program and what your thoughts are on that.

Ms. Turner: Thank you. Can you hear me? Am I—can I be heard? Yes, you can—okay, okay, thank you. This Zoom is not my jam; I'm a great Montessori teacher.

I think it's like I said. I think that I can understand why people would be nervous to give, you know, the business the funding. But allow it—make it accessible to the parents; so pay it directly. We're happy to run it through our payroll, and we're happy to have them, we just—they're not eligible to come to us because we're a private centre. And that is not equality, that is not just, and that is not the way we're going to move forwards.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Turner.

Are there any other questions?

Ms. Adams: Thank you so much, Ms. Turner, for your work and dedication to child care.

I would like to know what your thoughts are on the ECE 1, and would that punish the staff you currently have?

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Adams. Or, Ms. Turner, sorry.

Ms. Turner: Thank you so much for the question. Thank you for very much for the question.

In terms—I think the question you're asking me is do I think that it would hurt my staff to have a one-year training program. I'm not opposed to a two-year training program, but it's physically impossible for these women to access the two-year program because

they can't be replaced at work and we can't afford to pay them.

So again, instead of paying the centre and passing the money on to the business, pass it on to the staff member. Make it equitable for my teacher to be able to further her education. It doesn't have to have anything to do with the privatization of child care, it has to do with supporting the people in the sector.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Thank you.

Ms. Adams, do you have any more questions?

Ms. Adams: No, but I believe my colleague the MLA for St. James has a question.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Lamoureux, would you like to ask a question? She's frozen. *[interjection]* You're—okay.

* (20:50)

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Thank you, Ms. Turner, for your very passionate presentation and all the work as an owner and operator of a private centre that you do.

As a person who is heavily involved in the centre and plays many roles, I really appreciate what you're saying with the goal of respect for equality for staff and parents. What changes do you think could be made that would create more equality?

Ms. Turner: Thank you very much for the thoughtful question. I think it's just important to recognize that we are all in this for the same reason. And it doesn't matter who signs your paycheque at the end of the day. It has to do with making them feel valued. And so when I have to say to them, no, we're not eligible for that, or no, we can't do that because you work here, it's devastating to them, and it's really disheartening. And so what I want to be able to say to them is I—they hear you; the government hears you; they care what you think, and here's how they're going to help you.

And so, again, respecting the fact that they are still early childhood educators, they are still women who care deeply about children, who care about their development, and recognizing that their needs might be different because it's a private centre, but as individual people in this sector, it's not. It's time to really stop tearing each other apart and build each other up, I think.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Turner.

Mr. Sala, we have 30 seconds, if you have a question. You're okay? No other questions?

Thank you, Ms. Turner. And we will next move on to Kristy Rebenchuk. If Kristy could unmute herself and open her camera, please.

Ms. Rebenchuk, are you—Ms. Rebenchuk is not in the waiting room, so her name will now be moved to the bottom of the list.

And we will now ask Shaina Pauliszyn—I'm sorry for not pronouncing that right—if you are in the waiting room, to unmute yourself and open your camera, please.

So Shaina is not there. Is—and her name will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

Ms. Kisa MacIsaac, if you are there, could you unmute and open your camera, please.

Floor Comment: Hi, I'm here.

Madam Vice-Chairperson: Hi, Ms. MacIsaac. You have 10 minutes—up to 10 minutes to speak whenever you're ready. Thank you.

Mrs. Kisa MacIsaac (Private Citizen): Great. Thank you. So hi, everyone. My name is Kisa MacIsaac. Thank you so much for having me to present today.

I'll introduce myself first. I am Métis. I'm a mother. I have three children. I'm a parent who—I'm a front-line worker, and I rely on my high-quality, non-profit early learning and child care to get to work, as does my husband, my partner. He's currently working nights right now while I work days.

I don't know what I'd do without the quality of the program I bring my children to and have after my— you know, each child was born, after each mat leave. They have a high ratio of trained early childhood educators, and I know that that makes all the difference.

For me, you know, we're a middle-class, middle-income family. We work pretty much paycheque to paycheque. It's—child care is really expensive for us. We don't qualify for any subsidy. And so \$20 a day for three children adds \$60 a day working full time. That's a huge bill for us. And so there was actually one summer before my youngest turned two, I was going to be paying just over \$70 a day because an infant space in a non-profit program is \$30 a day. And I realized, you know, my—I mean, my older children are in school. School is also my child care for my school-aged children. So, 70-some dollars a day to work.

And I want to tell you that I am also an early childhood educator. I do not make the wage to pay child care for my own children.

And I'm exhausted. I don't know if that's coming through. I'm doing my best to kind of keep it all together.

I work as an early childhood educator full-time. That summer—I took the summer off—I decided I'd rather have no income than pay 70-some dollars a day to take care of other people's children while my children also got child care at the same time. And that was really challenging for our family.

So, I mean, now all three of my children are aged 6, 10 and 12, and they're in school every day. But, I mean, I know Minister Squires says that it's up to the board of directors to choose the wages for their educators, but I know that's not true, and I know that wages are—funding to non-profit programs have been frozen since 2016.

I work in an inner-city, non-profit early-learning and child-care program. We have 205 spaces. We are really high quality. We managed to have a high level of trained educators who, thankfully, many of them stayed for the long term. But we're the exception; that should be the norm. The norm should be seeing ECEs staying for the long term.

But the fact is far too many ECEs leave the field after one year, two years, three years. Usually it's some time within five years. There's far too many ECEs leaving the field because the wages do not pay our bills.

Our program that I work in offers a free hot-lunch program, a homemade lunch at no extra charge to the families, plus two healthy snacks at no extra charge to our families. And we have families of all socio-economic backgrounds. Even though we're in the inner city, we have health-care professionals, doctors, nurses, students, all kinds of parents coming to us needing their quality child care. And I'm honoured to be one of those people that brings—that those parents bring their children to.

You know, but it's—I work two jobs. Most ECEs—many ECEs work two to three jobs to make ends meet. And this is not okay. I've been working towards my degree furthering my education. I'm almost now at four years post-secondary, and my wage wouldn't be enough, if I was living on my own, I wouldn't be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment on the wage that I make, providing what we now know is an essential, front-line service that is relied on during this pandemic.

I do have a couple notes to read here. I think I have about five minutes left.

So I love research, and I really wish that the funding going into early childhood education connected to the research that shows that well-funded, non-profit early childhood education creates so many long-term benefits and has a return on investment. A recent study done—and there's been enough studies done; there's been enough reports done. We don't need the KPMG report; there's been so many reports done—shows that for every \$1 invested, \$6 comes back in the long run.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

It's not just an investment in our children; it's an investment in our parents. When parents access—the quality early learning and child care, we see parents with better mental health. We see parents who are able to access post-secondary education or even just to finish high school and rise up out of poverty. If we want to solve Manitoba's child-poverty problem, we would be investing in quality, non-profit, well-funded early learning and child care.

It shouldn't be considered lucky to secure a space in a quality program for your children. However, it is. Any parent I talk to, they say, oh, I lucked out. You know, I lucked out getting my child in this program. Investment of public dollars in quality, non-profit early childhood care and education saves money in the long term.

What other notes? So there has been research that shows that quality child care helps parents keep it all together. It helps parents to keep their children out of the foster system and be more likely to participate in adult education and join the workforce. So this is an important finding.

Manitoba also has the highest number of children in the foster-care system across Manitoba, at approximately 11,000 children—90 per cent of those being Indigenous. And so this is from the First Nations Family Advocate Office. With \$451 million spent on child apprehension, \$21 million spent on prevention. We have an opportunity to reverse these numbers and make an investment in families through access to quality early learning and child care.

* (21:00)

You probably heard of the science of early child development. If you go to the government of Manitoba website, you'll see the science of early child development is supported through the—I suppose it's the Canada-Manitoba partnership, right on the child-care website. From the science of early child development—it's research-based—increased language,

literacy and numeracy skills in early childhood are linked to better outcomes for education in the school years, an increase in high-school graduation, a decrease in crime rates, increased better mental health for, also, not just the parents but for the children, as well.

Quality child care is a prevention strategy for parents and children. And you'll hear me repeating the word quality. Quality, quality, quality.

What is quality? All these statistics are related to quality early learning and child care. Quality is trained early childhood educators and consistent, stable relationships with those early childhood educators. And if we're not seeing educators stay and create that stability, then you do not have quality.

Quality is also small group sizes. Small—quality is nurturing, passionate staff. It is enhanced ratios, and we're not seeing that into—in enough programs. It's just not there.

You know, there's another study that I noted here, and I think I only have two minutes left. In a recent study on maternal depressive and anxiety symptoms in Canada—this was just published in March 2021—research showed an increase in mental health problems in mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study specifically mentions child care, that larger increases in depression and anxiety symptoms were observed in mothers who had difficulty in accessing child care—this is Kalvin. The study identifies provision of child care as a key prevention strategy in future increases in maternal psychological distress.

Access to child care is also a key strategy to decreased child poverty. We know the foundations of mental health are shaped from the earliest days of life.

And, really, I just—as someone who works in this field, I just can't understand the lack of support and respect for the workforce. I just—and I know people are repeating this over and over again, but we don't have enough people going into the field. We need to attract passionate, loving, joyful, nurturing people who love children, who want to stay. And that's how you're going to get a stable, equitable, high-quality early-learning and child-care sector, is through that investment in the workforce.

So, yes, that's it. I set a timer so I wouldn't go over 10 minutes.

Mr. Chairperson: You are right on the money in terms of time, Kisa, so good job.

And welcome, Calvin, to this meeting as well. You're putting a smile on a lot of people's faces, so, good job there.

Just want to now move ahead with questions. We've got five minutes for that, and we'll start with the honourable minister.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Ms. MacIsaac, for your presentation today. And your passion for children and for the sector really comes through, and I'm really in awe with how much love and passion you bring to your job and to children in the province. So, very grateful for that, and thank you so much for being here.

Also want to thank your son. It was great to meet him tonight. Very much appreciate seeing his joyful exuberance here in committee on a long Thursday night here in the Manitoba Legislature. He certainly brought a bit of sunshine to all of our faces.

Really appreciate your research-driven presentation, and can certainly reflect on that as we're working through this bill, the many points that you brought.

Just as a point of clarification, there is—right now there is no table in the bill or in legislation that outlines the salary or the—mandated salary for the profession, but certainly appreciated your perspective on that and am going to be taking into account many perspectives as we work through how we build and maintain a strong, stable sector for future generations.

You had also mentioned about the CFS system and how a strong early-learning and child-care sector can certainly enhance and divert child apprehensions, and the number you had brought forward is, fortunately, a little less than the number that you had quoted in your presentation, that we have reduced the number of children in care right now. We have—by a significant number, where fewer children in care now than in the past decade, and we certainly want to see that trend line decreasing. And, of course, that means investing in the front end, where we've got support programs for early learning and childhood—the sector, as well as prenatal supports.

One of the things that we're working on is a doula program. We've got investments going into the Mothering Project, as well, at mark—Mount Carmel Clinic and some other things that we really think are going to be helping continue that decline trend downward in the number of children in CFS care.

But I really appreciate you highlighting how having a strong child-care sector can certainly just make the environment at home so much more beneficial for moms and dads who may be juggling stressful things in their life, and then to know that their children are receiving that quality care during the day when they are in child care is something that I appreciated.

Now, I couldn't help but notice you'd mentioned that your partner was working nights, and that's something that we know a lot of families are going through. A lot of families have overnight shifts and very irregular hours—wondering your thoughts on what you would think about a child-care sector that would be responsive to providing, you know, a licensed spot at this time of night.

Would that be something of benefit for you and your family?

Mrs. MacIsaac: Yes. I mean, for my family, we've got it covered. For those families that don't have it covered, I mean, of course they deserve to have options for high-quality early learning and child care, but the high quality is the essential part of it.

There's research that shows what happens when you have lower quality child care, just any kind of child care. You see children in front of screens, and we know what the research is on when children have too much screen time.

Like, children are—we see children who are pretty much addicted to screens, and we are a zero-screen program. We are, like, fully enriched, outdoor play, engaged, nurturing, professional, like, across the board—science and art and everything, right?

If you have low-quality child care, it's harmful to children in the long term. And, you know, that's children in the most—in critical stages of their brain development.

Yes, I just—it has to be an investment in quality. And the research shows quality is—you're more likely to have quality if it's non-profit. You're more likely to have quality if you have long-term educators that are there that love their work.

Too many educators leaving the field—I've seen so many amazing human beings leave the field completely because they need to pay their bills, and it's devastating.

But, yes. I'm all for flexibility. Flexibility is great.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Thank you very much, Kisa MacIsaac, but that takes us past our five minutes for questions, unfortunately.

Can we do a quick question with Ms. Adams? Let's try that.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Kisaac [*phonetic*], for the work you do and the dedication you show to Manitoban children.

I'd like to remind the minister that there's already flexibility in the act to provide overnight care, but I'd like to know from Ms. Kisaac [*phonetic*], what has the PCs cut and funding freezes meant for you and your centre?

Mrs. MacIsaac: Well, you know what, I know our centre, for a long time—I mean, we hadn't seen raises in five years. We did luckily just have a small raise a little while back, which was a surprise, but nowhere near where I should be at with 18 years in the field.

Yes, I mean, I know of educators that haven't had a raise since 2016. And that's since operating grants were frozen. So I know it's been a struggle for people to stay in the field. I myself work—I worked my two jobs today and got home, and, yes, I mean, I shouldn't have to work two jobs to have a decent income doing the work that I love and that I was called to. I should just be able to work 40 hours a week.

* (21:10)

So, I'm not alone, and I know I speak for many ECEs who, you know, work more than 40 hours a week.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. That takes us well past our time. I'm going to have to cut you off there. But, Kisa MacIsaac, I thank you very much for coming this evening and for making your presentation, answering those questions. And also thank you to Calvin for his cameo and wish him a good night and a good rest tonight. He looks pretty excited though, so he might have trouble sleeping.

All right. We're going to go to the next presenter then. I'm going to now call on Stephania Kostiuk and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. Stephania Kostiuk, I ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on.

Stephania Kostiuk, if you can unmute yourself and turn your video on. We don't quite see you yet.

Floor Comment: There I am. Hello.

Mr. Chairperson: Hey, you're here. All right. Welcome to the committee meeting. Thanks very much for your patience in getting connected there.

Floor Comment: Thank you for having me.

Mr. Chairperson: You have 10 minutes. You can go ahead and make your presentation.

Ms. Stephania Kostiuk (Ryerson School Age Centre Inc.): Okay. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Stephania Kostiuk and I am the executive director of Ryerson School Age Centre, which includes Ryerson child care, Linden Meadows Child Care and Eastern Star Preschool.

I first of all want to thank Minister Squires for her thoughtful and informative responses. A lot of questions that I've had have been answered, so I really appreciate the time that you've taken to answer and to reassure many of us that have had the same questions.

I would like to present to you our own personal experience as child-care centres and I also want to note that in this, Minister Squires was not the minister of Families at the time.

So, part of this presentation has to do with the problems that we've had in COVID that seem to me have happened as it has been an opportunity for the government to step in and change things without letting us know what's happening. And that, I think, has a lot to do with our mistrust of this government, so please allow me to explain this.

It's been a difficult year for all of us, and daycare was no exception. The lack of understanding of the not-for-profit child-care structure by the current provincial government led to many hardships.

Child cares were closed down at the beginning of April last year, and almost immediately afterwards, we were asked to open with no safety precautions in place. Those of us who refused, citing safety concerns, were told that if we did not comply, we would lose our funding; and we had one hour to respond.

After raising concerns and calling the opposition and the media, the government backed down, reinstated the grants and denied that anyone was ever told they would lose their grants. The centres who feared repercussions immediately reopened to very few children and lost money almost immediately. And those that were closed—and we were closed because we weren't ensured of any safety or any programs or PPE in place to keep us safe—we were ordered to return parents fees, creating an instant loss of income.

So, imagine being—running a child care, having COVID hit, and rather than your government stepping up and saying to you, well, we will help you, we will continue your grants, what else can we do to be of service to you, they turned around and said, this is the perfect opportunity to say to you I'm not going to pay your operating grant and I want you to return the parent fees—like, punishing you for raising any sort of concern for the safety of yourself, the safety of the children, your parents and no pandemic planning whatsoever at the time.

To add insult to injury, many tone-deaf announcements were made with snappy slogans like, helping our heroes. This is mentioned in the KPMG report.

Private home daycares were offered \$3,000 to set up home daycares. So, they were actually private enterprises that were encouraged and were offered a grant to do this, again, in the idea—for the idea that they could have care provided and it—and they could make a profit.

A multi-million-dollar decision made, a lot of announcing and saying they were going to give this money—and I'm talking millions of dollars—to these people that was to open up the floodgates and the—open up the homes and—their homes and they'll get \$3,000 and they'll be able to have up to 12 children in each home; and they would forgo any training and everything would be just absolutely fine, because that was because of COVID.

And I have to tell you, that was a real slap in the face to us as educators, and it also served to show us, in the long run, how little people cared about having that done privately. The—out of the I think it was \$15 million—sorry if I can't recall, but it was millions of dollars that we were offered, and—to be distributed by the Chamber of Commerce, which is like a private organization for business development, which—I don't understand what that had to do with child care or quality child care or human services.

But they turned around and they offered this money—40—Adrien Sala, I believe, was the person that found out that only \$43,000 dollars was ever given out of this immense amount of money, the announcement that was made. And so that indicates to me that there aren't a lot of people that want to go work at their homes and have no breaks and not get paid and not be able to control who's in their centre, and—for \$3,000.

So, there may be—if you're counting nine centres that are for-profit that are really good, that's awesome, but there are a lot of places that you're just—you were

just throwing money at that did not offer anything. And I don't know whether it was like a panic situation or what, but I—you know, we were very disheartened by the way the government treated us.

So as it stood, the money wasn't spent. I don't know what happened to the money. I don't know what next announcement—so—I'm very wary about announcements, funding announcements and having new spaces which nobody can—there's nobody to work these spaces. So you can make as many announcements as you want about that, but if there's nobody to do it, it doesn't really make any sense.

The pandemic allowed the Province to let untrained individuals take care of children. A snapshot of what they want it to become: untrained, unfunded, unregulated and ultimately unsafe. The funding announcement of millions of dollars for these programs led to only \$43,000 of the grant used. This tells me there's no support for opening home daycares. To date, again, unsure of what happened to that money.

The grant was distributed by the Chamber of Commerce. Once again, why? I have no idea.

The promise of PPE gear, that was another announcement where millions of dollars were to be given and we were to have PPE—distribution of PPE and we would get a dollar amount. This was last August. To date, I believe at one point there was a box of H1N1 masks that went out to us, as a—you know, this funding announcement, which made us sick because they were 11 years old, 12 years old.

And rather than—I don't understand the point of making a huge announcement about something that you actually never offered. But that's what happened.

So, you had these catchy slogans, you had these funding announcements, you had these opening of spaces, but you really had no substance to any of these announcements. None of the—there were no follow-ups. We didn't know where the money went. We had no idea.

And then to make it worse, we had—we were threatened to lose our funding, and then we were told we're holding back your—like—your—we're going to freeze your funding. So that, again, I don't understand that.

Child-care co-ordinators, what happened to them? We haven't seen them in a year. Is that going to be the case when we go through this and change our act? Is the act going to mean that, because of this stewardship, that we're going to have people that are

only coming out when? Every three years? Which is what I heard.

Does that mean that people who are setting up daycares—how do you know it's going to be safe for your child? How do you know things are going to go okay for you if you don't have proper safety precautions in place?

I—we've been—I've been doing this for 31 years, but there are people who you're offering \$3,000 to that have no idea what they're doing. Do you want your children to go there without any kind of care and understanding of safety or programming education? I'm kind of surprised that that would even be something that would be discussed.

A stark reminder of this government agenda really hit very close to home for us. A private medical clinic—I once had four centres that I ran, and one of the centres was located in Whyte Ridge, at Whyte Ridge Baptist Church.

* (21:20)

The church moved, sold their building, and—to a private medical clinic. And through speaking to council and the Province, they were granted a licence to practise a private medical clinic on Waverley.

And when they came into the building, they immediately said—we said, well, we're an existing centre; what do you want us to do? And they said, I'm going to charge you 3.2 times the rent. So your rent is going to go up by three, almost four times as much and you'll be asked to pay utilities for a building that was, you know, 40 years old. And there was nothing in place for me.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Kostiuk, just a quick time check. You've got about 25 seconds left.

Ms. Kostiuk: Okay. So the real agenda was: they kicked us out; they took away our space, 65 spaces were lost. So if you're making a funding announcement or you have spaces—you have 65 of our spaces. And that was in Mr. Pallister's riding. And, to date, I've not heard from your government about why you closed it down, why you never supported us, why you never even answered our phone calls.

So, educators lost their jobs. 65 spaces were lost and programs shut down. Children had no space. Parents were unhappy.

So, what can I say? I'm not happy with that. I want to know what your government's going to do about that.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. Thank you so much, Stephania, for your presentation. Your time for that presentation is up, but we have time for some questions. So we're going to go to that next.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Ms. Kostiuk, for your presentation and for your 31 years of service in providing service to Manitoba families. I greatly appreciate that. And the countless children that you have helped care for and educate is certainly admirable and just want to thank you for that.

You touched upon a lot of areas. One of the things that I do want to highlight in that: you talked about some investments that our government had made earlier this year and sort of wondering where that money is. I can tell you that we have got—we did put \$11.5 million in a Child Care Sustainability Trust, and this was something that was asked for by the sector for many years, in terms of having an additional revenue source for discretionary items.

And earlier in the evening, I heard from one child-care provider who said, do you know how much it costs for a can of paint? And, of course, these are items that a child-care centre would want to have on hand for instruction and learning and activities.

And we also know that those supplies are, of course, incredibly expensive, and so we did create the sustainability trust, which will provide a year-over-year opportunity for child-care centres to apply for that funding for those discretionary items. We thought that that was incredibly important to do that.

And in terms of the spaces: now, we know that there's always a challenge with spaces, and the math on that is unequivocal in that we need to create more child-care spaces in the province. We have—in the last five years, we've created nearly 5,000 new spaces and then, of course, this year alone, in the budget that was just released last week, we provide for another 541 additional child-care spaces throughout the province. So that is in a variety of centres and regions throughout the province.

We know that we still have a long way to go. We know that there's still families—and especially after the pandemic, we know that we're going to see more people returning to the workforce, and the child-care sector being strong and stable is incredibly important.

Recently, we just stabilized the sector by providing an infusion of money—\$4.4 million. This went directly to centres—non-profit centres—who were running a deficit. We wanted to ensure that they were able to start a—wipe the slate clean, if you will,

and start fresh and not have a—so that—there were 230 centres that received funding under that announcement that we made three weeks ago: 230 centres in the province that were running deficits that received that money and now are running without a deficit.

We also wanted to ensure that there were—there was the more spaces I just shared with you, the 541 spaces that we created.

And when it comes to providing the equipment necessary to deal with the pandemic, we recognize centres have kept their doors open, many of them did throughout the pandemic, and we did provide 1.6 million pieces of PPE to child-care centres, as well as 7,580 eye-protective pieces of equipment to child-care centres throughout the province. Not sure if you were one of the centres who received any of that, but that is what we had made available.

And then, in addition, in recognizing the work that you would have done, the risk pay for operating throughout the pandemic, we did provide \$1,377 per eligible child-care worker, nearly—or, over 1,000 child-care workers were able to receive that benefit. So, just a few of the things that we did.

We know that more needs to be done; certainly wanting to partner with you on building a greater child-care sector on a go-forward basis, but thank you so much for being here tonight and for your presentation.

Mr. Chairperson: Stephania, do you have a quick response for the minister? No need to respond if you don't wish to; that's fine.

Other questions?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Miss, for your service and hard work for the children in Manitoba.

I would like more from—I'd like to hear from you on what you feel the child-care sector could have done with the \$18 million that the government hasn't spent.

Mr. Chairperson: Stephania, you have about 15 seconds to respond. Go ahead.

Ms. Kostiuk: Pay people what they're worth. How's that for 18 seconds?

Why don't you just pay them what they're worth instead of pretending—you took 65 of our spaces and you're putting—you're making announcements for our spaces, essentially.

You could have had them employed. You could have had more people employed and making more money. Take the money and spend it on the people that need it.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you so much, Stephania, for your presentation and also your willingness to interact with the questions from members of the committee.

We're now going to go to the next presenter, and so I'm going to call on Darren Stebeleski, and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting.

Darren Stebeleski, I would ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on.

All right, I think I see you now. Welcome to the meeting. You've got up to 10 minutes to make your presentation. Go ahead.

Mr. Darren Stebeleski (Private Citizen): Okay. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak tonight. I promise I won't take up too much of your time at this late hour.

I'm speaking to you as a parent of a child currently attending a licensed child-care centre in Winnipeg to express a number of concerns over the proposed Bill 47.

The bill defines an early-learning program as learning experiences for infants and preschool-age children. Notably absent from this definition are school-aged children, for whom there are 13,000 licensed school-age spaces in Manitoba.

The regulated programs offered by centres such as the one that my child attends provides children six to 12 years of age with a safe and healthy and stimulating environment, 260 days of the year. By leaving out children between the ages of six to 12 out of Bill 47, I fear that the Province is saying that Manitoba families with children between these ages don't deserve access to quality health—quality child care.

Bill 47 also seems to indicate that unlicensed child-minding services, such as dance studios or private art schools, will be eligible for public funding in the form of grants. As a parent who relies on licensed child care for the majority of the year, this troubles me greatly. I strongly feel that public money should be spent on enhancing the established and well-regulated, quality child-care centres that Manitobans currently access and require, rather than diminish them by spreading their operating funding

even thinner by having them compete for grants with private for-profit programming.

The bill also proposes freezing parent child-care fees for more than three years—or, for—sorry, for three more years, and it's distressingly unclear if this applies to school-aged children enrolled in child care.

Freezing fees may sound like a good thing on the surface, and I believe it's being sold that way, but if licensed centres should lose their operating grants and become deregulated under Bill 47, there's no other option than to raise parent fees substantially to cover the operative costs.

Having already dealt with a five-year fee freeze up to this point, we've seen that early childhood educator program—or, sorry, wages stagnating, forcing quality educators to leave the field, as people have talked about in many of the previous statements; increased fundraising efforts by these centres and parents to compensate for this; centres forced to cut programming and hire more child-care assistants, who make little more than minimum wage—which has, again, been addressed many times—and are often young, inexperienced, instead of qualified ECEs; the general devaluing of school-age ECEs treated by the Province as babysitters rather than the professional educators that they are.

* (21:30)

So in this hostile environment, I will ask the question, how are child-care centres to keep up with rising costs and educator wages? How will the sector recruit and keep high-quality, experienced educators in the field? What will this mean for the the condition of education and care for our children? Will the government subsidize equipment, supplies and spaces?

And with regard to training, Bill 47 refers to ECEs as employees who are certified, but it's left unclear as to how the Province will ensure that ECEs remain trained and knowledgeable child-care experts.

As it stands, to me and to many others, Bill 47 looks like a textbook example of austerity economics, telling those who are already just scraping by to somehow do more with less. This is always going to be a losing strategy because it's based on an impossibility, with children and their families being those who lose the most.

With so much of Bill 47 remaining either unfair or unclear, it simply must not be passed in its current state.

In closing, I'd like to stress that I, and many parents like me, demand a quality system of child care in Manitoba, and to us, this means robust public funding to regulated non-profit child-care centres such as the exemplary one that my children attend. This means no public funding in the form of operating grants to unregulated, unlicensed, for-profit child-minding services, and this means well-educated and well-remunerated ECEs in charge of our children.

And that's really the end of my statement. So, I realize that I'm under my 10 minutes, but I'm happy to cede them to—in order to keep this going.

Mr. Chairperson: All right, thank you, Mr. Stebeleski, for your presentation.

We'll now move to questions.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Mr. Stebeleski, for your presentation tonight.

I just wanted to clear up some misinformation about the intent on the school-age program, and, of course, the current licensing regime for school-age program and the importance that we've—we place on the school-age program is maintained in Bill 47.

What we have done is, for the first time ever, created a definition of early-learning childhood education, and that is enshrined in law, because it was never there before. And all the pertinent information about the school-age programs and the commiserate regulations are maintained in Bill 47 and, of course, with that, maintenance of that—the regulatory environment for the school-age program.

Of course, the funding, as you know, we fund the school-age spaces and require that we have early-learning childhood educators doing that program delivery in that system. And so rest assured that that school-age program, the quality and consistency in funding, is maintained for that.

And just appreciate you being here tonight, and thank you for your thoughts.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Stebeleski, any response to the minister?

Mr. Stebeleski: Not at this time, thanks.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, other questions from members of the committee?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Mr. Stebeleski, for your presentation and commitment to child care in this province. I think it's important.

And we'd like to hear from you on what is your thought on ensuring that school-age program is enshrined in legislation and is not in regulations where the minister can just change it at their whim. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Stebeleski, sorry, I have to recognize you first.

Darren Stebeleski, go ahead.

Mr. Stebeleski: Sorry. No problem.

Yes, I'm very—I am very concerned about it. I do want it enshrined, as you said, in legislation. I don't want these children left out; I don't suppose anyone does.

So I—to be honest with you, what I'm most concerned about is the idea that licensed daycare centres will now have to compete for operating funding with, you know—for these grants with other—with for-profit child-minding services, I guess, like dance studios, art studios, whatever. That part really distresses me. I think, like, we have a great *[inaudible]* funding.

I'd like—I and many others are willing to pay more taxes to support this, and I don't understand why we can't have this. I think our—the care of our children's the most important thing; I think all of us can agree on that.

And I just, you know—this coupled with the attack on public education, just—it's all coming at once and it's very distressing to me. People are already at their—at the end of their rope. This is—it's a trying time for everyone, and I see that in our ECE workers, and I don't want to see any more stress put on them.

Mr. Chairperson: Other questions from members of the committee?

Mr. Sala: Thank you, Mr. Stebeleski, for your comments and for taking time to present to us today on the importance of publicly funded child care.

Just wondering if you could comment on what it is that you're hearing from people in your community about their thoughts on Bill 47 and concerns around the direction that it seems to be taking us.

Mr. Stebeleski: Yes, the concern I'm hearing mostly is that it's being forgotten, with everybody focusing on 64, the education bill, and—so that it's sort of sneaking in under the wire, I guess, and under the radar. That's mostly what I'm hearing.

You know, it's my understanding that there are a lot of people speaking—or, registering to speak to the standing committee on that bill and not as many on this one. That concerns me because I feel that early childhood education is fundamental to, obviously, early childhood development, that these are teachers, they're not babysitters, and it's really important that we support them and fund them accordingly.

I think that—it's bizarre to me, frankly, that the Province will, you know, keep increasing funding to the Winnipeg Police Service, for example, but won't increase funding to early childhood education, when it seems to me like this is a perfect place to put money if you want to root out any of the root causes of crime. It's very easy to sort of shovel more money to the police, and it looks good optically, but to me it all starts here and now, with daycare, with, you know, education.

This is what I want to see money put towards more than anything.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Darren Stebeleski, for your answers to those questions and for also appearing before the committee and sharing your thoughts with us. Very much appreciated.

We're now going to move on to the next presenter. Now, Sheila Argue actually has indicated that she's not able to attend in person this evening, but she has provided a written submission, which is now being distributed. If there's leave of the committee, I'd like to have that written submission included in Hansard.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Then we'll move on to the next presenter after that, which is Jenny Da Silva. I'll call on Jenny Da Silva and ask the moderator to invite them into this meeting.

Jenny Da Silva, if I could ask you to unmute yourself and turn your video on.

Oh, it looks like Jenny Da Silva is not in attendance, so her name will be dropped to the end of the order.

I'll now move on to our next presenter, which is Kevin Rebeck, from the Manitoba Federation of Labour.

Kevin Rebeck, I'll ask the moderator to invite you into the meeting and I ask you to unmute yourself and turn your video on.

There you are. Good to see you again, Kevin. It's always a pleasure to hear from you. And you've got up to 10 minutes. Go for it.

Mr. Kevin Rebeck (Manitoba Federation of Labour): Bill 47 proposes profound changes to Manitoba's early-learning and child-care system.

The Manitoba Federation of Labour takes a strong interest in our provincial child-care system. We know that high-quality child care is good for children and supports their healthy development. We know that affordable and accessible child care makes it easier for parents, particularly mothers, to participate in the paid workforce, and is therefore an important gender equalizer. And we know that child care is a labour-intensive job creator, especially for women. As has often been said, everyone in Manitoba depends on someone who depends on child care.

Today, we want to raise two central objections to Bill 47: the privatization agenda that runs throughout the bill, and closely related is the threat this legislation poses to the quality and affordability of early-learning and child-care services in our province.

There is extensive research that shows that not-for-profit child care is higher quality and is a more efficient use of public dollars. Thus, Manitoba's proposed changes fly in the face of evidence and introduce unnecessary risks to our provincial child-care system.

We support organizations such as the Manitoba Child Care Association and Childcare is Essential, which identified further concerns with Bill 47, including its impact on early childhood educator training and other aspects of process quality.

Manitoba has a shortage of licensed early-learning and child-care spaces. The latest figures show that, in 2019-2020, Manitoba had just 38,465 licensed spaces in homes and centres to serve 202,382 children. This means Manitoba has a child-care space for just 19 per cent of our youngsters and that services for children aged six to 12 years are especially underdeveloped, with access for just 12.1 per cent of school-aged children.

* (21:40)

Most parents pay full fees. Manitoba reports only 6,452 children received a subsidy, meaning five out of six parents pay the maximum fee to enrol their child in one of the rare spaces.

As one indicator of how much Manitoba child-needs more child care, we point out that at least

122,600 children, or more than 61 per cent, have an employed mother. If Manitoba tripled the supply of child care, we would still not have a space for every child with an employed mother.

Since 2018, Manitoba has received at least \$15 million per year under the federal government's multilateral framework agreement on early learning and child care. Nationally, under the MFA, Ottawa will spend at least seven-and-a-quarter billion over 11 years as part of a national effort to build a system of quality, accessible, affordable, flexible and inclusive child care for all Canadians funded through negotiated bilateral agreements with the provinces.

Yet Manitoba's policy approach in Bill 47 moves our province away from this vision of child care as a public good for all citizens. Instead of—it begins to lay the foundation—instead of beginning to lay the foundation of a public system, Manitoba is pulling in a different direction. Bill 47 suggests a dramatic U-turn away from the non-profit child care and will accelerate privatization, prompting the growth of more expensive and worse quality for-profit child-care services.

For many years, Manitoba has been the envy of English-speaking Canada for its strong non-profit child-care policy architecture. Manitoba's current legislation, The Community Child Care Standards Act, limits all grants of public dollars to non-profit centres and licensed family homes. It specifies that the minister may authorize grants to be paid to non-profit corporations and co-operatives which operate licensed child-care centres and to persons who operate licensed group child-care homes or licensed family child-care homes.

This means that taxpayer dollars are only used to support not-for-profit centres, which make up 95 per cent of our centres and which supply basically nine in every 10 spaces.

Today, a child-care facility licence is simply not transferable to any other person. Manitoba's no-transfer rule permits existing commercial child-care centres to operate under existing ownership, but when that owner no longer wishes to operate their business, the operation must close down. The licence policy, in combination with funding rules, has meant that there are few incentives to own or operate for-profit child-care centres. In 2019-2020, Manitoba had just 35 commercial centres.

Under Bill 47, both of these two protections for non-profit child care would be eliminated. Bill 47

would permit any person to apply for a funding grant. This is a major change couched in deceptively simple language. The owner of a for-profit centre, for example, would be eligible for taxpayer-funded grants. Manitoba would suddenly create a climate in which for-profit child-care centres could receive grants and enrol subsidized children.

With facility licences available for transfer, we can anticipate mergers and acquisitions as commercial corporations seek to capitalize on new business opportunities. We know that where there's a sizeable share of commercial owners, they try to manipulate the regulatory environment to maximize profitability.

Research shows that, overall, commercial programs treat quality regulations as a maximum to meet rather than as a floor to exceed. This is a large part of why vast amounts of research concludes the quality in commercial child-care centres is lower than in non-profit programs.

Now, to be clear, Bill 47 does not promise to fund for-profit child-care centres. It simply makes it possible, for the first time in Manitoba's history, for commercial centres to be funded and to transfer licences.

We've seen what happens in long-term care when decision-makers work under the mistaken confidence that for-profits and not-for-profits meet the same regulations and requirements. Under COVID-19, this confidence has been deadly. Seniors have died at much greater rates in for-profit long-term care, even though the rules are supposed to be the same. Do we want to expose our children to the risks of profit motives in child care? The MFL says no.

By permitting commercial child-care centres to receive funding, the Province is proposing to permit taxpayer dollars to subsidize private profits. Through government operating grants, a private child-care owner could build a business, pay the mortgage to own a piece of property, defray staff costs, all while charging parents higher fees and funds that land in the bank account of private owners. The same pot of Manitoba dollars would have to go further, meaning less money for the existing non-profit child-care system. This is weak stewardship of public dollars and bad policy for our children and families.

Outside of Quebec, Manitoba has historically had the lowest child-care fees in Canada. Until recently, under existing legislation, the practice has been that the maximum daily fee has been applied to all non-profit facilities. In recent years, this policy has

cracked and some non-profits have begun charging higher rates to parents, largely because their operating funding from the Manitoba government has been shamefully frozen since 2016.

A new CCPA study on child-care fees in Canada has discovered a major price gap in Manitoba between non-profit child care and the stock of commercial child care. The researchers report that parent fees are 2.6 times higher in Winnipeg's commercial centres compared to fees in non-profit child care. In fact, in virtually every city in the cross-Canada study, parent fees are higher in the for-profit sector than in the not-for-profit sector.

In light of research that Manitoba's fees are higher in commercial child care, like everywhere else across the country, the MFL is deeply concerned about affordability.

As Manitoba's flat maximum fee policy breaks down under provincial austerity, sky-high fees in commercial child-care fees are a hundred per cent predictable. It's clear that Manitoba parents and children will be hurt if commercial child care expands.

In addition to squeezing higher fees from parents of young children, commercial child care tends to pay lower wages to early childhood educators, failing to value their important work and leading to even higher rates of staff turnover. High staff turnover and lower rates of trained educators are, in turn, a recipe for poor quality for children and their families.

If we believe that the work of early childhood educators is a vital public service—the MFL certainly does—then we should not allow wages and quality to be suppressed by a market-based system and over-reliance on parent fees. Vital public services should be supported with vital public funding.

There are other concerns about affordability and quality lurking in Bill 47. One of them is that in the text of the bill it reads that eligible parents may directly receive financial assistance to assist them in obtaining early-learning and child-care services, with no requirement that those public dollars be put in regulated, licensed services.

The proposed legislation clearly permits money to be given directly to parents if the parent is unable to access licensed care to buy babysitting in the grey market of unlicensed services because we have too few child-care services. This has nothing to do with solving families' needs for affordability—affordable, reliable, quality early-learning and child-care services.

Bill 47 will make child care worse for our province rather than better. And now's the time to move forward, not backwards.

It's clearer than ever that child care is essential infrastructure that helps to make the economy, as well as families, function well and fairly, and supports greater access to paid employment for women. We need to grow child-care services, improve their quality, support early childhood educators and make sure that all families have access to affordable, responsive and equitable child care where and when they need it.

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced a nearly universal view that our economic recovery depends on building an affordable, universal, quality child-care system. We should be pulling in the same direction to build a universal child-care system that works for the 21st century.

For the same reason that we support public education and public health, we need to support public early learning and child care as a public good. Manitoba should not be betting against all evidence that the private market of commercial child-care businesses can meet our needs.

The MFL oppose Bill 47 and rejects its privatization agenda because it will be bad for children and families in our province. What Manitobans need and deserve is a quality, affordable, publicly funded, universal child-care system.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Rebeck, for your presentation.

We'll now go to questions.

Ms. Squires: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Rebeck. It's always a pleasure to see you, and thanks for spending your Thursday evening with us. And I appreciate your presentation and your words tonight.

Just wanted to point out, and just a point of clarification: when we talk about a regulated child-care space that is licensed—and any space that receives funding from the Province, of course, is licensed, and then of course is under the category of being regulated. And if you are a regulated space, you must adhere to the daily parent fee, which we have capped at the second-lowest parent fees in the country. And as you know, we have capped them. And so we are looking to keep an affordable child-care system that is accessible to all Manitoba families.

You've mentioned, too, the work of the federal government, and as you know, we do have a bilateral agreement on early learning and child care with the federal government. And I'm very grateful for the cooperation and the collaboration with our federal partners. Very pleased that I have been able to meet with Minister Hussen and talk about child care in the province of Manitoba.

* (21:50)

And, of course, grateful for their contributions. They do provide \$15 million a year for the enhancement of child care in the province, in comparison to the provincial contribution, this year, was \$185 million. That is \$25 million more than any other government has invested in an annual child-care sector. And so that is the budget that we unveiled last week, the additional \$5 million that was going into the early-learning child-care sector, for a total of \$185 million.

We think that that is a good start. We know that there is more work to do in terms of ensuring that all families have access to affordable, high-quality child care and we—but we do believe that budget '21 was a good start with that historic investment of \$185 million into the sector.

And certainly do know that we have more to do on building that sector, but wanted to just put that clarification for your information, in case you had not heard about—knew about the cap on parent fees and the requirement for all of our licensed spaces to adhere to that daily parent fee schedule, as it is in—as it always has been in regulation and is maintained in regulation.

So, not really a question; just to thank you so much for being here and a pleasure to see you again, Mr. Rebeck.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Rebeck, any response for the minister?

Mr. Rebeck: Yes, please.

Yes, thank you, minister, and I'm glad we can agree that affordable, accessible child care is a mutual goal that we want to see more of. I think there's lots of evidence presented that shows that the non-profit sector is the best place to do that, and our concern with this legislation is the enhanced role for the private sector to play in the child-care system with public dollars and resources that are limited.

What we need are a lot more spaces. There's a huge need out there, and the non-profit sector, with

adequate provincial funding, is the way to make that happen.

Mr. Chairperson: Other questions?

Ms. Adams. We've got about 80 seconds.

Ms. Adams: Thank you. I would ask leave for more time to ask questions to this knowledgeable witness—presenter.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave from the committee for additional time for questions of this particular witness? *[interjection]*

Suggestion from the honourable minister is perhaps an extra minute. So why don't we stick with that.

You have two minutes and change.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Mr. Rebeck, for your knowledgeable presentation.

I'd like some information from you in terms of a labour standpoint. What does quality affordable child care mean to women in the workforce?

Mr. Rebeck: Yes, sadly from a workers—worker perspective, child-care educators are still woefully undervalued and underpaid. There is a need for there to be some standards and a fair living wage paid to these workers, who deal with some of our most vulnerable, some of our most loved ones, in a way that respects the role that they play. And that means having fair wages, having pensions, having benefits, and this sector is woefully behind on having adequate resources to do that in a way that's meaningful.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Mr. Rebeck, for your answer.

My other question is pertaining to the funding that the minister is announcing. Majority of that money is federal money.

So I would like your thoughts on, do you feel there should be more money put into child care into this province to ensure child-care centres have the funding needed to provide the care to children and the wages ECEs need?

Mr. Rebeck: Yes, I think both the provinces and the federal government have a responsibility here to have a vibrant, public and not-for-profit child-care system that's got adequate funding, that respects wage levels and creates more spaces—541 spaces simply isn't enough. We need a lot more created, supported and having good-paying jobs that help our economy, not just with those workers themselves but for the services

they provide that allow others to enter the workforce. It would be very good for our economy to make that investment.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Thank you, Mr. Rebeck.

Is that good, Ms. Adams? All right, appreciate it.

And I thank you very much for your time today, Mr. Rebeck, and your knowledgeable presentation and your willingness to entertain even a few extra questions from the members of this committee.

We'll now move on to the next presenter. So, I'll call on Sue Sydoruk, and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting.

Sue Sydoruk, I'm asking you to unmute yourself and turn your video on. Sue comes to us from RRC child-care centre.

Floor Comment: Hello.

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, there you are. All right, welcome to the—to this committee presentation this evening.

You have the opportunity to make a presentation for up to 10 minutes. Go right ahead.

Ms. Sue Sydoruk (Red River College Early Childhood Centre): Thank you so much for the standing committee to have the opportunity here to speak with you tonight regarding Bill 47, pardon me. I hope you all have reliable and loving child care at home tonight and I hope you're still sitting comfortably.

My name is Sue Sydoruk and I am the current executive director at the Red River College Early Childhood Centre. I personally have been in the field of early learning and child care for over 30 years—class of '84 shout-out—and I have had many roles in those over 30 years. And I will describe them a little bit, just so that later in the presentation you can under—I can give you a little bit more real-time experiences.

So, I did start off as a front-line worker, as we all do; soon to move into management. I also taught. I still continue to teach at Red River College in the continuing education department. I moved on to be an executive director of a centre in south St. Vital for 17 years, and then I moved into the Province, where I was a child-care co-ordinator for 10 years. So, really seeing both sides of the fence.

After 10 years, I took a secondment—sand this might be awkward, Minister Squires, but I was one of the subject matter experts on the Online Child Care

Registry when it started to be developed. And so I know we spoke about this earlier in presentations and I can certainly speak to it more.

And then, about 10 years ago, I was wooed back into the field, to be the ED of the Red River College child-care centre, and I couldn't be happier. So, that's a little bit about my history and hopefully I have learned some thing over—or two over the years.

I'm happy to speak to Bill 47. I really, really believe that we have a strong foundation here and there's no need to break it and rebuild it. I don't mind change, but I think change needs to come with all the stakeholders at the table. So, therefore, I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak tonight. But I wish there could have been a little bit more input from the child-care sector when Bill 47 was being spoken about.

We have such a good foundation with our legislation, with our regulations in place. We ensure staff training and ratios and class sizes and health and safety. What the regulations don't teach us is how to truly care and love these children, and you have to be a very special person in order to do so.

So when we talk about regulations and the act and so on and so forth, those are great things, but when we talk about early childhood educators, there's not a profession like it. There's no one who says when they're 10 years old, I want to be a banker, I want to be—maybe a princess—but not an accountant. I don't know those people.

I know early childhood educators, and most of us are lifers until it got to the point where we couldn't be, and we see people leaving the field in droves. And it's sad, and the people who pay for that are the children and the families of Manitoba. So we need to get that back. We need to build it stronger, not—and I don't know that Bill 47 is the answer for that.

Okay, child care definitely makes the economy go around. And, so for instance, in—where I work, it allows for students to go into post-secondary education to go into the workplace providing a strong economy.

* (22:00)

It provides for—or it allows for a blossoming workforce for women, for those who need a hand up, for those who have so much to offer in Manitoba. They can't do it without child care. And so that is one of the huge pieces of the puzzle.

I'm always a little concerned when the things that matter most get attacked, such as health care, child care, education. That concerns me. Those are the things that matter most, and I can't stress that enough, and I'm so passionate about it even 35 years later in my field.

I want to speak to a little bit—oh, can you see me?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we can still see and hear you. That's fine; keep going.

Ms. Sydoruk: I want to speak to a little bit about the for-profit philosophy. When I was a child-care co-ordinator in my jurisdiction where I went and I licensed and monitored child-care centres, homes, and nursery schools, I had three centres that were for-profit. And I can tell you first-hand, with great intentions, these people were lovely, but they always were worried about the dollars that were coming in the door. Consequently the staffing was a revolving door because they only ever paid minimum wage. One of the centres has to have an ECE II or III as a director. They designated one of their staff as a director and she had no idea that she was a director. The owner just made her that on paper. They often were short on supplies, whether that be health and safety supplies like first-aid kits or arts and crafts supplies. And it was difficult. It was difficult because they only could rely on parent fees.

I am of the mind that public dollars should not go to private entities, though. That, as a citizen, I don't want my tax-paying dollars to go to private businesses and for them to make a profit off the backs of children. That's just not acceptable to me. And I see—I saw it first hand that it just didn't work.

So, my—sometimes I find that parents are having to go to private centres, using it as a transitional measure until they can get into the quality not-for-profit centre that they want to get into. And they're always very happy when they get called from our centre that they get it—that they've got a spot.

So, again, when we look at how much of a non-profit child-care budget goes towards staffing and wages and benefits, it's approximately 80 per cent of the entire budget, and the revenue sources coming into the non-profit is parent fees at approximately 60 per cent, operating grant, and then fundraising. And I'm embarrassed to tell you that I have been fundraising for my own wage and the wage of my staff for 30-something years, and there's only so many chocolate bars I can sell. And that's the truth.

And I—I'm going to, within five years, probably retire, but what I want for my staff is to be able to have a solid pension plan named in the bill that we know is going to move forward and go forward for them, and we want to give them decent living wages. It's so important. That—we love those children, but love doesn't pay our bills, and I know that our parent fees have been frozen for eight years now. And this government is proposing another three years for parent fees. I think that's wonderful for our Manitoba families, but, boy, do I wish my cable bill would freeze for 11 years. And I know that's not going to happen.

If we continue to freeze parent fees and not add more to the operating grant, we're going to cripple the child-care centres out there. And I can tell you that Red River College has an extremely good reputation. We do great work. I'm so pleased to be part of that organization. But, if something doesn't change, I don't—I see that centre retiring about the same I retire, unfortunately. So—

Mr. Chairperson: Just a time check. You've got about 30 seconds. Go ahead.

Ms. Sydorчук: Thank you. One thing I can say last is that the pandemic has definitely taught us that child care is an essential service, and I really hope that this government sees it as such.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Sue Sydorчук, for your presentation.

We'll move right into questions.

Ms. Squires: Well, it was a pleasure meeting you this evening, Ms. Sydorчук, and I really appreciate your years of experience and your contributions to providing child care in South St. Vital and providing your service in work in government, in helping us create that strong, stable child-care sector.

Our government certainly does recognize the need for a strong sector, and that is why we're moving forward with creating new spaces and historic levels of investment. This year, we are putting \$185 million into the ELCC sector, which is \$25 million more than ever before from any previous government. That is a record level.

We know that there's more to go. We need to continue on with our strong track record of putting investments in the sector. We know that there's certain

things that need to be stabilized and move forward on that.

We also recognize that, in response to some child-care service providers who were saying that the cost—there's a lot of discretionary costs that pop up—and you probably know this first-hand—where you want to have supplies on hand but you don't know where you can get the money to just go and buy some discretionary supplies for extra activities for the children in your—under your care. And so we did establish an \$11.5-million sustainability trust for child-care centres that they can apply to each year and get funding for those smaller capital purchases with fewer—you know, fewer restrictions.

And so that is something that was definitely required—requested by the sector, and we're very pleased to make that happen this year alone. And, as well, in creating the additional spaces—five hundred and seventy new—one spaces that were—that are being created this year, because we know that while right now we do have vacancies in the system—4,600 vacancies throughout the province in a variety of different regions and in a variety of different centres and with—but we know that when the pandemic is over—and hopefully it is in our rear-view mirror sooner rather than later—we know that we need to ensure that we've got child-care centres opening their doors like never before for families and parents who are returning to work in many cases.

And to create a level—like, a stable, level playing field, what we did is we worked with all the non-profit centres who were facing a deficit. We were able to provide them with enough money to wipe that deficit clean. We gave \$4.4 million just a few weeks ago to the centres that were running a deficit so that they can—then, that they can open their doors and be there for the families that depend on them.

So, no question, just a real lot of gratitude to you for the work that you've done and your contributions to child care in the province over the years.

Mr. Chairperson: Sue Sydorчук, any response for the minister?

Ms. Sydorчук: Yes, I just wanted to say, you know, I do appreciate that this government is trying to be creative in its way to distribute some of that money that has been sort of sitting and pooling up. I—we do appreciate it one hundred per cent.

We could do without the circulars at 4 o'clock on Fridays, though.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. Other questions?

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Thank you, Ms. Sycharchuk [*phonetic*], for your dedication to children and to the great work you did within government.

My question comes surrounding the operating grants that have been frozen for a number of years. And my understanding is that is limiting centres being able to pay their ECEs wages that they very rightly deserve, as they're highly trained, educated staff, how much would you need your operating grant increased so that you could pay your staff what they deserve?

* (22:10)

Ms. Sydorчук: I mean, I certainly don't have a dollar figure right off the top of my head, but we would probably need at least 0.5 more of the total operating grant in order to make a dent in wages.

We haven't had any wage increases in approximately five years. Our centre is—has—had been established in 1974 as a training centre, just as St. Boniface Hospital is a training centre for a hospital. We're proud of that. We want to keep that up. Therefore, we want the best of the best.

Right now, we stay competitive with other people, but we're not in a competitive business. We just want to pay fair wages. So we need the operating grant to go up significantly.

Mr. Chairperson: All right, thank you, Sue Sydorчук. We're out of time for questions, a little over time, actually, and I do thank you for your time this evening and for being willing to answer the questions that were posed to you and to make your presentation.

So we're going to move to the next presenter. I'm going to call on Mike Urichuk and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting.

Mike Urichuk, I just ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on.

All right, I think I can see you now. So, welcome to the meeting. You've got about 10 minutes to make your presentation. Go ahead.

Mr. Mike Urichuk (Private Citizen): I want to start by recognizing the voices of the other presenters that have gone before me tonight. They have passionately and succinctly, as well as insightfully, laid out a need for change within our child-care system and changes needed within Bill 47. And I just wanted to thank them

for their work and advocacy for such an essential service within Manitoba.

Now, on with me. And my name is Mike Urichuk. I come before you today as a parent, private citizen and teacher from Winkler, Manitoba. Thank you for the opportunity to present here today.

As a teacher, most of my legislative reading has been involved with Bill 64, which was cited earlier by Darren, and its subsequent materials. And in my readings, one of the relevant materials is the K-to-12 education review report. And in the report, it states: Although an increasing number of students appear very ready for school, there has been a related rise in the number of students not ready for school. These early gaps in school readiness translate into achievement gaps that tend not to close over students' academic careers. End quote.

With once-in-a-lifetime change in the K-to-12 education happening simultaneously with these child-care reforms, I'm surprised at the lack of mention and seemingly—and seeming lack of focus on creating a comprehensive approach to raising the next generation of Manitobans, as cited earlier, a cradle-to-grave strategy. We need to shift the perspective of child care within Manitoba from supervision and custodial care to one that's a perspective of investment and of education within our society.

My daughter has benefited from the tremendous work of highly trained and dedicated ECEs. You have heard of the various benefits of properly trained staff from previous presenters. However, the benefit is not isolated to our children. It's not isolated to the parents. It's not isolated to the families. And that's been highlighted within this COVID pandemic that we have been experiencing for over a year now. The COVID has highlighted the essential nature of child care. Throughout the pandemic, our ECEs have demonstrated how they are foundational to not only our economy running but our own well-being and the functioning of our society as a whole.

The government has acknowledged these workers are essential critical service providers who have been nothing short of heroic. Yet, we continue to pay our ECEs and child-care workers below living wages in some areas and certainly nowhere near the level where we should be paying essential workers.

This historic and continued underfunding of the child-care system is abhorrent. However, it is consistent with this government's approach to underfunding public services, underfunding education and

underfunding sectors where the majority of the workers are female.

Bill 47 is a missed opportunity, to say the very least. Instead of investing appropriately and supporting our constructive, although underfunded, model, we see a move to privatization and for-profit centres.

When I was a child, my parents relied on private, for-profit care. Their—the priority of these centres—at least, the ones I was a part of—was to provide care as cheaply as possible, meaning that educational opportunities were non-existent, and our lunch and snacks were either also non-existent or the equivalent to—well, one of the standards was a mustard sandwich when we were given food there. Or, sometimes, we would have a butter sandwich.

And profit being a focus—and, a profit focus does not belong in our child-care system. We need changes in our child-care system, and that's been a highlight over and over again. However, the changes can simply be stated with the general concept of greater investment within our current system, not just from our federal government, but from the provincial government.

We need a cradle-to-grave, or at least, cradle-to-college approach to child care, not just for the admirable goal of quality child care but, as in studies previously cited, for the betterment of our society. We need to attain—in order to—when we invest within child care, we end up having a better Manitoba, both today and into the future.

It has been said that it takes a community to raise a child. I encourage this government to hear and act upon the overwhelming message from the presenters here tonight and properly fund our child-care system. Although, regarding funding, the term historic is thrown around, historic is not equal to appropriate. Clearly, based on what has been presented here tonight, current investment is not enough.

In closing, I implore the government to work with the—I implore the provincial government to work with the federal government in working towards the implementation of a universal, non-profit child-care program, drafting school-age-care language into this legislation and increasing the operating grants available to non-profit centres. ECEs need to be shown that they are valued, not just with words from politicians, but by paying them at a level that is representative of the value of the essential service that they provide.

I want to thank the past presenters here tonight and for the members of the committee for hearing these words. And I will now invite questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mike Urichuk, for your presentation.

And we'll move on to questions.

Ms. Squires: Thank you, Mike, for your presentation tonight. It was a pleasure to meet you and hear your words and hear your perspective on the benefits that we need to—the benefits of creating a strong, stable early-learning and child-care sector.

And just wanted to point out that we do agree that even though we are making those historic investments of \$185 million into the child-care sector, which is \$25 million more than ever before, we are cognizant of the fact that when we inherited government, we did inherit a child-care sector that was deeply underfunded as well as with a significant, lengthy wait-list that we are working towards creating 5,000 new spaces in the last five years and putting extra money in.

We know more needs to be done. We will continue that work until we—and we won't stop until we get a child-care sector that provides accessible, affordable child care for all Manitoba families.

Mr. Chairperson: Mike Urichuk, any response to the minister?

Mr. Urichuk: I'm glad that we agree that the goal is to strive toward having an affordable child-care centre for all Manitobans. Sitting at the 19 per cent of children being able to even have a spot available, or spots available, for 19 per cent of children is certainly a concern.

My question, then, is if we agree, why don't we move toward that goal faster, as opposed to looking to give tax cuts to wealthier Manitobans?

Mr. Chairperson: All right, are there other questions? I see Ms. Adams. Go ahead.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Mr. Urichuk, for your work, both as an educator for our children and making your presentation today.

You stated that you've—as a teacher, that there—you've seen what happens when—that some kids are not school-ready. I'm just wondering if you could elaborate: What does that mean long-term for children that are going into the school system?

* (22:20)

Mr. Urichuk: Well, that's a long conversation about what preparedness for school what—could look like and the benefits of quality care for our children, whether it be quality care through CFS for kids within systems there or whether it be through child-care system providing care for students.

But I think that to narrow that conversation to our meeting here tonight, the early childhood educators need to be able to be recognized for the professionals that they are. Currently, we have them doing phenomenal tasks of supporting emotional learning so that when they come to school, they can interact with their peers and be productive members of a classroom structure.

We see ECEs preparing them by introducing concepts, even before the age of two, of mass and equivalence and if we start to introduce those by the time they're five, for some of these people who don't have access to early—quality early childhood education, they are already three years behind in what has already been described as the eight most important years of development within their life.

So—and the quote that I described was straight from a government document that this government has funded. And so I anticipated there to be agreement that there needs to be a greater investment within education and for it to start within the early childhood part of life.

And so to finish up, the main concern I had, as opposed to just being that it's not—sorry, as opposed to just the for-profit expansion, is that there really does not seem to be collaboration with the Education Department and there seems to be no vision of what a grand scheme of cradle to grave will look like within Manitoba. And that's disheartening and distressing.

Mr. Chairperson: Any further questions? We've got about 30 seconds. No? That's fine.

Well, thank you, Mr. Urichuk, for your presentation and for being willing to answer the questions of members of the committee. We really do appreciate your time and your participation this evening.

Now, we're now going to move to the next participant and I will call on Renée Cable and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting.

Renée Cable, I ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on. All right, I think I can see you now. Welcome to the meeting. You've got about 10 minutes. You can go ahead and make your presentation. Welcome.

Ms. Renée Cable (Private Citizen): Thank you. Good evening and thanks for having me. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with all of you. And I'm going to try to keep this short, as you might see behind me my daughter is still up; she wanted to watch the movie. So I'm going to try and keep this tight.

I just want to recognize the many workers and advocates who spoke before me. So much wisdom, dedication, insight. It's really incredible the depth and breadth of the field in Manitoba.

I'm here as a concerned parent of a school-aged child—who I currently have excellent care for in a non-for-profit centre just across the field from her school—and of a teen who has aged out of child care. I'm not here as someone who is likely to need child care in the future, aside from what I already have access to, and I'm very hopeful that that centre will remain open. And I'm not here as a child-care professional, but I'm here as someone who understands how disproportionately women are affected by the lack of access to child care and just how important it is for children to get the best start possible. I'm here as a professional woman who would not be in the position I am in now without the access that I had to quality, affordable, public child care.

And I'd like to just tell you a bit of a story about me and my son's experience with daycare. When he was coming up on three years old, I made the tough but totally necessary decision to leave precarious, low-paying work in the hospitality sector to upgrade my bachelor's degree and go back to school full-time. I was parenting on my own at the time and I absolutely would not have been able to complete my studies without the quality, reliable, public care he received at the University of Winnipeg Student Association Day Care.

I had access to the best possible care for my son—like, the best care. And based on my income and my postal code at the time, I felt like I had won the lottery. I had a subsidized spot that allowed me to keep food on my table, a roof for—over our heads, and most importantly, I knew he was safe because it was a public centre with high standards and accountability. And I knew it was a safe space for my son to learn and grow while I was busy learning and growing.

And while he was at the UWSA daycare he made a lot of friends. Some were children of professors of the university. Some were children of newcomers in the neighbourhood. Some were children who needed additional supports. And some were children much like him who had moms and dads who were trying to

write finals while potty training a toddler. But I could go to school and not worry. It brought stability to our lives and allowed me to pursue my education.

I can tell you now that I have a spot and I absolutely pay full fare, so the Province got its money back.

While I—while Connor [*phonetic*] was going to UWSA, I joined the daycare board, and I served as chair for a couple of years. And it was there that I learned just how dedicated the workers are, because I learned that most make just over minimum wage, that they're disproportionately Black, Indigenous, people of colour. I learned that turnover is high because sometimes the centre up the road can pay 15 cents an hour more.

I learned that often people leave the field not because they don't love the work but because they can't afford to do it any longer. And we heard people speak earlier who—you know, women working two jobs to put food on the table, doing the work that they love but they can't afford to do the job.

A number of times tonight, I've heard the minister say that it's up to the board at the centre to determine wages and decide how staff are paid. But the minister knows that her government has frozen operating funding since 2016. So it's not really up to the board when there's nothing more to give. If there are no crumbs in the cupboard, nobody's eating.

And the government is creating an impossible situation, pitting parents against providers. How can parent fees stay frozen while operating grants are, too? It's illogical, and it's setting up the non-profit providers who have worked so hard to build up their centres, to fail.

And while the minister's held off on increasing fees for now, we can see that she does not feel—that she does feel that this could happen once we're past the pandemic. That really concerns me. And I'm somebody that can pay a little bit more for my child care, but I really worry about other people who have to make the decision between going to their job or sending their kids to daycare. And it shouldn't be that decision anymore. We're in 2021. We should have a system that supports families and specifically supports women in their pursuits of going to work. We shouldn't have to worry now that there might not be a spot, that it might be too expensive, that my child might get hurt if I'm there.

The last thing I want to say is that the—all of the changes that are coming in in Bill 47 really just

encourage privatization of the sector, And it takes money away from the people who are caring for our children and it gives it to for-profit companies. We've seen what happens in PCHs under this sort of operating model. We've watched so many people suffer through this pandemic. And it just really is illogical to break down a system that, though it isn't perfect, with some investments would be really good.

And this is all to say that I fully believe we're moving in the wrong direction at the—on this. And child care really is essential. We need to invest in it, not cut it, because most moms and dads no longer have the option to stay at home and care for their little ones. We should be investing in our public system, not cutting it. I thank you for your time.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Renée Cable, for your presentation.

We'll move right into questions.

Ms. Squires: Well, thank you very much, Ms. Cable, for your presentation. And I certainly hope that your daughter felt that it was worth the wait to stay up and join us here in committee. I just want to express, probably on behalf of everyone in this room tonight, that seeing your daughter was certainly a joy and brought a smile to all of our faces. So much appreciated that she stayed up so late to see how committee proceeds.

Just in regards to your comment about needing a strong publicly funded child-care sector, we couldn't agree more. That is why we are making investments and why we will continue to make solid investments. Very pleased that you were able to find the child care to pursue your career and achieve your goals in your education and your goals. And certainly want to ensure that we've got that same child-care sector for future generations, and that is certainly exactly what we're doing by making strong investments in our public child-care sector, and we'll continue to do that for future generations to come.

* (22:30)

So, thank you for being here tonight. Thanks to your daughter for staying up late to be with us.

Mr. Chairperson: Renée Cable, any response for the minister?

Ms. Cable: No, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Other questions from members of the committee?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Cable, for joining us tonight and for your presentation.

I'd like to know more from you about how important it is for you that your daughter is in a publicly funded, non-for-profit child-care centre for your after-school programming?

Ms. Cable: It really is—it is critical to me, actually. We believe—in our home, we believe, really, that public services are really important. We think about her before-and-after care in the same way that we thought about her early learning, which is it is an extension of her school day.

It is essential for us that it is publicly funded, that it's not for profit. I want to know that her care is not affected by profit margins. I want to know that every dollar that goes into her care is paying the wages of those awesome teachers that are there, that are paying for the programs that they're running there, that are paying for the healthy snacks that they give them.

I really—I'm—*[interjection]*—she just said, very healthy. I'm just really—we wouldn't have it any other way.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Further questions for the witness—or the presenter?

Mr. Sala: Thank you so much, Ms. Cable, for the presentation. It was great to hear your perspectives on child care.

I'm just wondering if you could elaborate on how your family reacted to this government's working with the Chambers of Commerce to deliver child-care services in the province. Any commentary on that and that direction that we saw from the PC government?

Ms. Cable: I have to say that I was shocked. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me. I've never considered delivery of a public service being appropriate to be delivered through a chamber of commerce.

It—there—it's just a huge disconnect for me as to why. It just doesn't make any sense aside from it really made me consider who was motivating, what was happening, who was pulling the strings, who stood to benefit. And at the end of the day when I walked through those questions that didn't—I didn't come up with families that I knew or people that I thought about that were waiting on child care.

It is—I'm still baffled by this decision. I still don't really understand the logic.

Mr. Chairperson: Any other questions?

All right, seeing none, then Renée Cable, I'm going to thank you on behalf of the committee for appearing before committee tonight, and also pass along our greetings to your daughter, and I'll give her a little wave and hope she enjoys her healthy snacks. She's probably going to get some more tomorrow, I'm sure.

An Honourable Member: Hope she enjoyed the movie.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. And, I—yes, not much of a movie, but it'll have to do for her.

In any case, we're going to move to the next witness now.

So, I will call on Jessica Perry and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. *[interjection]* Sorry—the next presenter.

Yes. What did I call her? *[interjection]*

Okay, thank you. The next presenter. All right.

And Jessica Perry, I'll ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on. I think I can see you now. There you are. Very good.

Welcome to the committee meeting this evening. You have up to 10 minutes to make your presentation.

Ms. Jessica Perry (Private Citizen): Hello. My name is Jessica Perry, as everyone stated earlier. I just was—wanted to come to talk today about the bill because I'm just concerned about early childhood education.

I have a—I'll just talk a little bit about my experience with sort of the—I was using the private child care for quite a while because it was all we could get, but unfortunately, because of the cost, I was only able to have my child go two days a week to daycare, and then the rest of the time, we kind of cobbled together care with grandparents and stuff like that.

And then of course, after the pandemic hit and all the daycares closed and then I again, was, you know, scared to have my parents watch the children because of the pandemic. It just made things a very, very stressful year this year.

And luckily, just in September, at the last minute, I was able to get full-time care at a not-for-profit centre, and it's been a huge benefit for our family, especially for my younger son who's four. He's one of those kids that we were talking about earlier who's undiagnosed and currently has a significant speech delay.

We—just been on a waiting list for almost a year now for him to be seen by the developmental pediatrician. So—and again, with the pandemic, we lost a lot of our supports like the speech therapist. We were only able to have Zoom meetings for a long time, which were completely, well—it was better than nothing, but for a child with some developmental needs, trying to use a screen to do speech therapy was not that efficient or effective.

You know he's—was followed by occupational therapists, and, again, we weren't able to go to see them in person and we were only able to do phone meetings. So, really, the only support he has for his, you know, social, language, all that development, are the highly skilled early child educators that he sees every day and has just helped him so significantly.

And I—it's just shocking to me that—to hear that, you know, people talking about how they have to work second jobs, you know, they—centres not being able to pay their staff well enough. I mean, without these people, my son wouldn't be, like, moving forward, getting his speech improving. And it's just, like, he's been really set back for the last year because of, you know, not being able to access services because, you know, this uncontrolled pandemic we're living in, which, of course, you know, there's not much that we can change about that.

But I'm just really concerned he's going to be one of those kids who, when it's time to go to daycare, he's not going to be ready. So I just—I guess my point being that we need to make sure that, you know, all kids have access to high-quality education, high-quality early education, so that when they do get to school that they're able to, you know, achieve and excel and thrive.

And so I just—I wanted to come today to say that the school, the daycares, they need better funding so that they can retain their staff. Like, even in the last, you know, since September he's been at this full-time daycare. I think he might be on his second or third worker. There's a high turnover of staff, and it's just—I just really hope that going forward these kids are going to—like, the daycare centres are going to have access to the funding that they need in order to continue to support all the kids in Manitoba.

That's basically what I wanted to say to you.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Thank you, Jessica Perry, for your presentation.

And we'll now open it up for questions.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure):

Well, thank you very much, Jessica, first of all, for waiting this long. These are long nights and a lot of presenters. It's one of the beauties of this Legislature that we do all legislation with a committee that allows Manitobans to come forward and speak to it. And thank you for being patient.

Also, as a little bit of a benefit, there's a little bit of a silver lining with COVID that you can do it from your home. We've had some very interesting presentations over the last couple of weeks.

So you've certainly identified another area for this committee, and I know we certainly appreciate it. What we're—I would say what we're allowed to hear is real stories and individuals coming forward and sharing with this committee what's going on in real time in their homes.

So I'll leave it there and just thank you again very much for being part of this process, for having your input and for speaking to committee of the Legislature. And all the best with your son.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Jessica Perry, any response to the minister?

Ms. Perry: No, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Further questions?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Perry, for your presentation and sharing your story about your son.

I'd like to know from you a little bit more about how your child—your son's child-care centre is able to provide the supports needed for your son and how important it is for publicly funded child care to be available for your family.

Ms. Perry: I guess one of the things—I guess—they're able to provide a lot of the socialization that he can't get now outside of daycare and home, just because we're not having other people in our home, or really—and again, I don't have friends or family with children the same age as him, so, you know, all of his socialization is at daycare. They work with him really well, helping with his language. They're—you know, they work with his speech therapist and the occupational therapists and they sort of, as a team, help support him in his development.

* (22:40)

And it—I've just—even in the—he's only—hasn't even been there for a year and he's made more progress than

he did in, like, his first three years. So it's—I've just been really grateful, and it's really important for me to have access to affordable, quality child care.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Further questions?

Mr. Sala: I don't actually have a question. I just want to thank the presenter for the story that was shared and for just highlighting the incredible value that's brought to Manitoban families through high-quality child care, and especially one that can provide the kind of supports that she outlined that are being provided to her son.

So, thank you so much for sharing that. I think it really highlights the importance of these supports for families. Grateful you took the time to be here.

Mr. Chairperson: Jessica Perry, any response to Mr. Sala?

Ms. Perry: Thank you. No, no response.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Further questions, Ms. Lamoureux?

Ms. Lamoureux: Thank you, Ms. Perry, for your presentation and can you talk to us a little bit further about the supports that are often needed but maybe haven't been considered or aren't talked about as much as they should have been throughout this legislation?

Just to give an example—and you've talked about this throughout your presentation—about speech therapists or occupational therapists.

Ms. Perry: Yes, I'm not totally sure about that. I just know that the occupational therapist connects with the daycare and they work together to help support him.

Like, my work life is extremely busy right now, so I don't really have a lot of time to—I'm not able to take a lot of the time needed to help support things like language and those kind of things at home, so by him being able to do that at the daycare is pretty significant.

But otherwise, I'm not—I don't know the system well enough, I guess, to speak to it.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions?

Okay. Well, I thank you, Jessica Perry, for coming to committee this evening, for making your presentation and for answering the questions and I wish you all the best with your young son and hope that he has a bright future in front of him.

We'll go on to the next witness—or, sorry, the next presenter. It's starting to be late. And I will ask the moderator to invite Jill O'Donohue into the meeting.

I'll call on Jill O'Donohue and ask Jill to unmute herself and to turn her video on.

All right. I think I can see you now, Jill. Welcome to the committee meeting this evening. You have up to 10 minutes to make your presentation. Go ahead.

Ms. Jill O'Donohue (Private Citizen): Good evening. My name is Jill O'Donohue, and I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak to you all today.

I appear before you as a mom who has her two children in provincially funded daycare. I'm grateful for the dedication the daycare staff have shown in providing quality care and educational activities for my kids every day. I have served on daycare boards for six years and I am currently the chair of my children's daycare board. In this capacity, I can attest to the constant budgeting challenges that daycares face.

Lastly, I am here today as a speech language pathologist, or SLP, who works with preschool-aged children in daycares, nursery programs and their homes. I have the privilege of consulting with early childhood educators, who I will refer to as ECEs, every day at work.

I have a vested interest in child care in this province. I am here to ensure that Bill 47 does not compromise the child-care system Manitoba currently has in place. The shift from our current highly regulated system towards a system that encourages the wholesale privatization of child-care services terrifies me, frankly.

Quality, accessible and affordable child care is vitally important in child development. It provides children the opportunity to learn with their peers, challenges their skills and provides endless play and growth opportunities.

Professionally, I see that child-care centres encourage language development through play. Research has shown that play is, in fact, the most effective learning environment. Trained ECEs have the knowledge and—have the knowledge to support this learning.

Bill 47 indicates the possibility of more for-profit centres in Manitoba. I have experience in both for-profit and not-for-profit centres as a consulting SLP. It is not for lack of care, but without question, the not-

for-profit centres are better able to accommodate children with additional support needs as they have access to provincial inclusion funding. Asking a for-profit centre to allocate funding out of their own budget to support one child with additional needs will be difficult to justify. This results in limited accessibility to programming for such children. Once again, as an SLP working with these children, this worries me. I'm sure you will agree they deserve to have the same access to good, quality, affordable child care as do typically developing children.

The regulations currently in place that control parent fees allow all Manitoba families to access quality child care. If Bill 47 allows for-profit centres to both access public funds and charge the fees they wish, it's likely they will price quality child care out of reach for many lower income families. For-profit centres will drive the cost of child care up as the market allows. Eventually, the prices will be more than many families can afford.

Again, this worries me because I understand the benefits that quality, structured child care provides to children of all socio-economic statuses. I know some of the children I see as an SLP have parents who work hard to make ends meet. The increased fees of private daycare will quite simply break them. The children will be pulled from child care, parents may be forced to leave their jobs or cut their hours and instead of children having the opportunity to be with their peers, they will stay at home. This will create a strain on our society that can be avoided if quality and affordable child care remains a priority in Manitoba.

The pandemic has shown us the true costs of financial hardship and being at home all the time can put on Manitoba families. We simply cannot price child care out of reach for them. Parent fees must remain regulated and affordable in this province if we are to give them a chance to succeed.

Other provinces such as Alberta that don't have the same affordable, accessible, quality child care as we do in Manitoba have more children attending day homes. I'm not saying child-care centres are inherently better than day homes; however, when compared to licensed child-care centres, there is a large proportion of day homes that do not meet the same ratio of trained staff per child, with many day homes having no trained staff at all. This worries me. Early childhood is a critical time for cognitive and social development, and trained ECEs have the

expertise to support this growth. This is the clear difference between true child care and babysitting, as valuable as the latter may be.

Bill 47 indicates learning experiences preschool programs and as I have said, regulation within this sector is crucial. I fear that by omitting the mention of regulation in school-age programs, this regulation will be eliminated. This will result in less trained staff working with six- to 12-year-olds which, similar to day-home scenarios, compromises the quality of care provided.

Privatization of regulated child care is a risky and expensive notion that puts the development of Manitoba's children at risk. Our province has a great system currently in place that allows for accessible and affordable quality care for their children. As a mom, when I pick my kids up and every day I'm at work, I see the benefits of quality early childhood education when it is accessible to all.

I ask you today: Why would we compromise this by cutting funding to such an important sector under the guise that privatization will provide adequate care? Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, it will not.

Thank you for your time.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation, Jill O'Donohue.

And we will now move into questions.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Ms. O'Donohue, for making your late-evening presentation to our committee. I'm grateful for your words and for your presentation this evening.

We in the government certainly agree that a strong, stable child-care sector is of utmost importance in the province, and that is why we have invested \$25 million more than any other time in our province's history in the child-care sector to have \$185 million going into the non-profit child-care sector in the province.

We've also believe that we need to create additional spaces in the non-profit child-care sector and, therefore, that is why our government has created five—nearly 5,000, not quite 5,000 spaces in the last five years. This Budget 2021 commits 540 new spaces.

* (22:50)

We know that there's still a long way to go towards creating affordable, accessible child care for

all Manitobans, but that is what we are committed to doing and we will continue to make those investments until we have child care for all Manitoba families.

So just appreciate your presentation tonight. Not a question but just more a comment and an opportunity to say thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Jill O'Donohue, any response for the minister?

Ms. O'Donohue: No.

Mr. Chairperson: All right, other questions?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. O'Donohue, for your presentation and your work, and your commitment as a speech therapist. I think that's a really—that's really great and it also ties into my question about this—a board chair and your employment area.

How have you seen the funding freezes and the cuts to the ISP funding affect the child-care sector in early childhood learning and the children?
[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: Jill O'Donohue, first I need to recognize you, which I've now done. You can proceed.

Ms. O'Donohue: My apologies. Sorry.

I've been a community-based preschool therapist for 12 years now, so I have been working in my position in daycares, nurseries, all that stuff the whole time. I have seen inclusion funding become dramatically more difficult to access for children. A lot more applications are being denied. A lot more hoops need to be jumped through in order to get the support that the children with additional needs require. And a lot of centres are struggling to get that money which, in turn, sometimes allow—doesn't allow for the children to attend the centre, because if they can't attend the centre safely and the daycare can't provide the funding for an additional staff, they simply can't be there safe.

So, I've seen the inclusion funding grants decrease and become more difficult to come by, basically every year since I started 12 years ago.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions?

Seeing none, I will say thank you very much, Jill O'Donohue, for your presentation.

Oh, I do have another question. I can't always see; I'm sorry, you're—you are directly behind somebody else's head so it's so hard to see. I'm so sorry. Ms. Adams, go head with another question.

Ms. Adams: And as a board chair, what has the funding freezing meant for you, in terms of wages for staff?

Ms. O'Donohue: It has meant that we haven't been able to provide wage increases to staff who work tirelessly every day to take care of our children. It's heartbreaking, and as we've heard many times this evening, that staff are vastly underpaid. And although the minister has spoken to—that it's the board's decision, I think, as was previously mentioned, it's not the board's decision if we don't have any money to give.

So although it ultimately comes down to us, you can't get blood from a stone. So, I guess it's our decision but it's either pay the staff or pay the hydro bill. So, we don't have the decision that is being alluded to in conversation.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Any other questions? I'll keep Ms. Adams in full view. I think we're good.

So, thank you very much, Jill O'Donohue, for your presentation and your time, and for sticking with us late into this evening. Thank you.

Ms. O'Donohue: Thanks.

Mr. Chairperson: We'll now move on to the next presenter and I will now call on Ross Martin and ask the moderator to invite Ross Martin into the meeting.

Mr. Martin, I ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on. I can—there we go. I can see you now. Welcome to the meeting this evening. You've got up to 10 minutes to make your presentation, so go ahead whenever you're ready.

Mr. Ross Martin (Private Citizen): Well, thank you. I'm Ross Martin. I'm retired. I'm a retired Hydro employee, which the government is trying to privatize and destroy, so at least they're being consistent with the child care.

I have serious concerns with this bill and I have had children in the daycare system years ago and now soon they will have children and will utilize it, I hope, in a none-for-profit. But what I see from all the presenters, and they've been very eloquent, is that our child care is underfunded by the government deliberately and held up by the workers. It is the workers that are actually making it work and not the government because the government has underfunded it so severely.

We have seen, during the pandemic, private versus public personal-care homes. We have seen

what the difference is: poor wages in the private ones, scurrying here and there, spreading pandemic everywhere. It is a terrible situation. And by putting in the provisions that private daycares can access public funds—our tax dollars—so that they can pay low wages and provide inferior service, to me is an insult.

Children are not commodities. They are vulnerable people and they should be treated as children, not bidded up and down by corporations that want to provide child care at a profit.

We know that if you give \$100 to a none-for-profit daycare, they give \$100 of service. If you give it to a private one, they will give you \$90 because they're private, because they make money. It's very easy economics, and they will find a way to make money because that's their business.

So we have to quit this silliness and provide service for Manitobans. Why do we want to drive down to the basest, lowest level when we should be providing decent service, quality service, with decent wages to the workers? That's what we need.

And this bill has missed it on every mark. In fact, I missed so many things that others have brought up, that this bill is flawed so deeply it should actually be removed and rewritten with the help of the daycare professionals that are working day after day. This bill is deliberate in that it wants to be privatized and it wants to give our money—our public money, our tax money—to private individuals so they become rich at the expense of the workers.

And that's what we are dealing with. You already wasted \$600,000 to give it to a private consulting firm for a decision that was already known prior to even going into this bill. Shame on you. That money should have gone directly into none-profit child care, and that's what we need. We need quality services, and you have the ability to do that and you refuse.

I don't know why you dislike children so much and dislike the people of Manitoba so much. They deserve better and you can provide better, but you have to take this bill off.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Ross Martin, for your presentation.

We'll now move straight into questions.

Ms. Squires: And many points of disagreement, but a few points of agreement, one in that we do need to make investments in a strong child-care sector and

that is exactly what our government is doing. That is why this year we put \$185 million into the early-learning and child-care sector, which is \$25 million more than ever before in the province's history. We know that there's still a long way to go towards building that stable sector, but our government is committed to doing that.

We know that providing spaces for families in the province is also incredibly important. That is why we've created nearly 5,000 new funded spaces in the non-profit child-care sector to ensure that more families have access to child care in the province. Definitely more to do, and certainly going to continue to do—move forward with that.

We've also made some investments in capital. Just recently I was very fortunate to see some of our capital investments at work in the child-care sector with some new child-care spaces, very creative ways of creating great child-care centres in rural Manitoba that many of our child-care centres have been able to utilize the capital dollars that we've made available for expansion of their spaces and creating those learning hubs for children. And very pleased to be able to see some of that happening on a recent tour that I had of some of our centres in western Manitoba.

* (23:00)

Looking forward, when this pandemic is over, to getting out there and visiting some of the other sectors and continuing to work with the child-care sector. We have a ministerial consultation table, and I'm very appreciative of all the sector input that we're receiving. Many people who have many years of experience in building a strong public child-care sector around the table, and looking forward to their continued input on that.

So, certainly, recognition that there's more to do in creating a strong, stable, publicly funded child-care sector. We did also maintain the second lowest parent fees in the country. We know that affordable access is important, and outside of one other jurisdiction, we have the lowest fees. And we know that that's an important component of making life more affordable for families in Manitoba. So we were pleased to maintain those low fees for parents in the province.

Mr. Chairperson: Ross Martin, any response for the minister?

Mr. R. Martin: Yes. I understand the route that you're parroting, but the low fees are based on repressing the workers' wages, which I believe is wrong.

You need to invest more into the not-for-profit daycares so that they can pay their wages so that they're recognized for what they do. They're looking after children, literal children, and you're not giving them that funding. You can expand all the funding you want, but you want the workers to uphold your whole program.

And it's already been mentioned, but if you keep on cutting and you don't allow any fees to go up, it will collapse, and then you'll overfund the private sector to fill in the gap. I've seen it happen, and I'm sure that is the plan. But it's going to hurt so many people.

This bill is a failure, a complete failure, and it needs to be rewritten.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Thank you.

Further questions?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Mr. Martin, for your presentation.

I'd like to know, how does it make you feel to learn that the Pallister government, at the Cabinet table, decided not to spend the \$18 million of money that was dedicated to child care? And how do you think that relates to the government trying to privatize child care?

Mr. R. Martin: Well, I am legally blind, so you may be able to see me; I can't see you, so that's your problem.

But \$18 million, you know, that's a lot of money. And I know that this is just part of the privatization plan. And it is a destroying of public service, of a none-for-profit, and I believe that this government has one priority. And that is to get rid of all none-for-profit and have everything based on private enterprise to the detriment of our children, our elderly and everyone in between.

It's shameful. Absolutely shameful. That money should have been spent for child-care workers at least. And to leave it on the table, I believe, shows that they have no conscience.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Ross Martin, I thank you very much for your time tonight and for your presentation and your, also, willingness to answer questions from members of the committee. That's all the time we have for questions with you.

I just wanted to note—I think one of our previous presenters was Dr. Ashdown. If you remember Dr. Ashdown's presentation, I think when I introduced

Dr. Ashdown and then also I think once further on—maybe more times and maybe other members of the committee to—referred to—incorrectly to Dr. Ashdown as Ms. Ashdown. So I want to apologize for that. The intention was to use your proper title throughout, and that certainly was my intention as well. So my apologies to Dr. Ashdown.

We'll now continue with the next witness—or, sorry, the next presenter. And I'm going to call Orvie Dingwall and ask the moderator to invite Orvie Dingwall into the meeting.

And Orvie Dingwall, I just ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on.

Oh—I can see you now, Orvie, so welcome to this meeting. You have up to 10 minutes to make your presentation. Go ahead.

Ms. Orvie Dingwall (Private Citizen): Thank you so much to the members of the committee for having me here tonight, especially as it's getting so late.

I am a health sciences librarian at the University of Manitoba and I'm vice-president of the Manitoba Organization of Faculty Associations. But I'm here tonight, as many others have been, as a private citizen, as a mother and as an incredibly concerned community member.

I'd like to start by sharing a bit about myself and my personal experience with child care here in Manitoba. As an academic, when my son was only a few months old, I chose, willingly, to move to Manitoba, but I didn't yet have a support network here. And trying to find a space for my son, for care, was the single most stressful event of my entire life, including during—at any time during this pandemic; including when we had to do virtual learning.

That was 11 years ago and times have not changed for young professionals who choose to come to Manitoba, and for all parents. When my eldest 'chide'—when my son was two years old, like another speaker earlier this evening mentioned, I felt like I won the lottery because I got a space in a large not-for-profit care centre that was within one kilometre of my home.

I immediately volunteered to be on the board. I served the maximum amount of time 'permissible' to be on the board and I served as member-at-large, as treasurer and as chair for a number of years. I learned that there were two forms of revenue for a child-care centre: parent fees make up about 50 per cent and the provincial operating grant makes up about 50 per cent.

Similarly, there are two main—there were two main expenses at my centre: staff wages was the most significant one; and rent was also very significant. And those two—two basic things, staff wages and rent—accounted for almost 100 per cent of the expenses.

So, with parent fees and operating grants frozen since 2016, there simply was no excess and certainly no fat to skim. Now, we had very thirsty directors and early-child-care workers, and so we were—and we had involved parents so we could pay for, you know, things here or there, we could do a lot of maintenance on ourself.

But during my tenure there, we needed new playground equipment and we also needed to replace lighting. Now, to me, that seems like not that expensive; you replace some lightbulbs, no big deal. This was a \$20,000 project because we had to replace the—all of the ballasts.

So, we applied for grants. We did fundraising. We did everything we could because we had such a tremendous—such tremendous skill on our board of directors and because our daycare director was truly incredible.

But it shouldn't have to be so hard. And after my time there, it—we got so pinched between those expenses and what the revenue were that the centre had to discontinue the position of the cook; the cook, who provided the lunch program and provided the snacks.

And this was a huge and tremendous loss, both to the centre, to the children and to the parents that now had to pack those things on their own.

So, I have a few questions to the committee. The first is: who is this bill designed to benefit? There's nothing here that benefits families; it doesn't improve the quality, education, safety or care of children; it doesn't benefit employers of workers with children in care and it certainly doesn't benefit child-care workers or centres.

The only thing this entire bill seems to do is prepare Manitoba for an increase in privatization of child care, which is exactly the opposite direction all of the consultations have determined we need to be moving in. Or, frankly, that any parent in Manitoba would tell you.

* (23:10)

My second question is: what does modernization, in the context of this bill, mean? Modernization is a word that's been used to describe this bill. Through the

consultations on this bill, this government has appropriately identified the barriers to child care and has identified priority families who aren't able to benefit from the current system.

Manitobans express that they need more options for child care. They need child care outside the hours of Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. They need care on evenings and weekends. Creating a system that provided these sorts of hours, that would be modernization. But earlier tonight, Dr. Susan Prentice has already outlined that the current legislation already allows for this and doesn't need legislative amendment within Bill 47.

Single mothers have also been identified as needing preferential access to child care, which would be modernization, but that's not included in Bill 47. And to provide priority doesn't need entirely new legislation anyway.

Bill 47 is advertised as speaking to choice and flexibility. From a parent perspective, that should mean that there is more than one care option in every neighbourhood, but that's not included in Bill 47.

I know from first-hand experience that rent, as I've mentioned, is inconsistent across centres throughout Manitoba. Some centres, like the one I'm currently in, have very low rent because they're already in a public centre, like a school. So is modernization to provide operation grant funding that is equitable to centres taking into account the cost of rent? I don't see that included in Bill 47. I can therefore only assume that, in this context, modernization is meant to mean privatization.

Parent fees and operating grants have been frozen since 2016—that's five years—yet, expenses to provide child care have increased 3.5 per cent each year, creating an absolute strain on the entire system, even without COVID—the COVID-19 pandemic. Freezing parent fees and operating grants for such a long period of time is a deliberate strategy to create the perception that our current government-subsidized non-profit system isn't working, which simply isn't true.

My third question is, why is the government trying to make a profit off of children? In the background document for this bill, there's the example of enabling 1,000 families to access new spaces from private child care, thereby opening 1,000 non-profit spaces to new families, which would theoretically enable the first 1,000 families more—or the second 1,000 families more opportunities to enter into the

labour market. This is a bizarre and poorly thought-out plan.

Where are those 1,000 families supposed to go? Why would they leave non-profit care centres in favour of paying 2.6 times as much? Where in Manitoba are the families that could and would willingly do so?

And also, for those first 1,000 families that aren't currently within the system, I think this is also an assumption that they aren't currently piecing together—through their vacation, through their friends, through their family members—ways to provide child care currently. The free market will never build equitable access to quality services. We need to be investing in our non-profit child-care system, not introducing more for-profit spaces.

My fourth and final question is why is this government choosing to provide small pockets of money to early child care instead of increasing the operating grants to all facilities in a way that will permit early childhood educators to be properly compensated for the imperative work they do? This government has already done the great work to establish that Manitobans need a fully accessible, publicly funded non-profit system of comprehensive and high-quality child care that they can afford.

Manitobans also want early childhood educators to have worthy wages and good working conditions. We have been at a critical point for child care in this province for at least the last five years. The education, safety and well-being of children depend on it. Our labour market depends on it. Manitoba's economy depends on it.

I therefore urge this committee to reconsider this bill as it relates to privatization.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Orvie Dingwall, for your presentation.

We'll now move right into questions. The first question is from the honourable minister.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Orvie Dingwall, for your presentation tonight.

And just a point of clarification that many of your questions about some of the details will be certainly dealt with in regulation.

What Bill 47 does do is bring many things that were in the previous regulation into the act such as a definition for an early learning—for early learning, something that wasn't—actually, it wasn't there before

at all. And so we are moving more things into the act, which is why Bill 47 is longer than any previous act on child care.

And we certainly recognize that some of the provisions that were previously in regulation, moving it to the act to ensure a consistent application of the law will reduce duplication and it makes for a bit of a longer act, and that there are certainly other things that are in regulation that deal with matters of a legislative matter that are subordinate to the main principles of this act.

And as we're moving forward with some of the regulatory work, we do have a variety of committees that are providing input and feedback to government on that, including a ministerial consultation table that is predominantly experts in the sector to provide feedback and guidance as we move through the regulatory framework. And then, of course, we have a parent advisory council and continual feedback from community.

So, look forward to further input from you as we move forward in creating a legislative framework to enhance our child-care sector. We recognize that a strong, publicly funded, stable, public child-care sector is of vital importance to maintaining quality of life here in Manitoba as well as enhancing our economy and is a key driver in our labour market.

And right now, of course, we are seeing lower market participation because of the pandemic, certainly not a trend that we want to see continue in the province, and are hopeful that people who have experienced out-of-work during the pandemic because of stay-at-home orders will be returning to the workforce and therefore needing strong child care to help them obtain their goals in returning to the workforce.

And so, addressing that wait-list with more non-profit child-care spaces is critical. You did ask about the small pocket of money—and I'm assuming you might be referring to two recent small pockets of money that we've provided—were the 11-and-a-half-million-dollar sustainability trust fund which provides centres with a stream of revenue that they can apply for based on their request for funding of things such as discretionary items, supplies for activities, that might not be otherwise provided for.

So we've created a new revenue stream for that. And then, as well as—recently, we did stabilize the sector by providing \$4.4 million to wipe off the

deficits of any child-care centre that was experiencing challenges throughout the pandemic.

We thought that those were important investments to make because we know that these child-care centres will be opening their doors and needing to be more robust than ever before. So we were very pleased to make those investments. And we'll continue on.

We inherited quite a wait-list when we formed government as well as an underfunded child-care sector. So we're making—we're adding on and making historic investments in child care.

Mr. Chairperson: Orvie Dingwall, do you have a brief response for the minister? I'd like one of—at least one of the other members to be able to ask a question.

Ms. Dingwall: Thanks. And I just, you know, all investment into child care is wonderful and appreciated, but \$15 million that you have to apply for is not something—is something that I see as, like, an emergency fund. It's not something that hires your cook back or that is something that you can do regular programming on.

Mr. Chairperson: All right; questions from the committee.

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Dingwall, for your presentation. It was really informative. And thank you for taking the time.

I'm really interested and wanting to hear any ideas you have on modernizing centres, how they can pay rent that is so inconsistent. What would you think of an idea of a rent-assist program for centres that have above-average rents?

Mr. Chairperson: Orvie Dingwall, we're almost out of time, but maybe if you can wrap it up quickly, that would be appreciated.

* (23:20)

Ms. Dingwall: I don't pretend to have all the answers, but certainly I know that being at a centre—my former centre—that had a tremendous rent bill and being at the centre that my children are at now with a very low rent bill, that it seems to me that a sliding scale—an operating grant that took into account a sliding scale for rent—would be tremendous help so that you don't have some centres that can offer field trips and lunch programs and snack programs at no cost and other centres that cannot offer them because they simply have to pay the essential cost for rent.

Mr. Chairperson: All right, Orvie Dingwall. I thank you very much for your presentation this evening. That takes us past the amount of time for questions, and I also want to thank you for your willingness to answer the questions that were posed to you by members of the committee.

We're going to move to our next presenter. So I'm going to call on Madelaine Dwyer, and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting. Madelaine Dwyer, I ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on.

All right, Madelaine Dwyer, are you able to hear us? I think I see you coming in there. All right. I believe I see you, Madelaine Dwyer. Welcome to the meeting this evening, and you're now allowed to proceed with your presentation for up to 10 minutes. Go ahead.

Ms. Madelaine Dwyer (Canadian Union of Public Employees): Good evening. Thank you for allowing me to be here and speak tonight. My name is Madelaine Dwyer. I'm here representing CUPE Manitoba in my submission on Bill 47, The Early Learning and Child Care Act.

CUPE is Canada's largest union with over 700,000 members across Canada. CUPE is also Manitoba's largest union with over 37,000 members here in Manitoba. In Manitoba CUPE members work in health-care facilities, personal-care homes, school divisions, municipal services, social services, child-care centres, public utilities, libraries and family and emergency services.

First and foremost, I'm a mother to three children. I have a 14-year-old son, an eight-year-old daughter, and my youngest, a nine-month-old baby girl. I have been involved in the daycare system since I went on a wait-list 14 years ago for my son. I found that there wasn't enough spaces then and things are even worse now.

I'm on the board of directors of a daycare in the North End of Winnipeg because I see the great work that they do every day. I participate in their fundraisers. The members of the board and I volunteer our evenings to attend board meetings and we put our hearts into making sure that daycare is as good a space as any in the city.

There have been times while on wait-lists and unable to get child-care spaces that I've been on unpaid leaves of absence from my job. Daycare space is what has allowed me to work, live and raise my family.

So when I looked at this bill meant to reform child care in Manitoba, I looked to see if it would expand good, not-for-profit child care like I had for my first two children and hope to have my third in as well.

In short, is this bill going to help me get back into my workplace at the end of my maternity leave, or will I be stuck on a wait-list, unable to work and struggling to get by. I'm worried that this bill doesn't get the job done.

A private daycare centre wouldn't have helped me back then and won't help me now. I did the research and I couldn't afford a private space at my salary, and if I could, their standards still aren't at the same level.

Not-for-profit daycares have parent boards driving them to succeed. I know because I'm on one. For-profit centres have margins and shareholders. I trust my ability to advocate for my children in their daycare. I don't trust anyone's ability to move a private daycare off of a profit motive. And when I speak to my friends in similar situations, they feel the same way.

Putting profit into daycare means removing power from parents and families. That means lowering quality and lowering input or increasing costs beyond what I, and many like me, could afford.

When I hear from my friends in Toronto or Alberta about their private daycare centres, it sounds like the stuff from a parent's nightmare. They pay way more for child care and, in return, bring their kids to what can only be described as a big box daycare. These centres don't include the families; these centres don't even value their staff, and I can't support that.

I hear the provincial government talk about choice in its last speech from the throne. The problem is when I hear the word choice I don't think these are choices any parent is going to want to make. I hear choice between paying more and getting less. I hear choice between leaving the workplace or compromising my daughter's safety to subpar child care. I hear choice between driving across the city to get to my space or taking something unregulated that might be on my way to work. How do we get out of those choices? There's only way, and that's with more spaces with more trained, high-quality ECEs. And the only way to do that is to make some upfront investments into centres that families can trust.

What is needed is a plan to take steps forward in providing more child-care spaces for families like mine: high-quality spaces, affordable spaces and spaces that are available when we need them. Quality,

affordable child care should allow mothers like me, and fathers, to work without enduring years-long child-care wait-lists or breaking the family budget. I'm urging this government and the MLAs at this committee to take this bill back to the drawing board and come back with a plan that invests into good-quality, not-for-profit child care that we can be proud to fundraise for, volunteer for and, most importantly, trust our kids to.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Madelaine Dwyer, for your presentation.

We'll move right into questions. First question from the honourable minister.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Madelaine Dwyer, for being here with us, especially on this late night in committee. Appreciate your perspective and hearing from you about the need for a strong, stable public child-care sector, which is exactly what our government is working towards. That is why we have created nearly 5,000 new spaces.

And I appreciate the hardships that you experienced in finding child care. We know that that is the experience of many families, and that is an experience that we want to eliminate so that when families are seeking out child care, that they are able to access reliable information as well as timely access to a child-care space.

And so we've created 5,000 new spaces. These are publicly funded spaces in our nonprofit sector in the last five years. Of course, it doesn't mean that we—we still have a long way to go, and we recognize that. We did inherit a system that was chronically underfunded and an incredible backlog for funded spaces. And so we're moving forward on that.

This year's budget invested \$185 million in the child-care sector, which is \$25 million more than has ever been invested in a child-care sector and, again, recognizing more to do, more to come, and we're certainly in agreement that we need a strong, publicly funded child-care sector in the province of Manitoba.

So, thanks for being with us and hanging in there to this late hour.

Mr. Chairperson: Madelaine Dwyer, any response to the minister?

Ms. Dwyer: I think CUPE has seen this government try time and again to hand funding to the Chamber of Commerce, to try and make child care work; I don't think it has.

I'd like to see this government commit itself to not-for-profit and public child care and abandon risky privatization schemes and trials.

Mr. Chairperson: All right, further questions?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Dwyer, for your presentation.

I'm just interested to hear, what are you hearing from your members about Bill 47?

Ms. Dwyer: I think that I'm hearing that they do—our members do want investment into public child care where parents aren't struggling to find space or struggling to afford their fees.

I think that the—we're hearing from members that they want to also be provided with fair wages for those members that are working in the child-care field.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions?

Ms. Adams: Thank you for your response, Ms. Dwyer. And I do agree with you that this bill needs to be redone and actually put the children first.

I'm wondering what you, as a board member, and what your members are hearing about the funding freeze that is—and how that's impacted centres.

Ms. Dwyer: Funding has certainly been impacted. I know recent funding changes earlier this year saw our enhanced nursery program go from funding of \$75,000 to \$15,000, which really impacts the services that we can provide.

* (23:30)

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions?

Mr. Sala: Thanks so much for taking time to present to us today. It was very informative. I think we hear a lot tonight and we've heard a lot tonight from the minister about new spaces and their desire to continue to move the system forward.

But really, I think it's important to highlight here and really just be clear that the plan that the government has put forward is about fundamentally reducing the role of publicly funded child care in our system in favour of increasing the role of privately funded, privately operated child-care centres. And we know that that's going to be to the detriment of quality; it's going to also increase the costs of child care for

families in Manitoba and, ultimately, it is the wrong direction for us to be taking.

So I appreciate your commentary and your concern about privatization as well. And I'm curious if you can just maybe elaborate a bit on what the impact of that reduced enhanced nursery grant funding will be for your centre and the families that you serve.

Mr. Chairperson: Madelaine Dwyer, we are out of time but I'll allow you a brief response.

Ms. Dwyer: I think that we've been able to see an impact already but I think that it's going to be an impact that we may see for several years with these cuts.

Mr. Chairperson: All right, Madelaine Dwyer, thank you very much for your presentation and for your willingness to also answer questions from some members of the committee this evening and for sticking with us into this late hour.

We'll now move to the next presenter and I will now call on Zach Fleisher, and ask the moderator to invite Zach into the meeting.

Zach Fleisher, I just ask that you unmute yourself and turn your video on.

It appears that Mr. Fleisher is not with us this evening, so we will put his name at the bottom of the list and we'll move to the next presenter, Pat Furman from Inspired By Wonder.

I'll call on Pat Furman, ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting and ask Pat Furman to unmute yourself and to turn your video on.

I can see you there. All right, welcome virtually to this meeting. It's good to see you, even at this late hour. You can go ahead with your presentation. You have up to 10 minutes.

Ms. Pat Furman (Inspired by Wonder): Great, thank you very much. Since I am still in my office here at work this evening, I do want to acknowledge that I am on Treaty 1 territory, the land of Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree and the Dakota nations.

Thank you very much for having me and I'm very glad that I was able to still make it on this evening. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Pat Furman and I am the proud executive director to Inspired By Wonder child care,

with locations within Robertson School, in the Point Douglas community and within the SSCY centre, Specialized Services for Children and Youth.

Between these two locations, we are licensed for 147 spaces, which include 16 infants, 68 preschool children and 60 school-aged children. I have been the only executive director of this organization, formerly known as Robertson Early Enrichment Program, for the last 17 years since inception.

For 10 years, I worked as a child development counsellor for Children's DisABILITY Services and had the unique opportunity to consult to various child cares, nursery school programs and within the homes of my clients, who had some type of additional support needs.

My role was to consult these various facilities, offering long- and short-term goals, evaluating environments and providing resource to these centres and to their families.

I am also the mother of three children who, over the years, accessed a variety of child-care services, including home and centre-based licensed quality care. My youngest daughter currently attends such a preschool program.

I am voicing my concern today at this committee regarding Bill 47 and some of the recommendations offered in the KPMG report. As a proud Manitoban, passionate mother, trained early childhood educator, advocate for my profession and activist for inclusive care environments.

Within my organization, we are honoured to employ and enrol a diverse population of citizens, many of who are new immigrants and refugees to our city.

We also have 22 children with additional support needs and many who are medically complexed. As a reflective leader, I too believe any system should be reviewed and examined regularly to ensure not just that all needs are met, but we hold the highest level of scrutiny, especially when it comes to our children and what they deserve, what our families deserve and what our educators deserve.

A child's care—a child's life in care is noticeably short and limited to a handful of years. However, any mother or father would admit that those choices one makes as to what type of care and with whom are some of the most difficult and stressful decisions to make. The only situation which we might deem comparable would be needing to make those decisions

at the other end of the spectrum when we look for quality care homes for our aging parents.

We now know that a child's first five years of life are the most critical in their development, and it will affect the trajectory for the rest of their lives. As a mother who made these decisions regarding child care for my own children, I know first-hand the many challenges of finding accessible, affordable and, most importantly, quality care.

I have read the KPMG report, and I have proposed some following concerns. As a Manitoban who has lived in this city my entire life, I am proud of the diversity in our province, and this report does not take into account the cultural demographics of Manitoba.

Manitoba, unfortunately, has the second largest poverty rate in our country, and affordable care should be a priority. This report, for example, comments that such areas of River Heights, my community area, coverage rates are 33.9 per cent, whereas in Seven Oaks, coverage rates are at 17.1 per cent. What this research fails to mention is that River Heights is mainly composed of nuclear families with both or one parent working, whereas in Seven Oaks community, this community is mainly comprised of multi-generational households where child care consists of other family members within the house caring for our children. One's culture is a strong indicator of how a family might access child care.

There is not enough information provided about child development and the benefit of inclusive care for all children. Over my career, I have seen how exposure and positive interactions with people from diverse backgrounds and abilities can affect children and families' acceptance of others. In a time where racism and biased opinions about many cultures are so prevalent, it is important and our responsibility as citizens to create positive, loving, embracing anti-bias education within our centres. And the earlier these opportunities are introduced, the more accepting their perspectives.

Children as young as infants instinctively know people are different from themselves. However, their attitudes are learned and formed through their relationships. My fear about a tiered child-care system is that will—it only will make the division greater. These lessons of acceptance will be potentially delayed until later in life when opinions are already cemented.

Through the report, on numerous occasions, it discusses the complexities of single mothers trying to

find affordable, accessible, quality care. This report does not mention that 90 per cent of our sector is led and employed by women, many of whom their own children attend or is attending care. The recommendations of creating more child-care programs with after-hour options creates a problem when it's these same women who will now be working shifts in the evenings and weekends instead of being at home with their own children.

It's not that I am opposed to offering a range of child-care programs, because we definitely knew that that was needed, particularly during this pandemic. However, it must be recognized, again, who are the demographics of people providing these circumstances.

* (23:40)

Investing in women is just good business. In the words of Melinda Gates, if you want to lift up humanity, empower women. It is the most comprehensive, persuasive, high-leverage investments you can make in human beings. In a sector that has been historically underpaid and undervalued, this must be the time where we recognize the contributions of women in this sector and advocate for higher wages so that centres can retain well-educated professionals in the field.

In conclusion, I do understand, appreciate, and emphasize the challenges in finding equitable solutions for all. I do believe our sector needs to continue to evaluate and together find innovative solutions so we can provide and offer the best quality care in—available to Manitoba families and children. However, the recommendations of providing a two-tier or class system will not be the successful strategy to retrieve these results—to achieve these results. It will continue to widen the economic gap and create segregation in child care within our own communities. We must be mindful in making these decisions for the best interest of our children because there is no greater investment.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Pat Furman, for your presentation.

We'll move straight into questions.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Pat, for sticking with us so late this evening and for being here tonight. I appreciate your presentation and want to express my gratitude for all the work that you've done serving children and families in the province of Manitoba.

Your history is admirable, so, thank you very much for your contributions and care for Manitoba children.

Do want to—also appreciate that you took the time to read the KPMG report in full and certainly appreciate you pointing out some of the shortcomings of the report. I too had many, many concerns and felt that it was just one tool of many tools that we were using to modernize our child-care sector. And, certainly, many aspects of many of the recommendations were not certainly ones that we thought would be advanced ahead of others.

There were other recommendations that were quite beneficial, in particular the one speaking about providing more flexibility in our child-care sector, but also share some of your concerns with some of the recommendations in that report and I thank you for pointing those out. It was just one of many tools.

We also have a Parent Advisory Council that we've established with a group of parents who are utilizing child care providing input and advice. We did a direct survey, heard from nearly 4,500 Manitoba families in regards to their wishes on creating a more robust child-care sector, and then, of course, the ministerial consultation table with experts and leaders from child-care sector to provide advice and input. So, certainly looking for a broad range of input and collaboration and advice from folks like yourself.

So, thank you so much for being here at committee tonight. Thank you for your input and your feedback. Much appreciated.

Mr. Chairperson: Pat Furman, any response for the minister?

Ms. Furman: No, but thank you for the acknowledgement.

Mr. Chairperson: All right.

Other questions for this presenter?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Ms. Furman, for joining us tonight and your presentation and thank you to the dedication you've shown to children in Manitoba.

I'm wondering if you could spell out how the KPMG report was used to draft the legislation, Bill 47, and how that is very problematic with the review.

Ms. Furman: Well, I'm not really sure exactly how the report is—drafted the legislation. However, I would say that a lot of the—what a lot of the previous speakers had alluded to were similar concerns that I see outlined within the report.

And I will note, too, that although I did read the whole thing and have made notes and shared it with my board of directors last night at our meeting, it is unfortunate to have only received it the day prior to.

So, looking at the Bill 47 and comparing it to this potential report of how we're going to look at potentially guiding our child care, there were numerous concerns.

I don't feel that inclusive, quality child care and the demographics of our province have been well discussed and represented. And that is very concerning to me. Of running a 'clusive' child-care program, as I said, with currently 22 children, I have, too, experienced a lot of frustration this year—particularly this year but in other years of—with our inclusion support program.

For example, we closed down our program on March 14th, as everybody else had done so, and reopened on the following Tuesday to—instead of 56 children at this location, reopened the following Tuesday to 22 children, is what we were allowed.

And one of the children was previously in our program for years; we had to apply for a totally full new funding application for a medically complex child, like she was brand-new, and she attended our program on the Friday and had to reapply a whole new grant for her on the Tuesday to receive the same type of care.

Now, I understood to some degree that the other children with additional support needs who are not able to attend their—our program because their parents were not deemed as essential services—we were not going to receive that funding.

But it just was mind-boggling the children who receive this same kind of supports on the Friday did not receive it on the Tuesday. And we had to really fight for—to be able to get that kind of level of care.

So the two-tiered—or this class of—between non-'provit'—profit and privatized child care is very scary. And as my colleague before, Megan Turner, had mentioned, that—as running a privatized child care—that she cannot, essentially, take children with inclusion, children with additional support needs—is exactly the reason why I'm very terrified of moving more centres into for-profit care.

Because that, to me, is not inclusion. That, to me, is segregation. And it's very backwards-thinking and not forward-thinking. And to me, that is not explaining modernization at all.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Thank you, Pat Furman. We're over the amount of time we have allotted for your questions, but I do want to thank you for sticking with us to this late hour and for sharing your presentation with us.

Order, please. I can see that we have a number of presenters still before us, so, we are approaching midnight. I'll just remind everybody in attendance of the provisions and our rules regarding the hour of adjournment. Committee can't sit past midnight to hear public presentations or to consider clause-by-clause of a bill except by unanimous consent.

For the information of the committee and for those participating virtually, I do want to explain what happens when we reach the hour of adjournment and the committee rises and we still have presenters who have yet to speak. The Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) has announced that a second Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs meeting will happen tomorrow, April 16, at 1 p.m. to consider Bill 47. We'll pick up where we left—where we leave off with public presentations then and the committee clerks will contact the remaining presenters by email, notifying them of this date and time.

So, I thank everyone for their patience. My suggestion is, just looking at the hour, that we do hear from one more presenter in—or, as—virtually, and that that presenter be allowed to give a fulsome presentation and have a fulsome question and answer period, even if that does take us slightly past the hour of midnight.

Is that agreeable to everyone here? [*Agreed*]

Very good. Then we will proceed in that manner.

And so, I'd like to call on Jim Pringle, and ask the moderator to invite them into the meeting.

Jim Pringle, I'll ask you to unmute yourself and turn your video on.

Oh, I'm being told that Jim Pringle is not available, so we're just going to go to the next one.

Rosemary Miguez. I did say a fulsome presentation and a five-minute question and answer from a real presenter, so that's in keeping with the agreement.

I'm going to continue and ask Rosemary Miguez, private citizen, if the moderator can invite—oh. Did everybody leave?

One more.

* (23:50)

Claudia Colocho, from CUPE, Local 1543. I'll call on Claudia to join me and ask the moderator to invite them in.

Claudia, I'll ask you to unmute yourself and turn your video on.

Floor Comment: Hello.

Mr. Chairperson: Don't quite see you yet, but I can hear you. There you are. All right. We have visual confirmation. You are here and congratulations are in order, perhaps, because you are the last presenter for tonight, but your cohorts who have not—your colleagues who have not managed to present will still get a chance tomorrow at 1 p.m.

But I just want to give you the floor and say you have up to 10 minutes for your presentation. Go ahead.

Ms. Claudia Colocho (Private Citizen): For sure. Thank you very much. My name is Claudia Colocho. I'm speaking to Bill 47 as a private citizen; however, I want to mention that I work for—a senior representative for the Canadian Union of Public Employees, CUPE, here in Manitoba.

As was mentioned earlier, CUPE is Manitoba's largest union with over 37,000 members in the province. In Manitoba, CUPE members work in health-care facilities, personal-care homes, municipal services, social services, child-care centres. CUPE represents over 12,000 ECEs across Canada, making up 83 workplaces. This includes workers employed by the school boards, municipalities, child-care centres, all of whom, across Canada, are dedicated to delivering high-quality child care to children in those provinces.

I mention this because we know that we—that there are models out there that work and models that no work. The private child-care model is one that we have seen fail again and again. The private child-care model leaves people behind. We know that it leaves everyday families behind everywhere it was tried, and that here in Manitoba, a risky privatization experiment could cost families and mothers from Southdale to Transcona to Selkirk could cost them money with even less chances to secure a space.

The research is clear: Only can non-profit child care consistently receives higher quality ratings than for-profit centres. Big box child-care centres cause parent fees to skyrocket and government end up paying to support shareholders' profits.

We need to make sure that every child-care investment made is in public and non-profit child care in Manitoba. That is actually benefiting our members, our citizens.

But we know that taking dangerous risks with our child-care system will harm those in equity-seeking groups even more. We know that inner-city children such children from the immigrant communities already suffer greater obstacles to high-quality child care.

Privatizing what we have will only make that worse. We know that northern and rural communities face unique challenges in attracting and retaining child-care workers in centres, so privatizing what we have, again, will only make that worse.

We know as families look at—to economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, that child care is going to play a huge role in that. It is clear by now that women, particularly women with children, have disproportionately paid an economic and social cost for the pandemic. Job losses for women have been greater than for men and women have taken on an even greater share of responsibilities for raising children.

Without child-care space, many parents, many women, are not going to be able to return to the workplace. We know these spaces need to be affordable, high quality, and ready when we need them, and we know that investments are needed now to ensure we have the spaces.

Instead of a risky prioritization agenda, this government needs to consider some facts, and again research shows that every dollar invested into high-quality child-care programs increases GDP by \$2.30. That is way ahead of a stimulus from construction and manufacturing.

In regards to the pay for our workers, child-care workers and ECEs are the key to high-quality child care. Right now, child-care workers, many of whom are CUPE members, have extremely poor wages, benefits and—low benefits and working conditions. This is because of choices this government has made.

Across Canada, the median wage for child-care staff is \$16.50. While that remains far too low, it is well above what many are making in Manitoba, and it is near a living wage in Manitoba.

I just wanted to quickly share with you that last week I was in bargaining with a child-care centre where an extremely small signing bonus was offered

instead of actual wage increases, because the employer couldn't afford to give wage increases and they haven't been able to do it for five years.

One of my bargaining committee members started crying, and she shared with us that she's a single mother; she works a full-time job at this daycare, but then she has to work a second job, and she also relies on food banks to be able to feed her children. In a moment everyone was there with teary eyes because it is extremely sad to see a woman who is working full-time looking after our children to have to give up the quality time that she could have with her own children because she has to have a second job in order to feed her children. That was extremely, extremely sad.

The Manitoba government should take action immediately to move or exceed pay at the current standards. What Manitoba needs is investments today, in accessible, affordable, high-quality public and not-for-profit early childhood education and care, a policy framework that includes goals and targets for building and maintaining spaces, as well as affordability and equality, public funding to the systems to reduce parent fees, not to increase them. And I'm urging this government and the MLAs of this committee to reject this bill and commit to public and not-for-profit child care in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Claudia, for your presentation.

We'll move right into questions.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much, Claudia, for being here so late in the evening, and thank you for finishing with a strong presentation as we approach the midnight hour. So, just really appreciate your perspective and, of course, share your concern and desire to build a strong publicly funded child-care sector that can support our families and can be a strong—that could also have a strong workforce to attract and retain those workers.

So our government has made some investments and certainly recognize that there's more work to do, and very committed to doing that work.

I'll leave it at that. And just want to thank you for staying with us so late this evening.

Mr. Chairperson: Claudia, any response to the minister?

Ms. Colocho: Just quickly, that the investments that have been made should be going toward—they should really go, which is the workers, and lower fees for parents.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Other questions for the witness—or, for the presenter?

Ms. Adams: Thank you, Claudette [*phonetic*], for taking the time and joining us this evening and staying with us at this late hour.

You indicated that you're part of a bargaining committee that is negotiating wages and that the board was only able to offer a small signing bonus in lieu of wages. That's—if they had more funding, would they be able and willing to offer higher wages to their staff?

Ms. Colocho: I assume so, because that's what the employer is saying, right? They don't have any additional funding, or they haven't received increased funding. And they're unable to—for five years they haven't been able to offer wage increases for workers, so if the funding was where it should go, that would benefit our workers, which will indirectly impact our children, benefit our children.

Mr. Chairperson: Further questions for this presenter? All right, not seeing any.

So, Claudia, I do want to, on behalf of the committee, just thank you for coming this evening and for sticking with us all the way to the very end of this evening and, certainly, appreciate your perspectives and your willingness to answer the questions.

And to the other presenters, we hopefully will be able to hear from you tomorrow.

The hour being past midnight—[*interjection*] It is past midnight. [*interjection*] Oh, the hour is midnight. All right.

The hour being midnight, what is—[*interjection*] Oh, I don't even have to ask the will. I can say committee rise. And so I shall.

Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 12 a.m.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

To the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba,

My name is Corinna Valdez. I am an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) with more than 5 years experience working in Canada. Back home in the Philippines, I taught preschool and worked with children with

additional support needs. I immigrated into Canada believing in a better system of education and childcare. Unfortunately, with Bill 47, it seems that this system is just like the one back home—it believes in profit over care.

When I moved to Winnipeg 8 years ago, I had to go back to school in order to become the ECE that is qualified to work here. Despite already having a Bachelor's degree and work experience, I chose to learn the way things are done here, I chose to be educated and trained that will match the quality of the services provided in Manitoba. I got the utmost quality of education from Red River College and learned that education and training is what makes me the qualified ECE that I am today. I find it insulting and disheartening to know that you are planning to create unlicensed spaces—like gyms and dance studios—with staff that have no formal training in guiding and child development. How can you say and prove that you are providing quality care to these children and families? One of the investments you can make towards childcare is to provide funding to train and retain staff. Creating more spaces to solve the childcare crisis won't solve the problem if you do not have the staff to run those spaces. You cannot guarantee quality care with staff that has no training and education in child development to address these children's needs. There are so many quality ECEs out there that leave our profession or have to work two jobs in order to make ends meet. Quality care cannot be provided by overworked and underpaid staff—why can't you invest in them?

This pandemic has hit a lot of different fields hard, childcare especially. Our profession has been struggling way before this pandemic started, now only worsened. Providing COVID relief to parents is great and all but freezing parent fees is detrimental to childcare. 60% of our funding is taken from parent fees. With rising costs of living, how will centres survive? It is not feasible to not have an increase in operating grants and no increase in parent fees, where will centres get the funds to stay afloat? We, ECEs, are essentially fundraising for our own salary, which has been frozen for the last 5 years. What about our relief as trained professionals? This government can't expect us ECEs to "step up" if we cannot even get decent support from them. Funding is something we have been clamouring for, for years. When will our voices be heard? We worked at the height of this pandemic with no support from this government other than masks—some expired, some non-medical grade. This is a reflection of how our sector has been treated

and looked upon, when in reality Manitobans cannot work without childcare. If you want what is best for the economy, why can't you invest in current centres? Centres that have been tried and tested, centres that have been providing accessible, quality care for years.

These issues barely scratch the surface of my concern—of our sector's concern—regarding Bill 47. As an immigrant who moved to Canada believing in a better system, and as a proud Canadian citizen who knows this government can do better, I urge you, members of the Legislative Assembly, to take a look at the short term and long term effects of this bill. It is time for the Manitoba government to invest in current, not for profit centres, which are run by highly trained professionals who want nothing but the best for our future generation.

Corinna Valdez
Early Childhood Educator II

Whom It May Concern:

I am submitting this letter to express my concern with Bill 47. I agree that the childcare regulations need to be updated but to reflect higher standards of care and build on the current system. There is lots to be fixed, so many centres are operating with provisional licenses, because the ECE shortage from over 30 years ago still exists. Government recruitment strategies have failed to address the real issue in childcare. Unrealistic work demands, poor compensation and lack of leadership knowledge by directors is prevalent in our current system. The current funding model has also created an imbalance between smaller and larger centres which I believe is unequitable. Smaller centers cannot generate the same level of revenues as larger centres to support staff increases and enhance their programs at the same time. These are the real issues that are always overlooked and not addressed. Creating an opportunity for the private sector to access funds to open new daycares is not addressing what needs to be fixed.

By submitting this letter, I am sharing my voice on what truly matters to me. I have no vested interest other than to make our present child care system better for children, ECE's, and families.

Thank you,

Phyllis Doyle

To Whom It May Concern

My name is Janel Wotton, I am currently on maternity leave with my first child.

While on my mat leave I am finishing my Early Childcare Management degree from University of Winnipeg and I will graduate May 2021 with my ECE III.

As an educator I have struggled for years with whether or not to continue my education. It doesn't raise my wage. But I love my job and I wanted to learn more to be better at my job. In becoming a first time mother, I realized how important my job is! As I started to look for childcare to return to work in the fall, I thought about the caregiver I want to watch my baby. The care giver, who watches my child, will comfort him when I'm not there. Hug him when he is sad and spend more time with him during the week then me. This caregiver has the responsibility to love my child and provide all the care while I'm not there. For that there is no price tag!

Being in childcare profession for 15 years, I know the struggle to find child care. So I started early. Put my name on the wait list as soon as I found out I was pregnant, then Covid happened. So come spring I started to call and email home daycares and centres. I was told no infant spaces were available but they will add me to the list.

So here I am an ECE level 3 and no struggling to find childcare to return to the field of childcare! I work at a centre in a school; the program is for ages 3 and 4, so my infant son can't attend the centre where I work.

The wages for childcare staff are ridiculous! We are helping to raise the future. The early child care field is constantly losing staff due to the low wage and the small benefits that come with the job.

I'm writing this email today to voice my opinion on Bill 47. To create more childcare spots or to create a better system starts with paying a wage that draws more educators to the field. We need to improve the system so people are excited and want to join the field!

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely

Concern ECE III and mother
Janel Wotton

To the Standing Committee on Bill 47:

I believe licensed non-profit childcare centres provide an essential level playing field which allows for

children of all backgrounds to access a positive, enriching, quality early childhood education experience.

Non-profit childcare centres are designed to provide a welcoming space for all, and allow for important educational and developmental experiences to occur. These experiences are coordinated and planned by a group of specially trained early childhood educators who work there and care for the children.

Most of our province's young children are being cared for and educated by caregivers other than their parents. Therefore it is essential that we ensure our early childhood centres and ECEs receive appropriate compensation and resources to ensure quality of care.

The positive impact of high quality early childhood care is far reaching and long lasting—this has been studied and proven.

Any threat to the quality of our children's care is unacceptable.

Our licensed non-profit childcare centres provide the best opportunity for quality childcare for all and must continue to play an integral role in the care of our province's children.

I share the concerns of the Manitoba Child Care Association regarding Bill 47 and believe that our non-profit childcare centres and the ECEs who are employed in them need more compensation and resources.

Sincerely,

Hannah Gifford

To the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba,

I am an Early Childhood Educator III working in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I have been an ECE for thirteen years and dedicated my life to the growth and development of hundreds of children and families in my care. RRC Early Childhood Centre Inc, hosted my final practicum before graduating and then employed me shortly after graduation. I went on to complete my level three in Childcare Management in 2019. I have been employed at RRC for my entire career and I am currently the Staff Supervisor there.

I am writing to you today regarding my deep fears and concerns around Bill 47, The Child Standards Act. The language used in this Bill has been very

ambiguous and worrisome to the Early Learning and Child Care Sector. I would like to share some of my top concerns with you.

First and foremost, the continuation of another three years of the parent fee freeze. Manitoba is among the lowest in the country for current parent fees, which have been frozen since 2013! Eight years with no increase. Adding another three years and we are looking at eleven years of attempting to operate on current fees while the cost of everything else continues to rise, including things such as rent, food, and supply costs. This is incredibly dangerous for non-profit centers' financially. I think it is also important to note that Operating Grants have been frozen since 2016 as well. As you know, non-profits operate on three streams of income: Government Operating Grant, Parent fees and fundraising. I am sure you are also aware that parent fees make up to 60% of a Centre's revenue! With no increase in revenue, Centre's are left to fundraise to keep afloat. What kind of business plan is that? Educators essentially fundraising for their wage!?! This is the picture in childcare centers across the province! How many non-profit childcare centers will have to close their doors in the next three years when they cannot make ends meet?

With the discussion of opening new unlicensed child-minding establishments (gyms, dance studios, etc.) or creating more for-profit Centre spaces, I can't help but feel anger and outrage. The Early Learning and Childcare sector already struggle to recruit and retain trained and qualified educators. Educators who have dedicated their time, energy, and money to professional development to stay current in child development, positive guidance, and health and safety, while building strong lasting bonds with children, families, and staff. Yet, most ECEs leave the field within the first five years. Why? For many reasons! A few worth mentioning—low wages, high child to staff ratios, or the constant high-level demand of the job. Not to mention, a ECE returning to work after having their own children and their wage cannot even support the cost of childcare. Remember, among the lowest parent fees in the country! After two years or more of continued education and that ECE parent cannot afford to put their own child in a childcare program?!

More spaces do not equal quality care. Who will work in these new programs? If the field is already seeing a shortage of workers—who is taking care of our most vulnerable? To me, quality care is the corner stone of Early Learning and Childcare. There have been

numerous studies proving the benefits of high-quality care in society. When you have high quality early learning and childcare, communities experience both short- and long-term benefits. Parents and children get what they need!

We see an increase in parents obtaining post-secondary education and getting into the work force (this is definitely evident at RRC Early Childhood Centre!). We see more children ready for Kindergarten. We see more high school graduates. We see less mental illness. We see early interventions for children who may need additional support for their optimal development. We see happier and healthier citizens and a return on the investment of public funds! Isn't this what Manitoba wants?

There are also serious concerns that Bill 47 makes no mention of The Childcare Workers Retirement Benefit. Worrisome to a group of people (predominately female) who barely make enough money to live on, to support a family on, or to retire on. As I have previously mentioned, staff turnover in childcare is high. The sector is unable to recruit and retain trained professionals, which wage and job demands play a huge part in. Most burn out before they can even think about retirement! This is doing a major disservice to the children who will one day be our doctors and nurses, our police officers, our politicians, our teachers, and early childhood educators, etc. ECEs deserve a living wage. ECEs deserve a decent pension!

In closing, I would like to stress that the Government must do what is best for Manitobans. You will never regret doing what is right—which is investing in and supporting a universally accessible system of quality, affordable, inclusive, and well-funded public early learning and childcare—staffed by trained, passionate, nurturing and professional educators.

Thank-you for your time and consideration on this matter,

Sincerely,

Samantha Henry

To the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba,

I am a Mother of 4 children, ages six months to 13 years and have been on the Board of Directors for RRC Early Childhood Centre Inc. since spring of 2011. I find myself in a unique position and wish to

express it to the legislative in response to the proposed changes of Bill 47.

Prior to 2010, I was a low-income single mother of two living in Manitoba housing. In September of 2010, I enrolled in a two-year college program at Red River College and found myself obviously in need of childcare for a two-year-old and an 18-month-old. This was no easy task as I did not realize the waiting lists were so extensive, so I had to resort to an unlicensed home daycare for my 18-month-old son and managed to find a spot through friend connections and pleas for my two-year-old daughter in a non profit centre. Without securing a spot I would have had to withdraw from college and continue the vicious cycle of low-income families struggling to get ahead.

A couple weeks into my schooling I noticed an extreme negative change in my 18-month-old's behaviour. I knew it was not due to the separation while I was in school as he was very socialized, and I would have family watch him here and there while I did errands. He then started coming home with serious signs of neglect, so I knew I had to find him another daycare right away. The unfortunate part about it was there was no one else in the home who knew what my son would go through each day or who could tell me the truth to be reported. I had no proof of the mistreatment and being unlicensed there was no one checking up on her or the quality of care she provided. I am not saying all unlicensed homes or facilities are that way, however one of my concerns with the way the changes to Bill 47 is written is that it increases the chances of similar situations happening to many families.

I again found myself in a situation where I needed childcare asap or withdraw from college. Fortunately, I spoke with the Executive Director at the time at RRC Early Childhood Centre, who happened to have an open spot for my son, which she gave with my emergency situation. As an existing family I was able to get my daughter in as well a short time later. Since then, I have graduated my program and continued to have a very successful career in my field of study. Due to this I have also been able to dig myself out of low-income housing and have a thriving family.

This would not have been possible without the amazing trained and quality staff at the Centre. I was able to drop my children off on campus and go to my classes knowing my children were well cared for by people who can identify their specific and individual needs. This Centre has allowed my children to learn

and develop age appropriately throughout their time there with the activities developed by staff to target their groups specific developmental needs and skill levels.

When my children grew out of the RRC Early Childhood Centre, I was feeling anxious as I did not want to have to go through another situation where I was worrying about the quality of care my children would receive. They were then considered school age and had to attend another centre. I still wanted the same quality care and even though I was on many waiting lists it seemed impossible to get them into a centre where I was comfortable. At this time, I was still a single mother but was working full time so I had even less flexibility with my time, so I reached out to the daycare at Linden Meadows School. I was able to secure a 1 school year placement for my son who was attending kindergarten there but they were not able to take on my daughter and after that school year I had to remain on the waiting list for them both.

This meant I had to reduce my availability and hours at work to accommodate picking up my daughter everyday and pick up more evening hours to cover the difference. The sacrifice led to less time with my children while they were young. Every year I would contact the Director of that daycare and ask how many names were before me and if there was a chance I would get in for the next school year but I never got a spot.

It has become so incredibly important to me to have that quality care for my children. Now that I have two more children, currently two years and 6 months, I have my two-year-old at RRC Early Childhood Centre, where my older two went and am completely confident that he is in amazing hands. When my youngest is old enough to attend he will be enrolled there as well.

RRC Early Childhood Centre is a non-profit centre that supports its community in every way possible. They host practicum students from the RRC ECE programs and lend their space to Career Start at various times of the year each year. They take on newcomers from the West End Women's Resource Center to train and teach and are members of the Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA). The current Director is also a member of the St. James Directors Group. The centre works with the RRC Student services within the college as well to ensure they are supporting the students as much as possible with the limited spaces they have as their priority

enrollment is staff of the college and students. This centre is built like a family as they have many long-term staff, including up to 20 years!

With some of the proposed changes to Bill 47 it puts this wonderful centre at risk. Parent fees have been frozen since 2013 and the operating grant has been frozen since 2016 but these are things you know. As a parent I understand and appreciate affordability. Especially being one who has been able to scrape out of being a low-income family, however it is unrealistic and foolish to think that fees would not or should not go up as how on earth could any business survive with out some sort of an increase here and there to cover inflation? I personally feel the lack of increase in either parent fees or operating grant has been negligent on the governments part.

On that note, putting more of an emphasis on privatizing childcare will only make childcare more and unnecessarily expensive. So, looking at the options to continue affordability we look at the operating grant. But with the changes to Bill 47 this looks as though it will then be shared with for profit centres which would potentially create a decrease in existing funding. I honestly do not understand that at all. Why would the government spend money where it isn't needed? Non-profit is where parents will find the most affordable quality care and is where the grant is needed. The only other stream of income for non-profit comes from fundraising so if you are going to take the money out of parents' pockets anyways why not just increase fees?! The problem with fundraising is it becomes unfair to the participating families who contribute each time year after year. Some families choose to ignore fundraising efforts so time after time it is the same few families who are supporting the needs of the centre.

By needs of the centre, I refer to increased food costs to supply quality snacks for the children, staff wages and increases/raises, general maintenance and upkeep etc. With yearly increased costs, especially wages that need to be increased so the staff, who are also people and families and parents themselves, how and why is it expected for the non-profit centers to survive on the same amount of income for currently five consecutive years?

I understand there are changes proposing increased childcare opportunities in the form of child-minding spaces however my concern is the quality and training of these likely unlicensed spaces. Will there be an age limit? Will they essentially be babysitters' clubs

staffed with high school students? What about the school age children? I am sure some of you are parents yourselves, so I ask how this has even got this far . . . ?

With the proposed changes I know as a long-standing board member and currently the Chair of the RRC Early Childhood Centre Board of Directors, that its operations would be in jeopardy. We have failed to be able to give our amazing and deserving staff increases over the last couple years which jeopardizes our retention and in turn will affect quality. Should the centre go under, the effect on its families and the students of Red River College would be detrimental and the ripple effect on all community involvement could be disastrous.

As a mother with children who have been and are currently in childcare of the various different stages, as a prior student, as a prior low-income family, as a board member and stakeholder in the well being of the RRC Early Childhood Centre, as a proud born and raised Manitoba citizen I urge the Legislative Assembly to take another look at the short and long term consequences of what they are proposing.

I am open to further conversation regarding this matter. Should you wish to contact me directly please see my contact information below.

I thank you for your time in considering the issues I have brought forth today

Larissa Childs

To the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

We the Board of Directors of RRC Early Childhood Center Inc. wanted to write in support of our non-profit center in response to the proposed changes to Bill 47.

We have great concerns for the viability of our center should these changes take effect. In recent years it has already been a struggle to stay afloat financially with the long freeze on parent fees and the operating grant. Our staff have suffered for it in the form of no annual raises more than once. We believe this is incredibly unfair and it has been extremely disheartening to have to make these type of decisions. With the rising cost of goods and services (inflation) but no increase in income we have had to cut back everywhere possible until there was no where else to cut but put a freeze on the staff's wages.

With an annual increase to the cost of living how are these staff/people/parents supposed to stay ahead with this being the reality of their industry. The only other choice staff have is to look elsewhere for work which in turn jeopardizes the quality of care our center can offer and that the industry can offer.

The other financial concern lands with the wording relating to the operating grant. The way it reads leaves questions as to whether or not for profit centers will start receiving some of this funding. If that be the case, will there be added funds available to the budget to accommodate this or will non-profit centers now have to share this grant that is barely enough as it is? This is a very crucial question as it is the reality that will make or break our future existence.

We the board also believe in quality trained staff. If we were able, we would have 100% trained staff. Children come with so many different needs in their varying developmental stages, never mind the differences when it comes to ethnicity or additional support needs. This is so extremely important when most of a child's day is spent in care when both parents are working during the day.

There has also been mention of prioritizing for profit centers which raises a number of concerns. First being the contradicting nature of this when creating affordability is what is being preached. There is nothing about for profit that speaks to affordability! The other concern is, we are talking about our children here . . . We should be caring for them, not profiting off them. Our children are not bargaining chips that should be used for profit but people that need support, nurturing and care.

On that note there is also the lack of mention in regard to school age children. Children ages six years to 12 years have just as much of a need for quality and trained childcare as children ages 0 to 5 years do. Their development is at a complete different level and some could say it is even more important that they have trained staff caring for them. When children enter their school years there is a wide range of changes for them. Helping children navigate their feelings, confidence and socialization skills is critical as they learn more about themselves, likes/dislikes and where they "fit" in. We feel this need has been completely neglected in this new drafting of the Bill.

These issues raised barely scratch the surface of concern but we hope that this letter will at least raise enough thought for the changes in the Bill to be

reconsidered and reviewed for the short and long term consequences that it will bring. We strongly urge you the Legislative Assembly to hear the pleas of those within the industry.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this very important matter

The Board of Directors
RRC Early Childhood Center Inc.

Submitted by Melinda Walden

After a full review of the Early Learning and Child Care Act (Bill 47), members of the CCPAC collectively would like to show full support of Bill 47. It provides flexibility to allow changes to be made to fit the diverse needs of Manitobans now and for years to come.

We have heard from Manitobans, most recently in the Early Learning Child Care Modernization Survey, it is evident that changes need to be made. Parents want to connect with their child care providers, meet with them, and feel a sense of security before enrollment. Individual needs are expanding, with some parents needing daytime care, part-time care, or evening care. The results were clear, and the proposed changes to the act will allow us to respond to exactly this, and create a system that is inclusive and sustainable. The top three priorities were availability, trained and experienced employees and affordability, these pillars remain the priority in Bill 47. It further provides definition, promotes accessibility in all aspects, and allows for expansion in childcare for our province.

In an ever changing world as parents, professionals, educators, and mentors we strongly feel that accessibility, flexibility, and communication have never been more important. Implementing these key concepts into the Early Learning Child Care Act will meet the needs of Manitobans now and in the future.

Child Care Parent Advisory Committee (CCPAC)

Submitted by Keesy Rodewald

Dear Members of the Standing Committee,

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and explain to you what School Age childcare means to me. My name is Jana Currie, and I am the Executive Director of Laura Secord Community Child Care Inc. in Wolseley. LSCCC is a licensed, non-profit childcare centre that provides care for

10 preschool and 40 school age children. I have been a Director for 12 years and in the field for 23 years. I have extensive experience in both preschool and school age care, and I am genuinely concerned that Bill 47 neglects to address the need for regulated, accessible, inclusive, high quality school age childcare in Manitoba, and by extension appears to devalue the role of educators in this sector.

There may be a misconception that school age Early Childhood Educators just play games, go on fieldtrips, make crafts, and "babysit" independent children. To anyone with that pre-conceived notion I invite you to spend a day volunteering at our centre. While we do offer a variety of those experiences, ECE's also help children and families navigate a multitude of challenges associated with this stage of childhood that benefit greatly from the support of experienced and qualified educators. ECE's providing school age care work closely with families and schools to create a continuum of learning and development, engaging and empowering children as they become more autonomous. ECE's facilitate the children's development as they take more control over their activities and decisions, explore peer relationships, and learn how to resolve their own problems and conflicts. ECE's model and promote appropriate social relationships, language, and behaviour and may detect and address concerns such as bullying.

School age care not only allows parents to work and support their families, but it also offers an inclusive opportunity for children to socialize with peers. Children benefit greatly from having educators to help guide appropriate social interactions and offer meaningful play-based experiences. Children learn to express themselves through the creative process and by having the opportunity to manipulate different creative mediums. We also complement what the children are learning in school by furthering their knowledge of science through our programming which includes experiments and sensory play.

In addition to the academic programming we offer, we also work closely to facilitate the overall health of the children we care for. For instance, symptoms of mental health disorders, such as ADHD, anxiety, depression, Oppositional Defiant, Obsessive Compulsive and Conduct Disorder, often start in early childhood but are not typically diagnosed in children until they enter their school years. ECE's work with families and other professionals such as teachers, doctors, behavioural specialists, occupational and speech therapists to complete assessments, monitor medication changes and implement strategies to

support the child and foster positive peer and child/adult relationships.

For example, we had a five-year-old child who attended our centre that exhibited symptoms of ADHD, anxiety, and depression. The child's doctor requested that we monitor and document on-going behaviours including known triggers. This included completing a comprehensive assessment that was included in the child's diagnosis. We also worked closely with a behavioural specialist from Family Dynamics to create and implement strategies to help the child experience success while at the centre and support the family in ensuring our strategies were consistent with what they were trying at home. The ECE's responsible for this child's care participated in over 30 hours each of professional development to understand and support this child's specific needs, which included attending workshops both online and in person, researching strategies and educating themselves on what had worked well for other children with similar disorders. We did all this while also managing extreme behaviours such as violent outbursts, lack of impulse control, inappropriate touching, running from centre and staff and refusing at times to leave the building for outings or to go to school. Our combined experience, dedication and education allowed us to not only support this child and his family through their time of crisis prior to diagnosis and treatment, but also helped us offer meaningful experiences that promoted a calm, safe environment for the child to flourish in.

Another example was the care we provided for a child with Angelman's Syndrome, which is a rare genetic and neurological disorder characterized by severe developmental delay and learning disabilities. This child was non-verbal, required assistance with toileting, feeding, had tremulousness with jerky movements of the arms and legs, and could be physical when frustrated. We worked very closely with all the professionals in this child's life including occupational therapists, speech therapists, and medical doctors to create an inclusive program that allowed the child to learn and thrive in a safe environment while meeting their specific needs. Staff learned sign language and taught it to the other children in the program to support the highest level of communication, community, and acceptance for the child. Due to the needs of this specific child, and to continue to offer support for the family, we applied for an received an age exemption so that the child could remain in our care until the age of 14, 2 years past the maximum age for school age care. Allowing the child

to remain in our care those additional two years ensured the child received consistent, quality care in an environment that was familiar to them and that offered an opportunity for sustained peer relationships guided by staff who were invested in this child's well being and well trained and knowledgeable about their needs.

The examples I have sited here, describe only two of the hundreds of children I have worked with over my 23 years in the field, but they are two of the children that helped shape and define not only my career but also my dedication and commitment to Early Childhood Education by experiencing first-hand the pivotal role ECE's play in a child's development.

ECE's also offer a variety of supports to children and their families who are dealing with a myriad of life's challenges including separation/divorce, death of a pet or loved one, financial concerns etc. We work hard to ensure the children in our care feel safe by building strong, positive relationships and earning their trust by being consistent, fair, genuine, and knowledgeable professionals in their lives. This kind of care does not happen by chance. We are highly dedicated, experienced professionals and should be valued as such. If the intention of Bill 47 is not to devalue, deregulate and declassify school age care then I urge you to reconsider this bill and the ramifications it will have on our sector. I implore you to do what is fair and just for our educators and the children and families we serve by rejecting this bill, as we are already struggling to do more with less under a five-year funding freeze that is starving our centre, especially now during a global pandemic that has stretched our resolve and resources to their limit.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Jana Currie
Executive Director
Laura Secord Community Child Care Inc.

Greetings to the committee,

Thank you for this opportunity, I have worked as an ECE for the past 32 years in non profit licensed early learning and child care. I have inclusion experience, preschool and school age experience, been a supervisor, instructor in post diploma ECE courses with Red River College and currently as a director where my staff work very hard to offer high quality

early learning and care for infant, preschool and school age.

Fiscal responsibility is important for this government. I can understand how you might think that spending more on child care might seem fiscally irresponsible in a pandemic. That's why it is important to understand that investment in child care is not a burden to the province's finances—it's an investment.

For this reason, funding for licensed public early learning and child care programs must increase. Operating grants have been frozen for more than five years now. You would be right to be skeptical of ECEs advocating for more money for child care. You might call that biased.

However, the Deloitte report titled Early Learning and Childcare as Key Economic Infrastructure makes not a social case but an *economic* case for increased funding for child care. In this way, the interests of the government today, in fact, align with the needs of child care centres in Manitoba. Deloitte demonstrates how when you have high quality early learning and child care, communities experience both short and long term benefits! Parents and children get what they need. We see a decrease in child poverty. We see children more ready for Kindergarten. More high school graduates. Less mental illness. We see early interventions for children who may need more supports for their optimal development. We see happier and healthier citizens and a return on the investment of public funds!

Perhaps most importantly for this government, we see increase in parents obtaining post-secondary education and getting into the workforce. This is particularly relevant as we seek to grow our economy post-pandemic. We want to ensure that Manitobans can go back to work.

Going back to work is not easy for all Manitobans. Ironically, it is difficult for our early childhood educators. Our ECE workforce struggles to afford to pay for child care for their own children. It is deeply inappropriate that we cannot provide enough for our ECEs so that they can access the very service they provide.

Many ECEs and CCAs haven't seen raises in years due to frozen operating grants. We are providing an essential human service with a very high level of responsibility.

We deserve at least to have a living wage—however it's still not nearly enough with a starting wage for

many positions of \$16/hour after two years of post secondary and intense hands-on practicums!

Can one afford to live off of this wage? Will we attract and keep the excellent workforce we need to ensure a high level of quality for all of Manitoba's families? If we want child care to be a meaningful investment, we must ensure that it is funded properly.

Increasing operating grants means that wages can increase for ECEs and CCAs, who need some reassurance that our retirement benefits are safe. An

investment in ECEs and CCAs is an investment in high-quality child care, and high-quality child care—regardless if you are a parent—is an investment for all Manitobans. It's false to assume we have to choose either only funding child care or only trying to find savings. It's not either/or—it's both. We can have both by investing in child care—an investment in both the present and the future.

Respectfully,

Sheila Argue

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>