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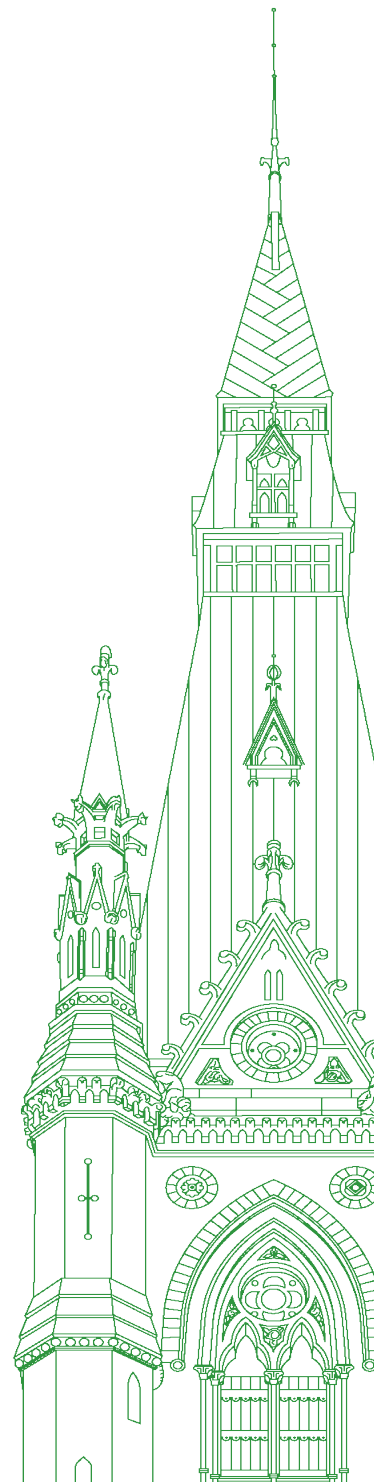
Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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● (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

The clerk has advised that the witnesses' sound has been tested, as has the sound for members appearing virtually.

Welcome to meeting 61 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today's meeting is again taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person and remotely, using the Zoom application.

To ensure an orderly meeting, before speaking, wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating virtually, please use the "raise hand" icon on your Surface. Before speaking, make sure that you turn on your mike. For those in the room, the microphones will be controlled by the verification officer.

You have the option of speaking in the official language of your choice. If interpretation services become a problem, please get my attention, and we'll suspend while they're being corrected. Translation is available with headsets here in the room, as well as by using the translation icon on your Surface.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the use of headsets with a boom microphone.... I will only recognize those participating virtually if their sound quality has been approved by the translator. For those members appearing virtually, if you're not approved to participate verbally, you can still participate in any votes in the committee by simply indicating, with a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down, a yea or a nay.

Again, should any technical issues arise during the meeting, we will suspend while they're corrected.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, February 3, 2023, the committee will continue its study of Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

I would like to inform all members that the witnesses appearing, as indicated, have been checked and we are fine.

I would like to welcome our witnesses today. As an individual, we have Susan Prentice, Duff Roblin professor of government at the University of Manitoba. From Compass Early Learning and Care, we have Sheila Olan-MacLean, chief executive officer. From

the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, we have Amélie Lainé, director of partnerships and programs, by video conference.

We'll begin with Ms. Prentice for five minutes, please. I will advise the witnesses that, at the end of their five minutes, I will advise them to conclude their remarks.

Ms. Prentice, you have the floor.

● (0850)

Dr. Susan Prentice (Duff Roblin Professor of Government, University of Manitoba, As an Individual): Good morning. Thank you.

I submitted a brief by the March 17 deadline, and my comments today draw on it. My brief is more comprehensive than what I will have time to speak to today.

I'm a university professor, a sociologist. I have published widely on historical and contemporary child care policy. I actually earned my Ph.D. for a study of child care in Toronto during World War II and the campaign to save the wartime day nurseries.

I appreciate that your job is to scrutinize the legislation and propose amendments as necessary, and I would like to help. I have two main points.

First, the most important step that I believe your committee can take is to introduce a definition of "early learning and child care" early in the act, right after the short title in the definitions section. I propose that your definition should look something like this: "Early learning and child care is a system of regulated and licensed services provided by qualified early childhood educators who have specialized post-secondary education training."

Yesterday in committee, a member read from a brief that suggests "child care is the care of a child, regardless of who provides the care", and I urge you to see the folly in this kind of definition for the purposes of legislation. Let me explain why.

In my house, when my spouse and kids are sick, I get out the thermometer, I make them hot lemon with ginger and I provide over-the-counter pain medication. I am of course providing health care, but you would in no way reasonably want to include what I do under health care legislation or funding. In our Winnipeg home, we have smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and we keep our fire extinguishers fully charged. We're practising fire hygiene, but we in no way belong to public firefighting.

Similarly, early learning and child care does not mean and cannot mean care of a child wherever it occurs. It means instead a very particular kind of out-of-home early learning and child care service, one that is regulated, licensed and provided by qualified early childhood education professionals.

Your bill needs this kind of definition.

I have a second major recommendation on clause 7 on funding. The commitment to public and not-for-profit investments must be strengthened, and in my brief I provide some textual direction.

The current language directs funding in particular to public and not-for-profit providers, and it's much weaker than it should be. Keeping taxpayer dollars out of private pockets is strikingly important. It provides protection for the child care ecosystem. It ensures maximally efficient use of public dollars, and it acts as a bulwark against the negative effects on quality staffing and regulations exerted by a lobby for commercial child care, particularly those parties with obligations to shareholders.

It would be very valuable for your committee to review the experience of Australia, beginning in the 1990s. In Australia, a series of decisions about small policy and funding changes set in motion a massive expansion of for-profit child care, including a virtual monopoly. On November 6, 2008, Australia's largest single child care chain went into receivership.

The bankruptcy of this one national day care chain left more than 1,000 child care centres, over 120,000 children and 16,000 child care educators in the lurch. The Australian government had to step in to keep the lights on until a fire sale could happen. It's been called a spectacular public policy disaster. It was directly triggered by permitting public funds to go to for-profit child care businesses.

Knowing this history makes it crystal clear why Bill C-35 should prohibit public funding of commercial child care operations.

Those are my two main points. There are more in the brief. I look forward to our discussion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Prentice.

Now we'll go to Ms. Olan-MacLean for five minutes.

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean (Chief Executive Officer, Compass Early Learning and Care): Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Compass Early Learning and Care is a not-for-profit charitable organization in central Ontario caring for over 3,300 children, from birth to the age of 12. We are led by the values of trusting relation-

ships; safe, caring, joyful spaces; diversity, equity, inclusion and justice; collective intelligence; and lifelong learning.

We recently began a visionary strategic planning process. We began by asking children what kind of world they wanted to live in. Here's what a couple of them said.

Justin, age 7, said, "I want to live in a world where everyone has a job and enough money for a safe place to live and enough food to eat with no worries, and people have to say kind things and not just what they're thinking when they think it."

Oliver, age 3, said, "I want to live in a world where there is a big city with lots of buildings and houses. My mummy would live there, and my daddy would live there too, and me. My whole family, like my grandma and my grandpa; Debbie, too." Debbie is their caregiver. "I like flowers, so there would be flowers, and there would be lots of bees. If they sting you, you would be able to fly because they'd put a special spell on you with their stinger."

These are just two examples of the comments we gathered that demonstrate children's connections to family, community and their caregiver; their empathy and kindness; their connection to the natural world; and their understanding of justice and equity.

Bill C-35 has many parallel values to Compass and to the children that we interviewed. It is a strong beginning, a foundation to embed accessible, affordable, quality early learning and child care as a right for Canadians. To bring them to life, there must be solid structures that will nurture each of these concepts and inspire a groundswell of people to come together and work for the ends and the goals outlined. To create such a system, we will need three things: a stable and sustainable workforce; accessible, affordable child care; and quality programming.

For Bill C-35 to have the impact that it proposes, federal and provincial governments must understand the impact that this child care staffing crisis has, not only on child care but on every other sector in our society. Right now, Compass is working with a group from central Ontario looking at how we can increase child care for medical staff. There's a crisis. We're having hospitals call us to say they need more child care so that they can have their staff. They're all so interconnected, and it starts with child care. People can't work without child care.

A stable and sustainable workforce means that we would need to increase our professional compensation starting at \$30 an hour, having a pension plan and benefits. In previous federal government initiatives for workforce strategy, funding was rolled out in Ontario with the provision that not one penny could go to compensation of any kind. It was very explicit. Much of this money went to colleges for free tuition for an ECE diploma. Colleges are now reporting that these graduates are not going into child care. In fact, they are going into higher education. They are going to school boards. They're going to Costco and even to Tim Hortons, because the wages are higher and the responsibility is less.

CWELCC has made a great contribution toward affordable child care. Our families report that they can financially breathe again—a very good thing. Accessibility will be an issue, and it's not an easy issue to address right away. It will take all of us working together to expand our system to accommodate the many families currently on our wait-list and those who are going to join shortly. Every expansion dollar will be needed for quality programs, beautiful spaces and sustainable funding.

We must send a message to for-profit corporations, shareholders and entrepreneurs that Canada is not open for child care business and that, in Canada, children are not for profit. Working together as a child care community, along with the federal, provincial and municipal governments and community partners, we can look back in 20 years and see that our vision is coming to reality.

• (0855)

To do this, the not-for-profit and public sectors will need access to infrastructure loans, support from groups such as Building Blocks for Child Care and support for our home child care expansion, as well as high-quality—

• (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Olan-MacLean.

If you could conclude....

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: Very good. Yes. Thank you so much.

We will need high-quality programs built on documents such as Ontario's "How Does Learning Happen?", the B.C. and New Brunswick early learning frameworks and research to study programs that are already deeply embedded in quality.

We have excellent programs across Canada. Let's build our system on those programs. Let us not build the system on underfunded programs and the scarcity model, in which we want to save all existing child care, whether or not it's good for children.

Our language—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Olan-MacLean.

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: In the question period, you'll be able to address what you missed.

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: Very good. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Lainé, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Amélie Lainé (Director, Partnerships and Programs, Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec inc.): Kwe, hello.

My name is Amélie Lainé and I am the Director, Partnerships and Programs, at the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec. I am also a member of the Wendake nation.

This morning, I am happy to be working on the territory of my Wendat ancestors.

I want to thank the committee for having me here, virtually, and allowing me to speak about the needs, problems and challenges facing indigenous families living in urban settings and the impact of Bill C-35.

The Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones is a provincial association that supports ten indigenous friendship centres and three service points in Quebec. They are located in the cities that indigenous people visit in significant numbers. The Regroupement helps develop tangible solutions and public policies to improve the well-being of the increasing number of indigenous people living in urban settings. This is a constantly growing population in Quebec but also across Canada. The Regroupement also implements innovative and proactive strategies to address indigenous people's needs and support the development and implementation of projects and programs.

The Regroupement and its centres are also members of the National Association of Friendship Centres, a network of over 120 centres that is the largest infrastructure for the delivery of services to the indigenous citizens of Canada. This infrastructure has been in existence here for over 70 years.

The indigenous friendship centres are frontline service hubs for indigenous people. They offer a range of services, such as health, well-being, social services, education and employability. They also offer family and early childhood services. They are places that value identity and culture and that offer traditional knowledge and indigenous language teaching.

The impacts of the activities of the friendship centres are numerous and documented. Well-being and health improve; a safety net is created for indigenous families living in cities far from their communities; families are empowered; diverse spaces, opportunities and experiences are created that contribute to children's healthy habits; and, most importantly, we see a desire for lifelong learning.

The early childhood services that are delivered by the friendship centres depend on the resources and the realities and issues of the urban indigenous community that supports the friendship centre. The services include early childhood learning services and guidance and psychosocial support for families. As I mentioned earlier, there are front-line services such as health clinics that enable indigenous families living in cities to overcome a number of challenges. These families experience several combined vulnerability factors. There are also programming of day camp workshops, family outings on the land, perinatal activities, various cultural activities, spaces for children to have access to educational materials, goodwill visits to pregnant women and new parents, parental respite services, and food and emergency assistance, among other things.

Bill C-35 includes funding agreements with indigenous partners to enable indigenous governance and partnerships in this area and program delivery. Those agreements are necessary: despite the multitude of early childhood and family services available, many needs are still unmet.

As we know, indigenous families living in urban areas use little to no public services, whether in Quebec or in the other provinces of Canada. There is racism and prejudice and people don't trust government institutions, so community organizations like the friendship centres become reference points, and, most importantly, places where they can access services that are culturally appropriate and safe. It is important that these families have access to specialized services, since some of them are also in the youth protection system.

To fulfil the federal government's vision and goal for early learning and child care, Bill C-35 must take into account the diverse realities and the needs of indigenous children living in urban settings.

Co-development, partnership and collaboration are the best ways forward. Unfortunately, place of residence too often affects access to quality education services. The result is discrimination on two fronts, direct and indirect. More than 50 per cent of indigenous people in Quebec live in cities. In Canada, it is more than 60 per cent. That population is continuing to grow and needs access to high quality services. Organizations that support urban indigenous communities, like the indigenous friendship centres, continue to face jurisdictional disputes when they seek funding.

● (0905)

Stable, substantial and equitable funding is needed to support our families living in urban settings. At present, urban indigenous organizations that offer services have little or no access to funding relating to the early learning and child care framework for young indigenous children, to consolidate and develop their early childhood and family services, since the funding is administered by the indigenous political institutions. The investments must therefore use equitable funding models that reflect the rights and jurisdiction of all indigenous people. Urban indigenous organizations need to be able to receive equitable, flexible funding that enables us to offer services. We must have access to resources...

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lainé.

[English]

We will now go to the first round of questioning.

Madam Ferreri, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to the witnesses. Good morning, and thank you for being here as we try to navigate the system and do all we can to ensure access to affordable quality child care for all families across Canada.

Sheila—if I can call you Sheila—it's nice to have you here from Peterborough. It's nice to see the representation from Compass. It's a wonderful facility in my riding. I've had the opportunity to visit them. They do incredible work, represent many families and have some phenomenal resources.

Sheila, if I may, can you tell me, right now, how many families are on a wait-list to access care from Compass?

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: We have about 300 in each of our programs.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Three hundred per each.... How many programs do you have? What's the total number on the wait-list?

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: We have 40 different licensed centres, and there are about 300. Some of those may overlap, because some centres are close to each other. However, it's a lot.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Could I get you to table that for the committee, Sheila? It would be very beneficial to see those numbers for the wait-list. That would be great.

I'm curious. Could you tell me whether you feel Bill C-35—this legislation—has improved wait-list times and access to quality child care?

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: I see this as a process. We're at the beginning, and the first part is to make it affordable for families. It's certainly doing that.

The unfortunate circumstance of that is that it increases wait-lists greatly. We also need, at the same time, a strategy to increase that access and offer expansion. Those are the two areas I would like this committee to focus on. How do we increase spaces in a sustainable and quality kind of way? The second thing is a compensation plan for our workforce. We absolutely need support with that. I think the federal and provincial governments, together, can come up with a plan that will support....

I absolutely support the—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I'm sorry, Sheila. I have such limited time. I know it feels as if I'm cutting you off.

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: That's okay. It's not a problem

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I'll just confirm this: Right now, the bill definitely needs to be amended, because, the way it currently stands, it's not improving access. We need to strengthen this bill.

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: I see the bill as a good beginning. The amendments would certainly help, but I don't think we need to go for perfect before we can move forward. This bill will enshrine child care as a right for Canadians. That is such an important step for us to get beyond. Then, we can start to work on how we do that.

● (0910)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Sure. I know you and I have had these great conversations. I just think it's very critical that.... We still can't forget about the people on those wait-lists. It's great for the people who are in there. This is like winning the lottery. We have to look at how to solve this.

I will move to Ms. Lainé.

I have a quick question before I ask you another question: Do you represent unlicensed child cares, as well, ma'am?

The Chair: Ms. Ferreri, I believe she's having technical problems. That's why she disappeared.

Do you want to direct a question to another panellist?

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Can I have my time back to ask her that question? How does that work, Chair?

The Chair: If you continue using your time with other panellists, it's your time.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Do we know if she's going to get back on? I do have a very specific question for her.

The Chair: I cannot answer that for you at this time. The technical people have not been able to reach her, but if we can, before this panel is out, I will let you get back for one question to her.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Can I give up my time at this point and then come back to her and see if we can get that?

The Chair: Yes. If you have one question to address to the witness we've lost, I will ensure you have that opportunity before we conclude this panel.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I appreciate that. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: We will move to Madam Saks for six minutes, please.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses today.

Mr. Chair, I might add that I also have some very specific questions for Madam Lainé, so if she does come back, I would like to have one question. I'm happy to cede some time in order to do that.

That being the case, I would like to move to Ms. Prentice, who is here today.

Your opening remarks really lean into what we're trying to do with creating a nationwide, accessible, affordable, high-quality child care system. Can you lean in a bit more on why it's important for us to be investing in non-profit care with taxpayer dollars?

Dr. Susan Prentice: I can. I started by advising that I think it's really urgent that the bill contain a strong definition of the services under consideration. It's going to be very important to delineate what's being discussed.

What's being discussed are early learning and child care services, which are best thought of as a public good, and public goods often are "market failures" in the language of economics.

In a labour-intensive service like child care, where somewhere between 80% and 85% of the budget is spent on the people who care for children, a profit motive invariably has quality-diminishing effects. It has quality-diminishing effects because the single most elastic budget category is staffing, and the way you make a profit in child care is to change ratios, hire fewer trained staff, see more turnover and basically shortchange children and families.

A profit motive is fundamentally incompatible with caring for vulnerable people. We saw this—if I can draw a parallel from a sister field—in Quebec, where for-profit homes for older people were much more dangerous places during the pandemic. Nominally, long-term care was provided by the same standard to all people, and we saw clear patterns where for-profit care is a more dangerous place. Vulnerable people are at greater risk in for-profit settings, and where there is a profit motive, quality invariably will suffer.

This is why it's prudent public policy to reserve taxpayer dollars to not-for-profit services, where 100% of the money goes to children and families, and none of it goes into private pockets.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you for that.

In May 2021, you wrote an op-ed that was entitled "We must eliminate profit-making from child care and elder care". You referenced that in terms of the Quebec model on LTC.

We all witnessed what was happening during the pandemic, but could you expand on some of the reasoning for the conclusion, whether it's specifically on what you've seen in terms of the quality of care in the for-profit sector or in the non-profit? You also leaned into staff turnover rates, which, as you know, also potentially can impact quality. If you could you lean into the evidence behind your conclusions, that would be really helpful to the committee.

● (0915)

Dr. Susan Prentice: I would be very pleased to table a bibliography of international research experience that could show you some of evidence-based reasons why for-profit child care in Canada, in the United States and elsewhere is of demonstrably lower quality. It's true system-wide, both in what we would call "structural quality" and in process quality on the floor. It's a vast literature. If you'll let me draw on my expertise, I'll simply say that there is a mountain of research that proves that for-profit child care is, in general, of lower quality.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I would be pleased to have that bibliography submitted to the committee to help as we weigh in on this.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have? I have to leave a bit of time for Madam Lainé.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I will cede my time with the hope that I can speak to Madam Lainé.

The Chair: Just to let the committee know, her Internet failed and she's attempting to reboot and reconnect. Hopefully, we'll get her back.

Thank you, Madam Saks.

[Translation]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for accepting the committee's invitation. I will take this opportunity to also thank the interpreters, whose work is important for us all.

My question is for all the witnesses.

In your opinion, are there things that it is important to add to Bill C-35?

[English]

Dr. Susan Prentice: If it's an open question to us all, yes, I will say at least two things are missing from the legislation before us.

One is a careful definition that makes it clear that we are not speaking about all care of all children wherever it occurs. We're speaking about early learning and child care, which is a very particular kind of service. That's the first thing.

The second thing is that the protections for not-for-profit and public must be strengthened.

The third, which I get into in my brief, is that I would like to see more public transparency and accounting for the national advisory council, but for today's purposes, that's in my brief and it's secondary to my testimony today.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Ms. Olan-MacLean, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: If I may just add, a workforce strategy would be important, along with something about the expansion, but certainly I'm supporting the comments that Susan has made.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Who do you think should sit on the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care?

If you would answer, Ms. Prentice.

[English]

Dr. Susan Prentice: The committee itself is off to a good start with a representative committee. I'd make a plug for more researchers, but that's inevitable.

What seems especially important to me is that the committee is supplied with the resources and data to permit it to make a thorough and robust evaluation of the progress toward the objectives of the framework and the act, so that it would be able to report it to the minister and to report publicly to Canadians.

I have some concerns that the legislation as proposed is not robust enough to fully empower the national advisory committee to be able to undertake this work. At this point, I think it's a secondary problem.

I'm going to make the observation that what's before us today is the legislation. It has a very narrow focus, and it's quite different from the kind of implementation that will roll out across the country with provinces, territories and indigenous governments. As much as I've wanted to speak to implementation, I'm trying to speak directly today to Bill C-35, specifically.

● (0920)

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Do you want to add something, Ms. Olan-MacLean?

[English]

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: I think that Susan has done a great job of summarizing, and I don't want to muddy the waters. Focusing on the way she has put it is fine.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You know there are important factors like inflation and rising child care fees.

Do you think they should be taken into account in the long-term funding levels for child care centres?

[English]

Dr. Susan Prentice: One international benchmark is a recommendation that about 1% of a nation's GDP should be spent on early learning and child care, and we will still not meet that target, even with the current spending ambitions. Building a national system of early learning and child care is a long-term project. I think Bill—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): I have a point of order, Chair.

I am having difficulty hearing the witness. It's fading in and out. I don't know if that is in the room as well, or if it's just like that for us online.

The Chair: It's not in the room, Ms. Falk.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: The interpreter says, yes, it is.

The Chair: We will suspend for a moment while we get this corrected. We will suspend for two minutes.

● (0920)

(Pause)

● (0925)

The Chair: It appears that the technical issue has been corrected. We will return to Madam Bérubé.

[Translation]

You have two minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: That's great. So I didn't lose too much time.

Given that Ms. Lainé is back with us, my question will be for her. I also want to thank her for coming to testify before the committee today.

You may not have had time to talk about the challenges and recommendations you mentioned in your presentation, so I will let you have the time to talk to us about that.

Ms. Amélie Lainé: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé. I'm really sorry about the technical problems I had with the internet and Zoom.

Regarding recommendations and needs, I talked about that briefly. We have to make sure that under this bill, the early learning and child care framework for young indigenous children is accessible to urban indigenous organizations.

At the moment, this funding is only administered through indigenous political institutions, and it does not give service organizations like the indigenous friendship centres in Canada access to funds to develop early childhood and family services.

We know that indigenous families use little or no services offered by the government because they are afraid of racism or discrimination. Things like indigenous friendship centres become places for receiving services that are culturally appropriate and safe, and this enables us to support families and young children.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I think Val-d'Or is an example, because the services are beneficial for young children. However, under Bill C-35...

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[English]

We'll go to Ms. Gazan for six minutes, please.

You appear to be on mute.

We still cannot hear you.

Ms. Gazan, I'm going to go back to two of the earlier members while we work to correct your issue. You will get your six minutes.

I'm going to return to Madam Ferreri and then to Ms. Saks for two minutes each, before we return to Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be as quick as I can.

Sheila, could you clarify those numbers you said earlier? I asked about wait-lists. You said that there were 300 per program, but there are 40 programs. That's 12,000. That seems outrageous when you only have 3,300 spaces.

Am I doing the math wrong?

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: When you think of a program that may have possibly 100 spaces, or less than 100 spaces, and it has 300 to 400 people—some have 600 people—on the wait-list, yes, that's probably pretty accurate.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: It's four times the amount.

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: It's not the experience of every program. It is an experience, because we do pay a lot of attention to quality and to family engagement. The reputation gets out there.

● (0930)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I know what great work you do.

It's really important that Canadians hear that this is the reality. There are far more parents and families waiting for access than have access. That number is out of control. We have to fix that.

I have to move on.

Ms. Lainé, can you table this with the committee if you don't have time to answer this question?

I have two things, if you can quickly answer yes or no. Do you represent unlicensed child care providers?

Ms. Amélie Lainé: No.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Okay. I'm just clarifying.

Could I get you to table this with the committee? I don't know if you'll have enough time to answer.

It is understood that since the proportion of aboriginal people living in cities is over 50% and growing, the government has a responsibility to this population. What do you think would be the best way to implement aboriginal early learning and child care programs and partnerships, so that they can also support urban children and help them stay culturally connected?

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ferreri.

[English]

Ms. Lainé, you will have to provide that in writing to the committee, or you may be able to address it in another question.

Next, we have Ms. Saks for two minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): I have a point of order, Chair. I'm just making sure you can hear me.

The Chair: I can now. We'll return to you, Ms. Gazan after Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study, Ms. Lainé.

[English]

What does not-for-profit care mean for indigenous children in urban settings?

[Translation]

Ms. Amélie Lainé: Thank you for your question.

As I said when I answered a question from Ms. Ferreri, my association does not represent unlicensed child care services. I am speaking for the indigenous community organizations known as indigenous friendship centres. We provide early childhood and family services.

What we offer goes beyond child care. We offer support services for indigenous families and children. As we know, a majority of indigenous families do not use the child care offered by the government or use private child care. In any event, that is how things are in Quebec. I believe it is the same in the rest of Canada.

These families often find it difficult to access that type of child care, because of racism, discrimination and prejudice, so community organizations like the friendship centres that can offer parents supports like drop-in child care and drop-in respite services offer avenues for the Canadian government to consider. The government needs to make sure that the urban indigenous population has access to high quality child care that is outside the usual structured child care framework.

[English]

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you.

I have one last follow-up question.

Do the current agreements, as they're written with the inclusion of the recognition of indigenous children, enhance the ability of friendship centres to do their work, yes or no?

[Translation]

Amélie Lainé: No. Because the funding is administered by the indigenous political institutions, service organizations do not have access to it.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saks.

We'll now go to Ms. Gazan for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Lainé.

With the passing of Bill C-15 in the last Parliament, the application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples was affirmed in Canadian law. That includes article 3, relating to the right of self-determination. We know that central to the right of self-determination is the respect for the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples.

Would you support an amendment to Bill C-35 to ensure the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples on matters pertaining to indigenous peoples, yes or no?

[Translation]

Ms. Amélie Lainé: I would like to answer yes or no, but I don't understand the question. It's not that I don't understand English, but I can't answer you.

I'm very sorry.

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay. Thank you very much.

I'm talking about the right for parents' self-determination to have free, prior and informed consent on any matters relating to their children. It's to get permission.

● (0935)

[Translation]

Ms. Amélie Lainé: So the answer is yes. Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes. Thank you very much.

I'm moving on to Madam Prentice. It's nice to have a fellow Manitoban in the room.

We're talking about developing a national child care strategy. I know it's not going to work unless we invest in a workforce. We also know we are witnessing a workforce crisis in the child care sector that is negatively impacting workers, children and parents.

How big of a factor is inadequate wages and benefits in contributing to this crisis? Do we need a workforce strategy to address it?

Dr. Susan Prentice: The quality of the working conditions of the adults who care for children is a direct measure of the quality of care for children, so the two are intimately linked.

It seems important to me, however, to distinguish between what a bill and legislation can do to set a national framework, and how it then becomes implemented by governments and how it is put in place on the ground. While there is a relationship, it's not a straight line.

One thing I would like to see, for example, would be the national advisory council assured of the kind of information and data it needs, so it can track, for example, progress on strengthening the workforce. I do not think the legislation itself will contain the workforce strategy. What will be important, once the legislation is passed, is to ensure that the funding will be adequate and the action plans that are signed with each province, territory and indigenous government are of high quality and will produce child care services in a good way for everybody.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Olan-MacLean, I spoke about a workforce strategy.

Do you agree that Bill C-35 needs to more directly acknowledge the workforce crisis? Would you support including an explicit commitment to supporting decent working conditions, livable wages and benefits as one of the principles guiding the federal investments in the system?

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: I certainly would.

I agree with Susan that it doesn't have to be explicit on how we're going to do it, but it should be very clear on the importance of the workforce and that the working conditions and compensation are paramount, really.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Moving on, in 2021, the federal government—and I'll ask you this as well, Madam Prentice—promised personal support workers across Canada a wage floor of at least \$25 an hour. Is it time for them to make the same commitment to child care workers and provide additional resources to provinces in order to improve wage grids from coast to coast?

I'll start with you, Madam Olan-MacLean and then move to Madam Prentice. Then I'll move over to Madam Lainé to expand on inequalities with indigenous care of children.

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: Again, I would say absolutely.

In Ontario, we were given an \$18-an-hour floor. What that did to our workforce was awful. They felt defeated. They felt that this was really important work, and they were not being compensated.

In a strategy such as you've suggested, I would like to see a floor of \$30 an hour, but \$25 an hour would certainly be a big improvement on that.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

Madam Prentice, go ahead quickly, please.

Dr. Susan Prentice: The bill should contain the kinds of principles and aspirations that lead to evidence-based best practices. This is inevitably going to mean supporting a well-qualified, well-trained workforce.

I do not believe that the bill itself needs to contain salary floors. Those ought to be part of what's written into the provincial, territorial and indigenous agreements. This is where the national action—

• (0940)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Going back to that, I agree that we don't want to put salary—

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, your time is over.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

We'll now go to Madam Falk for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I want to address my first question to Madam Lainé.

Would you say that friendship centres are already providing child care?

[Translation]

Ms. Amélie Lainé: Personally, the child care services I am familiar with are the services offered in Quebec, that is, services offered by early childhood centres, called CPEs, which are high quality child care services regulated by the Government of Quebec.

Indigenous friendship centres in Quebec offer early childhood and family services, but they are not early childhood centres or child care services of that type. They do offer drop-in child care and drop-in respite services for parents. They offer services that are culturally appropriate and safe and whose aim is to meet the needs of families and children.

They are not structured child care services like in early childhood centres, but they are essential services for indigenous families in cities.

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Absolutely. I have a number of friendship centres throughout my riding. I have a rural riding. I can absolutely see how community culture is reinforced and how they're safe places to go to.

I would be interested in knowing whether, across Canada, there are friendship centres that have licensed day care within the centre for that purpose, especially when we're seeing a lot of indigenous peoples coming into urban centres, which is away from their home reserve or where they're from, to a place of community.

Would you know if, across Canada, there might be centres like that?

[Translation]

Ms. Amélie Lainé: Yes, there are.

As Ms. Bérubé said, in Quebec, the indigenous friendship centre in Val-d'Or has a CPE attached to its services. The Regroupement is in the process of creating two living spaces for indigenous students and families, in Sept-Îles and Trois-Rivières, so we are going to offer child care out of those spaces where families will be able to access certain services.

I know there are child care services in some indigenous friendship centres elsewhere in Canada. Often, it is child care offered through the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities, or AHSUNC, program. However, programs like that are underfunded, which is why it is important to get funding under the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Okay. That leads into my next question for you.

What do the wait-lists look like with some of these organizations or centres for child care?

[Translation]

Ms. Amélie Lainé: I don't have those figures with me. However, I know that my colleagues from other Canadian provinces have said several times that there were wait lists made up primarily of children with special needs.

As you said, many people leave the communities and go to cities in order to access services that can meet their children's special needs. It's the same in Quebec. There are wait lists, particularly for the AHSUNC program, which does provide support for families. Again, I don't have any figures.

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Would you be willing to go back, bring those numbers to our committee and table them for us?

[Translation]

Amélie Lainé: Yes, I will find out and I will get them to you.

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Wonderful. Thank you.

That leads into my next question as well. I think we can all say that there is a great need for child care across the country. It doesn't matter what province or territory you live in. There is a need for child care.

Referring to these centres, would you say or believe that they are equipped to create more spaces? If they're not equipped, what is needed so that they can achieve that to help service and support our indigenous Canadians?

[Translation]

Amélie Lainé: As I said in my presentation, the indigenous friendship centres movement has existed for over 70 years in Canada, so it is clear that there are needs in terms of infrastructure, because it is often outdated.

In Quebec, we have been fortunate to have the support of the provincial government for this, so some centres have been able to improve access to their services. However, before we can offer families more services, we definitely have more infrastructure needs, so we can improve the space.

● (0945)

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: That's wonderful.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Falk.

We'll now go to Mr. Coteau for the last five-minute round in the first hour.

Mr. Coteau, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here and for their commitment to early learning and child care in this country. I know that, in my neighbourhood—the riding I represent, Don Valley East—this initiative is a very important one. It provides families with the ability to support their children through early learning. Also, it frees parents to participate more in the economy. I just want to thank everyone on our panel today for the work they're doing.

One issue brought up earlier, I believe, by all of our witnesses was around the monetization of the sector.

Ms. Olan-MacLean, you suggested there's a movement to monetize this sector. I believe you spoke about—I could be wrong—international investors and an international push into the sector, in order to monetize it. I wonder whether you could elaborate on that a bit more.

Ms. Sheila Olan-MacLean: It was actually Ms. Prentice who spoke to that. I'll give the floor to her.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thanks.

Go ahead, Ms. Prentice.

Dr. Susan Prentice: Yes, internationally, a number of private equity firms are moving into child care. A number of them are traded on the stock exchange. They are clearly interested in Canada. Unless the national legislative funding framework is strong enough, we will be a target for the kinds of acquisitions that have happened in other countries. That bankrupt Australian company I mentioned owned, at one point, child care programs in 13 different countries.

There is clearly an interest, among a number of operators, in making profits out of child care, not particularly in providing early learning and child care services. It will be very important for the legislation to put in parameters, so we can create child care as a public good, rather than as a profit opportunity for businesses.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I agree with you 100% when we talk about the public good and looking for ways to stop the profit motive in child care, as a whole.

Can you give us some examples? I believe you said there was an example in Australia or Austria. Can you talk a bit about that failure?

Dr. Susan Prentice: In Australia—which is a federation much like Canada—under government changes in the early 1990s, child care funding switched. The kind of policy-scape that had promoted a primarily not-for-profit and community-based child care model across the country was overturned. It created a fresh environment in which entrepreneurs could get public dollars and reap private profits. Naturally, they seized this business opportunity. There was a virtual monopoly, at one point, when ABC Learning, one company, provided over 40% of the spaces in Australia. It went bankrupt. There's much more to say about this.

I want to observe that the legislation before you is an opportunity to strengthen non-profit and public delivery of child care. If we would like to avoid the spectacular policy disasters that have happened in other countries, we should strengthen the protections the legislation proposes, while also ensuring it gives a clear definition of what early learning and child care services are, so nobody mistakes it as being the care of a child wherever the child is. Rather, we're speaking about licensed, regulated and quality services provided by child care professionals.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I want to follow up on that point.

I think people would make the argument that, if you have more players in the system, you can build more capacity. Therefore, private companies participating in this space would actually expand capacity. We keep hearing from the Conservatives on this issue.

Since you want to focus specifically on the legislative piece, how do we establish, within the legislation, the parameters that allow for growth to happen and favour the public system over a private system?

● (0950)

Dr. Susan Prentice: The current legislation will permit the continued operation, of course, of existing for-profit child care programs. Clause 7 in the legislation specifically speaks to new funding. It's in the individual agreements with provinces, territories and indigenous governments that the action plans for expansion are laid out. It's in those plans, directly, that the implementation will occur. What the national legislation will do is provide the public protection.

Here's what I think: If you're giving \$100 to a child care program so it can offer quality services, you do not want one penny of those dollars going into a private owner's pocket. You want 100 of those \$100 going into the service, directly. Any time we take out the protections that restrict funding only to not-for-profit, you're effectively burning public dollars, letting them go to private owners and taking them away from the children, families and staff in the child care program.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Prentice.

That concludes the first round. I want to thank the witnesses for appearing and answering our questions.

We'll suspend for a moment while we invite in the next panel.

Again, witnesses, thank you for taking your time to appear before this committee this morning.

● (0950)

(Pause)

● (0950)

The Chair: Welcome back to the committee. We'll resume the study of Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

To assist the interpreters in their work, I will remind all members to speak slowly. That way, they can interpret properly.

You may choose to speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available in the room with a headset and for those appearing virtually by using the translation icon at the bottom of your screens. You have the option of speaking in the official language of your choice. If interpretation services issues or technical issues arise, please get my attention and we will suspend while they are being corrected.

I also will remind all members who are appearing virtually that screenshots are not allowed.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin our second round, where they will speak for five minutes.

I will advise you at five minutes and ask you to conclude your comments, because our time is running tight.

We have with us Leila Sarangi, national director at Campaign 2000; Emily Gawlick, executive director, Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia; and Christopher Smith, associate executive director with the Muttart Foundation.

We will begin with Ms. Sarangi for five minutes, please.

You have the floor.

● (0955)

Ms. Leila Sarangi (National Director, Campaign 2000): Good morning.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear today.

Campaign 2000 is a diverse, non-partisan coalition of over 120 organizations working to end child and family poverty. Together we represent every province and territory across the country. We came about in response to the 1989 unanimous all-party federal resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000. For more than 30 years, we have been tracking progress towards that goal through our annual reporting and putting forward achievable policy solutions. Campaign 2000 has long advocated for a system of high-quality, universally accessible child care as a key component of a broader plan to end child and family poverty.

We celebrated the historic budget 2021 announcement to develop a Canada-wide early learning and child care plan, and we were similarly pleased when this bill was introduced in Parliament. It provides a good framework for the establishment and longevity of a national child care system. We are particularly pleased that it strives to develop a child care system that contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to meeting the sustainable development goals, and that it advances Canada's international human rights obligations, including those under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Poverty is a violation of our human rights. Child poverty in Canada remains persistent throughout the country. In our most recent report card, we found that in 2020 nearly one million children lived in poverty. That's 13.5% of all children or nearly one in eight. These rates increase dramatically for children from systemically marginalized groups. For example, first nations children living on reserve have a child poverty rate of 37.4%. For children in lone-mother-led families, it is at 30%. It is 19% for immigrant children and 8.6% for Black children, to name a few.

Childhood poverty is a traumatic experience that has lifelong impacts. Research shows inextricable links between poverty and children's ill health and negative developmental outcomes. However, research has also shown that high-quality early learning and child care can act as a protective factor from the harmful effects of poverty and also as an equalizer, improving long-term developmental and employment outcomes for those kids. Access to child care that is affordable and flexible can reduce pressures on family incomes, enabling families to participate in work, education or training and reducing a family's poverty risks.

The concluding observations from the most recent review of Canada's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, released just last year, found that the committee is "deeply concerned" about the discrimination against and the marginalization of children, and that Canada is very far away from meeting the needs of indigenous, racialized and migrant children and children with disabilities, among others. One of their main focus areas of the concluding observations was to ensure that low-income families have access to programs and services without discrimination.

We want to ensure that, as this system is built out, it happens in a way that is accessible to these families. This would include, as we've proposed in our report cards, a \$0- to \$10-per-day sliding scale child care model in which \$10 a day is the maximum a family would pay. We propose this because a \$10-per-day program is out of reach for the families who are working in low-wage, precarious work or trapped in our woefully inadequate social and disability programs. The average income, for example, for a low-income single mother with two children is \$26,703, and \$10 a day would work out to roughly one-fifth of her income.

In our submission to you, we offer four recommendations to strengthen the bill. I won't go through them in detail, because you'll have them. What I will say though is that we have thought very carefully about the language we've proposed to strengthen and enhance the guiding principles. Access to the new early learning and child care system without discrimination must be made explicit for children from these groups, including children with disabilities,

children without permanent immigration status and all children from low-income families.

We have also made recommendations to strengthen accountability by introducing requirements to the advisory committee to also report publicly to both Houses of Parliament and to any committee as they see fit, and we have recommended that reports from the advisory committee and the minister be based on broad consultation and appropriate disaggregated data and summarize how the new system is concretely advancing human rights obligations.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering any questions.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sarangi.

Now we go to Ms. Gawlick for five minutes.

Ms. Emily Gawlick (Executive Director, Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia): Good morning, honourable Chair and committee members.

I'm honoured to be calling in from the land that I live, work and grow on, which is the unsundered traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples, specifically the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish nations.

Through our obligations, ECEBC is compelled to think deeply, to listen with intention and to act ethically with commitments through the following lenses: the B.C. early learning framework, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, the ECEBC code of ethics, the indigenous early learning and child care framework, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since 2011, ECEBC and our partner, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., have been championing our own provincial \$10-a-day child care plan. This plan advocates for a public child care system that addresses affordability, accessibility and quality, and we are heartened to see the success of the \$10-a-day child care plan growing throughout Canada.

The essential factor for a quality system that supports children, families and communities is the early childhood educator profession. ECE in Canada is commonly perceived as a service for working parents rather than "a public good, of great social, cultural and political importance." When early childhood education is understood and operated as a commodity to be purchased by consumers in a competitive market—

The Chair: Ms. Gawlick, you muted yourself.

Ms. Emily Gawlick: I'm sorry.

The Chair: Okay, please continue.

Ms. Emily Gawlick: When early childhood education is understood and operated as a commodity to be purchased by consumers in a competitive market, early childhood education is reduced to an economic transaction without consideration of educational values and purpose. From this perspective, early childhood educators are viewed as technicians only within a model of cost efficiency and minimum universal standards.

ECEBC supports the development of the national advisory council and the importance of the council to be accountable, to work with academics and educators, and to ensure we co-create a system that is not limited to a service but provides an educational space that all Canadian children deserve.

Current research asserts social policies and narratives that maintain our profession as gendered, racialized, marginalized and positioned as a secondary market force. However, we know that early childhood educators are much more than those narratives. Educators practice with ethical commitments as they co-construct lively curriculum with children.

For generations, the education of early childhood educators has evolved to reflect the diversities of children and families. Educators, who are predominantly female, have for too long shouldered inadequate working conditions, low wages, a lack of benefits and minimum professional recognition. During the global pandemic, it was highlighted how fragile the current funding and processes are, and how imperative it is to move forward to create a new Canada-wide social system that embeds a wage grid, higher post-secondary standards and healthy working conditions.

With federal leadership, a system can be developed that includes a fair wage grid that is reflective of education and experience and provides benefits for the workforce. Bill C-35 needs to ensure that the complexities and the pedagogy of this work is recognized, and that it holds provinces accountable for creating a system based on children's rights.

ECEBC is encouraged that this enactment honours indigenous rights and jurisdictions. We must demand this acknowledgement, identify and overcome barriers created by colonial systems and structures, and align our practices accordingly. We support and acknowledge that first nations, Métis and Inuit have autonomy. We commit to learn, listen and act in our ongoing work to decolonize our own practices, perspectives and professional education. ECEBC encourages everyone to make this commitment alongside us.

In my 30-plus years as an early childhood educator, I'm elated to see the investment and commitments from the federal government in the early years. Research has shown the importance of strong, ongoing investment in a public, not-for-profit, licence-based model. Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care, takes a progressive leap forward in recognizing this through the lens of a child's right.

ECEBC is committed to working in partnership to ensure that this bill fosters a system that attracts and retains highly qualified early childhood educators and represents the diversity of Canada.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

● (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gawlick.

Mr. Smith, you have five minutes, please.

Dr. Christopher Smith (Associate Executive Director, Muttart Foundation): Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today before the committee in respect to Bill C-35.

My name is Christopher Smith, and I serve as the associate executive director of the Muttart Foundation. I'm joining you today from Treaty 6, which is the traditional ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux and Nakota Sioux peoples, as well as the traditional home of Métis peoples.

The Muttart Foundation is a private charitable foundation based in Edmonton, Alberta, whose funding interests and charitable activities include early learning and child care. Over the past two decades, the foundation has conducted research and convened and supported stakeholder consultations on the organization, financing and delivery of early learning and child care. We have undertaken this work in collaboration with governments, public institutions and civil society partners. Consistent with our charitable purpose, the foundation undertakes its work in support of the public benefit and in a non-partisan way.

The foundation's most recent early learning and child care work has two main areas of focus.

First, the foundation continues to work with a range of partners to advance the educational preparation, working conditions and compensation of early childhood educators. Despite a large body of research that highlights the foundational role professional, well-qualified educators play in the delivery of high-quality child care, early childhood educators across Canada remain underprepared, poorly supported and underpaid for their important work. The primary reliance on market-based approaches for the funding and delivery of child care has profoundly undervalued the work of early childhood educators. It has further resulted in governments historically struggling to recruit and retain the qualified educators they need to deliver high-quality child care.

The second focus of the foundation's work is on the roles local governments can play in the planning, management and delivery of early learning and child care. In those countries with well-developed, mature early learning and child care systems, local governments play central roles in ensuring that services are responsive to community needs, that they commonly support and deliver child care, and that they play active roles in making sure that services are developed where they are needed most and delivered in ways that advance public interests.

At present, in much of Canada outside of Ontario, local governments play more limited or discretionary roles in support of child care. The potential exists for this to change, with the appropriate support from the senior levels of government.

With respect to Bill C-35, the foundation commends the federal, provincial and territorial governments on their historic agreements to work collaboratively to transform Canada's early learning and child care sectors into systems that are more publicly funded, managed and planned. The commitment of the federal, provincial and territorial governments to work together on advancing early learning and child care has been a long time coming, as has the commitment of the necessary public funding to ensure that every child has access to high-quality child care.

The foundation also offers its support for the federal government's agreement with indigenous governments to advance early learning and child care for indigenous children and their families in ways that are distinctions-based and self-determined. This agreement is consistent with Canada's commitments under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and provides a basis for responding to the calls to action set out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

The foundation views Bill C-35 as an important step in the longer and larger process of building the high-quality, affordable and inclusive early learning and child care systems that Canadian children and their families want and need. The bill affirms and reflects the collaborative nature of early learning and child care system building within the Confederation, and establishes the federal government's long-term commitment to the transformational change necessary to elevate early learning and child care as a public good.

The proposed commitment under clause 16 of the legislation to annual reporting on progress in system building is central to both maintaining public trust and ensuring the most effective use of public funds. This reporting should, therefore, be to Parliament, and it should provide parliamentarians—and, by extension, Canadians—with the opportunity to review and assess the work undertaken in support of system building.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today.

I look forward to your questions.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith.

Before we begin, I want to advise that we'll have one round of five minutes for each party, because I need to go in camera for

committee business at roughly 10:30. Each party will get a five-minute questioning round.

We have Mrs. Gray for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

The first question I have is for Ms. Gawlick. We have heard from the government that they estimate we'll need to hire 40,000 new child care workers across Canada in the next three years. This doesn't even take into account waiting lists and potential retirements. I know that staffing is mentioned in your organization's brief as well, which you submitted to this committee. To meet this demand, various streams will have to be used, whether it's post-secondary training or immigration. All of those take time.

From your expertise, do you see this as feasible within less than three years, based on the current actions that have been taken so far?

Ms. Emily Gawlick: Thanks for that question.

Absolutely, I think there have been really good strides, particularly here in British Columbia, to support the sector to continue on with their education and to meet the demands. Definitely the demand is huge in this province as well as in other provinces and territories. I think that a really strong strategy needs to be in place to address the education of early childhood educators, and at the same time there are no real shortcuts. Our organization's biggest concern is that decision-makers will try to fast-track what is needed in this sector and this profession.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great. Thank you very much.

I am from British Columbia like you. Do you have any idea what the waiting lists are like in British Columbia?

Ms. Emily Gawlick: For child care, it really depends on each community, but for specific age groups it can be up to two to three years.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Okay, so that's the wait time.

Do you know how many children are on a wait-list right now? Do you have any numbers there? Do you also know if there's a difference between urban and rural, for a breakdown?

Ms. Emily Gawlick: There's definitely a difference depending on what kinds of programs and services are offered in particular rural and urban communities. Do I have the numbers at my fingertips? Not right at this moment, but I can pass that on.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great. Thank you.

Would you please table for this committee what those numbers are, both with the times and also the number of children who are on wait-lists. If you could table whatever details you have for this committee, we would really appreciate it.

I will actually now cede my time to my colleague, Ms. Ferreri.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much.

Leila, I really appreciate your advocacy around poverty. One thing that's written in this bill currently says parents of "varying incomes". We're seeing actually people, women in particular, who need access to affordable child care pushed back to the back of the list. Do you have current numbers of low-income people or those on the poverty line who are on waiting lists for \$10-a-day day care?

• (1015)

Ms. Leila Sarangi: I do not have that, but I am happy to see if I can find that and submit it to the committee.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I think that would be wonderful, because one of the witnesses, who we're hopefully going to get back, was supposed to testify last night and has shared this. By no fault of their own, there are many people who've done financially well, and they don't need subsidized child care. They can afford it, but they have a space, and they're taking up this space in these places when you have families who are struggling. They need to go to work. If they don't go to work, they can't pay their bills. They're pushed to the back of the line for the subsidized spaces.

Do you think the bill needs to be strengthened to include or to prioritize those who are on lower incomes?

Ms. Leila Sarangi: We do absolutely believe...and have made some very specific recommendations for the guiding principles. We've actually rewritten that section that you refer to to ensure that all families, "families of all incomes, including low incomes, benefit from affordable early learning and child care."

Part of the issue is that these low-income families face barriers to even getting on the wait-lists, so these are things that need to be really targeted as we're developing a universal system.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Overall—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Okay, thank you. I'll just leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ferreri.

We have Mr. Van Bynen for five minutes, please.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This has been a very interesting learning experience. As a grandfather of five, most of whom are teenagers, this hasn't been a top-of-mind issue for me. It has been quite refreshing to hear the information. I'm particularly taken by the huge backlog we're seeing, the need for child care and how we need to go forward to make sure we implement this quickly and effectively.

My question is for Mr. Smith as he is on the expert panel for the government.

I'd like to get an understanding of what your learnings have been and what your advice would be. I know the bill provides for a national advisory council. The description of the mandate is fairly broad and not as well-defined as I would like to see in a mandate. My concerns are around quality, sustainability, growth and expansion planning for the program in the long term.

What are the provisions you would like to see in the mandate for the federal government's national advisory council to ensure this fits within its authorities?

Dr. Christopher Smith: As a member of the advisory council, I'm not able to comment specifically on the work of the advisory council. It's very important that a national advisory council be in place. I would turn to my colleagues and ask their advice and direction on how they think that might best be expressed in legislation.

What I would point to, quite critically, is the difference between federal legislation and provincial and territorial areas of jurisdiction. When we look at the agreements that the Government of Canada has negotiated with the provinces and territories, it's absolutely critical those agreements provide for the provision of expansion of services in ways that meet community needs, particularly with respect to the questions arising around the workforce. I would anticipate that, in the next round of action plans, every one of those action plans should put workforce as the number one priority.

I apologize that I'm not able to speak about the national advisory council.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: It's evident that the focus needs to be on quality care for children. That's an essential part. Can you, in your capacity as an expert witness, tell me what the key elements of high-quality child care are, how that can be measured and how that can be monitored? What role can the federal government play to ensure those measures are attained or sustained?

Dr. Christopher Smith: The research literature on quality is complex. If I was trying to summarize it in a way that is short and brief, the key element of quality is the educational preparation and the working conditions of the early childhood educator who's working with children in the room.

When we look at the research, that's what we come back to. What is the nature of the qualification for that educator, and how is she prepared and supported in her important role? I would anticipate, in the bilateral agreements, particular attention would be paid to ensuring that early childhood educators are properly paid, fairly compensated and educationally prepared for their work.

The central element to quality is the educator and her interactions with children.

• (1020)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you.

I'll cede the balance of my time. My questions have been answered, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

We'll now go to Madam Bérubé.

[Translation]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here with the committee.

Ms. Gawlick, we hear about the huge challenges experienced by families in rural and remote regions when it comes to accessing child care.

What should Bill C-35 provide, in your opinion? Do you think it should provide targeted support for families in rural or remote regions to meet their needs?

[English]

Ms. Emily Gawlick: Absolutely. We need to look at the different jurisdictions where child care is needed and have specific targets and transitions for those communities as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What targets need to be met, Ms. Gawlick?

[English]

Ms. Emily Gawlick: From our perspective, the long-term goal is to ensure that all children and families have access to high-quality child care in the communities in which they choose to live and work.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Ms. Gawlick.

Mr. Smith, what does the bill do to provide targeted support to help children with disabilities or families with diverse needs?

[English]

Dr. Christopher Smith: Thank you for the question.

I think it's critical that, in the preamble to the bill, reference is made to support for children with disabilities and the recognition of our obligations under international treaties. The overarching legislation should speak specifically to the equitable access for all children and families, regardless of where they live, their incomes and their levels of ability. Then the real action, if you'd like, in terms of ensuring equitable access takes place in the bilateral agreements that are negotiated with the provinces and territories.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Are there other diversity-related considerations that could be added to Bill C-35?

[English]

Dr. Christopher Smith: In terms of specifics, again, the overarching guidelines.... I think it's clear in paragraphs 7(1)(a), 7(1)(b), 7(1)(c) and 7(1)(d) that there should be appropriate references to diversity. Wording or a friendly amendment is needed in those sections, absolutely. It's critical that this program be inclusive for all children and families.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: There is no definition in the bill of "child care" or the "age of the children" covered by the Canada-wide early learning and child care system.

Is that a problem, in your opinion? Can you tell us about the impact that might have?

I would like the three witnesses to answer this question, please.

[English]

Dr. Christopher Smith: I'm happy to answer first and briefly. Thank you for the question.

It's my understanding that, in terms of framing the legislation, at the moment most of the bilateral agreements speak to zero to six, but there is potential—and it's an important area—to recognize that this also might extend to after-school care. I think the legislation is attempting to be enabling rather than limiting.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Ms. Sarangi, what do you think?

[English]

Ms. Leila Sarangi: Thank you for the question.

I would add that, from a poverty perspective, children below the age of six consistently have higher rates of child poverty. Often-times it's related to the mother's inability to earn an income and the high cost and lack of availability of infant child care, so starting with targeting children zero to five is really important.

I agree with Mr. Smith that it has to then extend out to older kids and middle-year children, where we are finding a gap in services—who also have significant educational and developmental needs—for kids living in poverty.

On the diversity question, I would just add that there's a difference between diversity, inclusion and equity. We need to be striving for equity and inclusion. In our submission, we've put very clear amendments to clause 7 on that.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Ms. Sarangi.

Ms. Gawlick, what is your view?

[English]

Ms. Emily Gawlick: Thank you. I concur with my colleagues here today.

Also, just be mindful that other jurisdictions don't put that age limit from birth to six. We look at the early years as a much broader, thoughtful process. I think that's important as we move forward.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Ms. Gawlick.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[English]

Is it Ms. Gazan for five minutes?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes. Thank you so much.

I was happy to hear all the witnesses talk about how they were happy to see the inclusion of UNDRIP in the bill and the mention of the TRC. We know that one of the most violent colonial acts in the country was forcefully apprehending children, taking away parental autonomy and shipping kids off to residential schools. I'm glad that we're moving forward in a way where people recognize that injustice.

We know, with the passing of Bill C-15 in the last Parliament, that the application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was affirmed in Canadian law. That includes article 3, which relates to the right to self-determination. We know that central to the right to self-determine is the respect of the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples.

This is a yes or no question for all of the people on the panel today. Would you support, in addition to the current article in the bill, that first nations, Inuit and Métis children and families are best supported by early learning and child care programs and services that are culturally appropriate, that are led by indigenous peoples—this is the amendment that I think is critical if we're going to move forward in reconciliation—and that uphold the right of indigenous people to free, prior and informed consent on matters relating to children?

Is it yes or no?

Mr. Smith.

Dr. Christopher Smith: I think it's covered in guiding principle 7(1).

Thank you.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay.

Madam Gawlick...?

Ms. Emily Gawlick: Yes, I agree.

Thank you.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Sarangi...?

Ms. Leila Sarangi: Absolutely, and I would suggest making that the first top line.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay. Thank you so much, Madam Sarangi. I actually have another question for you.

Do you agree that Bill C-35 should be amended to include an explicit commitment to supporting decent working conditions and livable wages and benefits for child care staff as one of the principles guiding the federal investment in the system?

Ms. Leila Sarangi: Yes, definitely.

There was a question earlier about the need, the gap in staffing of 40,000 and about having decent work legislated, offering wages that bring people up above the low-income measure and having those decent working conditions, as we've been discussing. ECE workers, child care workers, will be attracted to those jobs and will be better retained. Yes, definitely.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Moving on, let's talk about workers, as you certainly did in your presentation. We hear a lot about the workforce crisis in child care, but we hear less about who these workers are. We know that they're overwhelmingly women and, dispropor-

tionately, women of colour and many migrant women. Can you expand on some of the challenges facing these workers and how we can better support workers in the sector?

Ms. Leila Sarangi: Yes. These are mostly racialized women with precarious work hours who are barely making minimum wage in these jobs, and that creates a crisis in their families. These are also mothers who need to access and pay for child care. It is a benefit to have decent work with livable wages, opportunities for professional development—that pedagogical development—and staff who can have that warm relationship with the children in care.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Madam Sarangi.

Madam Gawlick, like I said, we've heard a lot in this committee about a worker shortage. I take issue with this term because I know there are trained child care workers out there, but many are leaving the profession or not entering it after graduating because of the poor wages, benefits and working conditions. How important is it for us to address these issues in order to solve the workforce crisis?

● (1030)

Ms. Emily Gawlick: I believe it's imperative. I think, as we move forward to build this system, that's the first thing that needs to be addressed: the workforce issues around wages, benefits, working conditions and respect for the work that a predominantly women workforce is doing on a day-to-day basis.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, and moving on—

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, you can have a very short question, please. The time is up.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay, sure.

Would you support adding more clear language to Bill C-35 that one of the guiding principles guiding the federal funding ought to be supporting an early childhood education workforce that has decent working conditions, livable wages and benefits?

Ms. Emily Gawlick: It would be fabulous if we could see that embedded into this.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

Now, as we have to move in camera for the business portion of the meeting, I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to appear before the HUMA committee this morning on this important piece of legislation.

Thank you so much. We will excuse you while we suspend for a few moments to change over to go in camera.

Again, thank you.

The committee members will have to log out and log back in.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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