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Chair

Ms. Raymonde Folco

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• (1110)

[Translation]

The Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): Good day, ladies and gentlemen.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities is holding its 25th hearing today, Thursday, March 24, 2005.

On our agenda, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), is the study on the new Human Resources and Skills Development Canada call for proposals Criteria for Funding Community Programs.

[English]

Good morning, and welcome to the 25th meeting of the standing committee.

Today we are starting the study of the administration and management of contribution agreements in Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. This study is based on the government's February 16, 2004, decision to adopt four national directives designed to improve the administration, management, transparency, and accountability of contributions delivered under a number of programs.

I would like to thank our witnesses, those who are in the room with us and those who are on the screen, for taking the time out of their busy schedules to come to Ottawa or to be in front of the screens to give us their views on these changes.

I would also like to welcome Mr. Jack Layton, who will be with us for part of the meeting. Thank you, Mr. Layton.

Mr. Adams.

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, one of the witnesses has indicated to me there was a suggestion that appearing before this committee would affect HRSDC's consideration of the grant for the organization this witness represents. I want to make it absolutely clear that, as all members of committee know, this is absolutely not the case.

I don't know the origin of this suggestion, but I simply wanted to give this witness the confidence that appearing here does not have any influence whatsoever on the allocation of grants.

The Chair: Thank you. I think that's an extremely important point.

Do you want to add something to this, Mr. Martin?

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Yes. Given the sensitive nature of these hearings and the courage it's taking for some of these organizations to come forward and speak on behalf of themselves and their colleagues out there, who are obviously under some stress and some risk at the moment—even since we started these meetings, we've seen some organizations actually have their contracts terminated, even though we asked for a moratorium on that—I would suggest the minister draft a letter to indicate to all the organizations who are considering coming before the committee that their appearing before the committee will have no detrimental effect on any proposal they have before his staff.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, are you suggesting this committee ask the minister to write the letter?

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes.

The Chair: I don't think I can accede in this demand. I think it is up to you—

Mr. Tony Martin: I would like to make a motion, then.

The Chair: Let me just finish my sentence, and then I'll allow you to make your motion.

This is a standing committee of the House of Commons, and it is our responsibility to hear witnesses. We have no power over the minister, other than to present to the minister reports, resolutions, or recommendations pertaining to programs or budgets or whatever.

I would very strongly suggest...I would think that, rather than have this committee do this.... I mean, it's up to the members of the committee if they want to write a letter, and if you want to present a motion, that is certainly your right. But I would suggest you ask the minister yourself—that you write a letter to the minister to ask her. It is fully your right, as a member of Parliament, to write a letter to the minister to say these groups...whatever, and that you would like the minister to take this into account, in whatever terms you wish to do it.

Certainly I think it's more incumbent upon you as an MP, rather than us as a standing committee, to do this.

•(1115)

Mr. Tony Martin: Thank you very much for that direction. But I would like to move that the committee request the minister to write a letter to any organizations that have requests before his ministry, to indicate their appearing before this committee will not in any way jeopardize their potential for success.

The Chair: Mr. Adams.

Hon. Peter Adams: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I do have to say, first of all, that I raised this matter in good faith, even though the evidence I'd received was slight, simply to give assurance to witnesses today. If we are to receive a motion of this type, we have witnesses not only waiting here but some who are waiting in Victoria, and I would be obliged to debate such a motion. You've already ruled on it. We would be ruling on procedure and things of this type. There's also the question of 48 hours' notice and a variety of other things.

I know Tony is very keen on this matter, but I would say the first thing we should do now is hear the witnesses and deal with what we're doing.

I have in good faith raised this matter. I'm the minister's parliamentary secretary. I would have thought, by the way, that if such a thing occurred in any committee, any sort of indication that this kind of thing is going on, it would be a most serious matter. We have no written evidence or firm evidence that this is coming from HRDC or anything of the sort.

So I raised it in good faith to give today's witnesses some confidence. I believe if there is such a thing happening, it's very serious, but I would strongly urge, Tony, that we get on with the witnesses, or else we are going to have people sitting here until 2 o'clock or later.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, I must add, before I give Madame Bakopanos a chance to reply on this, I've been an MP for eight years. I've sat on this committee and on other committees for all these eight years, and never—but never—to my knowledge, has this been brought up in any committee, and particularly not in this one.

Let me go so far as to say, if I were the minister, I would find it offensive that under our own government, under a democratic government such as we have here in Canada, volunteer groups who are the backbone of what is going on with various minorities or various groups that need help and who are being funded to some extent or to a large extent by the government would be in some way penalized because they have appeared before a parliamentary committee of the Government of Canada. This is a very grave thing that you're putting forward.

However, I will give Madame Bakopanos the right to speak now.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.): I think, Madam Chair, you put it very well.

In the 12 years I've been a member of Parliament, Mr. Martin, in any committee I've sat on—and I've sat on over six committees—you are the only person who has imputed certain motives on the part of a minister or the government before those witnesses have come before a committee.

First of all, the witnesses before a committee have immunity. That is part of what the process is in the House of Commons in the standing committees. I find it very offensive that you personally believe there would be any repercussions from any testimony that is given in front of this committee.

I also do not think we should keep the witnesses waiting. I think Mr. Adams made a very valid point. Perhaps we should come back to this point when we are *à huis clos* and discuss it among ourselves before we go any further.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before I give you a word, Mr. Layton, we do have a second part to this meeting, which is committee business.

If you agree, we could come back to the question that you are proposing, Mr. Martin, at the second part of this, so that we're not keeping all these witnesses waiting.

Would you agree to that, Mr. Martin? No?

Mr. Layton.

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Thank you very much.

I appreciate the member's suggesting that this is a political show. I think that's an unfortunate comment.

Let me just say that groups in my riding, some of whom have lost their contracts already, some of whom have several contracts with HRDC that are in various stages, are extremely nervous about coming forward, and they've expressed that to me because they fear that their funding could be cut.

No one is imputing anything. In fact, what we're suggesting in this motion is that we could set people's minds at ease. It's a relatively straightforward thing to do. In terms of the procedural matters, unanimous consent can always be sought to waive 48-hour notices. Of course, this issue has come up, in particular, heading right into this meeting with individuals. I think it's an opportunity to reassure people. It's not an unreasonable request.

I can tell you, people are fearful. They're running on a shoestring programs that are very important in the community, and they're worried about their capacity to do so and about their clients. So I would hope that we could simply determine if there's unanimous consent, or whatever the appropriate procedure might be, and move on prior to hearing from individuals. Otherwise, the fact that we're even reluctant to adopt such a simple request—it's not a requirement; we don't have that power—so that the individuals deputing would know they have the backing of this committee should there ever arise a difficulty in the future....

That's all that's being requested. It's perfectly reasonable, and there's nothing political about it at all.

•(1120)

The Chair: My response to that, Mr. Layton, would be to say that it is always understood. Madame Bakopanos has made that clear too. I won't bring up the political aspect at all. That's not what I'm here for as chair. I will tell you that any witness who appears before this committee, with me as chair certainly—I won't speak for the others, although I think it's exactly the same thing—has the backing of this committee, and has my backing as chair.

To me this is not political. Whether it's a political ploy or not is immaterial. But I really find it a dangerous terrain to go into.

However, I will give Madame Gagnon the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gagnon, you have the floor.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): I wanted to add something to what the New Democratic Party has raised this morning. I heard certain people who work within organizations say that they did not want to come because they too were afraid. I don't mean that the minister might take action—that is not where we are at—but I mean that these are fears expressed by organizations that are vulnerable. Some have said that they were in the process of submitting applications and did not want their project to be refused. That is why they preferred not to come. I'm not saying that this is generalized, but these fears were pointed out to me in the course of certain calls I made. Some people prefer not to come for those reasons, but I suppose that there are no such intentions and I don't think that the people who would come to testify would be subjected to any proceedings. That is not where we are at, but what the NDP says this morning is congruent with observations that were made to me in the Quebec region. Some people are afraid and don't want to come. Those who will come are not afraid and said that in any case the process is so difficult and painful that they would also like to suggest adjustments that could be made to the programs.

I wanted to add my voice to that of some of my colleagues to make this nuance concerning the file.

The Chair: I think, Ms. Gagnon, that these people may have worked with the Quebec government when there was another administration at the helm which indeed had made this type of threat, but here at the federal government we are not in the habit of doing such things and it is certainly not the habit of this government.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: I am sorry, Madam Chair, but I think that you are going a bit far. We did not ask them to come and testify here on Quebec government programs, in any case. They are here to talk about federal government programs. I think that you are not showing the neutrality that it is incumbent upon you to show as chair, and that you should apologize.

The Chair: Mr. Adams.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Adams: Even though I assumed that what you said—and I think what we all assumed—was that witnesses who appear before standing committees of the House receive remarkable protection.... If you go back in tradition and in the Standing Orders—I suspect going beyond the House of Commons—they receive remarkable protection. The reason I raised this today was to give comfort to one of the witnesses or else I would not have raised

it. It's not a casual matter. I raised it simply for the very specific reason that when I arrived here I heard something that made me feel it was appropriate that I reassure this witness.

Now, it is a serious matter. If we're going to get into the business of ministers writing letters to witnesses assuring them that parliamentary protection exists, and things of this type, this is major stuff. If you went for example to the Speaker, the Speaker would say, "Well, what have ministers to do with the House of Commons? This is a House of Commons committee. The House of Commons protects these people".

I would repeat that we're into a serious matter if we're going to get philosophical about this. It is going to take us a long time. We have witnesses. I would strongly urge that if members want to raise it again, let's raise it another time, and let's get to our witnesses so we can hear the briefs that they have gone to this much trouble to present.

•(1125)

The Chair: Once again this suggestion has been made to the chair. Mr. Martin, what is your answer to this?

Mr. Tony Martin: It is just that this is a very serious situation here. I wanted to say that I found your comments to Ms. Gagnon to be totally inappropriate and actually politicizing the whole debate in a way that it hadn't been up to that point.

The Chair: That is your opinion, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: Well, it's been your opinion on some other fronts here this morning as we've had this discussion.

We've had a number of organizations... and activity has actually taken place out there already because this investigation has taken place. For example, the announcement was made that there was going to be this discussion or review on a Friday at this committee. On that Monday in Toronto the March of Dimes was given a contract that was taken away from another organization, and on Tuesday, JVS Toronto was given a contract that had been taken away from.... These are organizations that have been around for years in the Toronto area. Immediately following the announcement that we were going to have a review, all of a sudden these contracts were signed. Then we find, after we've written a letter to the minister asking for a moratorium, that in fact a significant number of other contracts were completed, so that if any moratorium did in fact come down, they wouldn't be revisited; those organizations were done and finished.

So I'm just afraid that a pattern has already been set. What could happen here is what is happening in B.C., where we're hearing directly from some organizations that the fall-out for them is beginning to happen because this inquiry is happening. That's what's worrying us here.

So all I'm asking for, first of all, is unanimous consent to move a very simple motion that the minister draft a letter of assurance to anybody who appears before this committee that their request for contract before her ministry will not be put in jeopardy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Monsieur Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I find it somewhat regrettable that we are holding a long debate on something that seems obvious to me. It seems to me that such a request should be answered. Debating its merits may indeed politicize the debate, Madam Chair, as we have seen.

One fact remains and cannot be denied, Madam Chair, and we are having to grapple with it. Currently, the whole political dynamic is scrutinized carefully by a commission which we all know and which has revealed that people from elsewhere have testified and are now being called upon to explain themselves.

So in that regard I think that the NDP's request is thoroughly justified and is in keeping with what we hear and perceive in our ridings. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Forseth.

[English]

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you.

The committee has rules, and, unfortunately we have to follow the rules whether or not they appear to go in our favour at the particular time. We have to accept the rules the way they are. The motion was put forward and unanimous consent has been denied. We have to follow the rules very clearly.

It's now almost 11:30 and we're running out the clock on an inappropriate matter. We all must understand that Parliament is not the government. Government has its own administrative side and is out there doing its operational stuff. This set of hearings is to critique and look at and review how government is doing its administration, but we don't administer from this committee. It's a separation of roles, and this must be clear.

The power to change things is in the evidence, not in political maneuvering here. That's why I encourage us right now to get on with hearing the evidence as expeditiously as possible. The further debate on the motion is irrelevant because it violates the rules, and we cannot do so. Unanimous consent has been denied.

• (1130)

The Chair: For the record, I would like to read from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the 2000 edition: Testimony

Witnesses appearing before committees enjoy the same freedom of speech and protection from arrest and molestation as do Members of Parliament. At the committee's discretion, witnesses may be allowed to testify *in camera* when dealing with confidential matters of state or sensitive commercial information. Under special circumstances, witnesses have been permitted to appear anonymously. Tampering with a witness or in any way attempting...

The rest of it, I think, is secondary. I wanted to read that into the record to complete what Madame Bakopanos has brought up.

Now, it is clear to me, Mr. Martin, that you do not have unanimous consent—

Mr. Tony Martin: On a point of order, you did not put the question of unanimous consent before the committee.

The Chair: I can put the question if that's what you desire.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes, that's what I desire.

The Chair: That's fine.

The question is put before the members of this committee as to whether there is unanimous consent for Mr. Martin to present a motion at this time. Is there unanimous consent? Do I hear any nays?

Hon. Peter Adams: No.

The Chair: You do not have unanimous consent, Mr. Martin, so you cannot present your motion. Thank you.

We will now go on. Once again, I apologize to the witnesses for making them wait. I will now present the witnesses.

We have Mr. Gary Malkowski, vice-president, consumer and government and corporaterelations, for the Canadian Hearing Society. He is accompanied by Madame Monique Doolittle-Romas, regional director. We have Bernadette Beaupré, executive director, Ontario Network of Employment Skills Training Project. She is accompanied by Madame Minerva Hui, board member of the Ontario Network of Employment Skills Training Project. We have Mr. Rupert Downing, executive director, and Madame Eunice Grayson, founding member, of the Canadian CED Network. In videoconference, we have Madame Sandra Glass and Madame Norma Strachan of the Canadian Coalition of Community Based Employability Training.

Welcome to all of you.

We will proceed in the order I've read the names. Each organization will speak for five minutes. When all of the organizations have spoken, there will be a question and answer period in which questions will be addressed to individual witnesses.

We will start with Mr. Gary Malkowski.

How do you intend to do this, Madame Doolittle-Romas?

A voice: Just as a point of privilege, perhaps you could give us an additional five minutes to suit the accommodation needs. We do have interpreters and we require extra time. Perhaps you would be kind enough to give us that.

The Chair: Of course.

Are there going to be two of you presenting?

Ms. Monique Doolittle-Romas (Regional Director, Canadian Hearing Society): Yes. I will be speaking first.

The Chair: Very good. You'll have your five minutes, and then we'll go on to Mr. Malkowski.

Please go ahead, Madame Doolittle-Romas.

Ms. Monique Doolittle-Romas: Thank you for the additional time. In fact, that's what we were just clarifying. Otherwise, I wasn't going to speak—and I'm just fascinating, so I'm sure you would have been very disappointed.

Founded in 1940, the Canadian Hearing Society is a community-based non-profit agency serving deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing people and their families throughout Ontario. We have a staff of 350 located in 28 offices throughout the province and an annual budget of \$27 million. We provide a wide range of services, including audiology, speech-language pathology, mental health counselling, educational support services, and of course, the reason we're here today, employment services. These are just a few of our programs.

Our employment service was the first program we established. Today it serves over 1,000 consumers on an annual basis, and on average we place 70% in full-time employment each year.

At the outset, we want to tell you that we fully support the principles of accountability and transparency that are behind the overhaul of the call for proposal process. Please believe that. And we appreciate the fact that HRSDC is in transition in this effort. However, we believe the implementation of this overhaul has been seriously flawed. We would like to tell you why, and we would like to share with you what its impact has been on the unemployed deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing people who come to us for help.

Before I get into those details, please allow me to put hearing loss into two perspectives, just to give you a better understanding of our consumers. We'll give you a statistical overview and an individual one.

According to an Ontario government report, there are well over 135,000 working-age Ontarians who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. Of this number, 36% have difficulty hearing in a group setting, 39% have difficulty hearing one-to-one, and 25%, or about 34,000 people, are completely unable to hear. Other research tells us that about 80% of individuals with mild hearing loss participate in the workforce. This number drops dramatically to under 30% for those experiencing severe hearing loss. What this means in actuality is that most people with severe hearing loss have completely given up hope of ever finding employment. I think you would agree with us that this represents a colossal and needless waste of human potential and lost benefit to us all, and it has an enormous impact on the individuals.

Now for the individual perspective. It is a common misconception that hearing loss is a matter of decibels. In fact, it is extremely multi-dimensional. It is selective with respect to various sound frequencies, and it can worsen depending on factors such as noise, heat and humidity, and psychological factors such as anxiety, nervousness, fatigue, or stress.

Of course hearing loss can be sudden or progressive. It can happen overnight. It can occur early or late in life. It can be all of these things and a variety of combinations.

Why am I telling you this? Severe hearing loss especially has a profound effect on those who experience it. Why? Because the challenge stems not just from a diminished ability to hear, but from the loss of the ability to communicate with the hearing world freely and with ease. Hearing loss is essentially a barrier to communication, and given that communication is so essential in any workplace, the loss of hearing poses a very formidable and complex barrier to finding and keeping employment.

We believe that specialized employment services are absolutely essential to deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing job seekers. Their needs are so unique, and so are the approaches and the solutions that we at the Canadian Hearing Society have devoted many years to developing. Our services are unique in five key ways.

First and foremost, our services are accessible. Without equal access, there can be no equal opportunity. We have interpreters, captionists, note-takers, and many of our managers and staff are fluent in American Sign Language or, in the case of the Ottawa office, Langue des signes québécoise. Deaf, deafened, or hard-of-hearing people who enter into any one of our offices know immediately they can be served in the right language. They have come to the right place. In fact, it may interest you to know that about a third of our managers and staff are themselves deafened, deaf, or hard of hearing.

• (1135)

Our second unique strength is our capacity to assess the degree and kind of hearing loss experienced by each of our employment services' consumers and the impact that loss has on the supports they will need in order to find and keep a job.

Third, we provide expert individualized advice to help job seekers choose the employment and/or training options that are viable.

Fourth, our consumers receive support in the form of outreach on their behalf to employers, many of whom at first are very leery about hiring a deaf, deafened, or hard-of-hearing person. We call this critical service job development. On top of this, every employer who hires one of our consumers receives expert guidance free of charge in designing workplace accommodation solutions for the new employee.

Fifth, we provide post-placement follow-up for a period of three months. We call this our job maintenance service. Job maintenance involves intervening on behalf of an individual in the workplace when a misunderstanding or difficulty arises between the employee and his or her supervisor. More often than not, difficulties can be traced to miscommunication or simply a need to fine-tune accommodation strategies. We are experts in this area. Our job maintenance service truly reflects the adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Over the years we have saved many jobs through this service, and every year we help individuals find jobs.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Malkowski.

Mr. Gary Malkowski (Vice-President, Consumer and Government and Corporate Relations, Canadian Hearing Society) (Interpretation): What has been the impact of HRSDC's overhaul on the call for proposal process? Well, it's this. Our employment services are being put at risk in three ways. First, like many of the organizations that have made presentations to this committee, we have borne the brunt of aggressive, intrusive, and harassing levels of micromanagement, inconsistent direction, and miscommunication around critical questions such as expected outcomes, what services HRSDC will or will not fund, and what timeliness and costs are acceptable.

Over the last year we have also had to absorb the unrecoverable cost of spending countless hours responding to random ad hoc requests for financial information, as well as the inordinate amount of time and energy required to clarify questions at virtually every turn of what has become a long and needlessly drawn-out approval process with local HRSDC officials.

Second, we have experienced severe cuts to critical components of our employment service such as specialized job development and job maintenance. We believe this is due to a mistaken one-size-fits-all policy, expecting the Canadian Hearing Society and deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing job seekers to fit a mainstream mould. As I hope we've made clear, we are not a mainstream service provider, and so it follows that mainstream approaches to costing and setting targets do not work. One size does not fit all.

In this connection, I'd like to point out that those specialized supports appear to be more expensive. In reality, they are not. It's false economy. Mainstream services for deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing job seekers actually cost more simply because they cannot meet the needs that are critical to securing and maintaining employment on a long-term basis.

We'd like to briefly highlight one particularly troublesome example of this situation. In Sault Ste. Marie, the local HRSDC office cancelled our employment program outright, citing high per-incident costs. It offered it to the local March of Dimes. The March of Dimes recognized that although it deals with persons with disabilities, it does not have the specialized expertise needed to provide effective employment services for deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing job seekers. That is how specialized our employment service is. It put this in writing, and we're still waiting to hear back from the Sault Ste. Marie HRSDC office.

The third and most serious impact of the call for proposal process is that cuts to critical services such as outreach to employers and job maintenance are leading to a downward spiral. The result is a reduced pool of progressive employers willing to hire, longer waiting times between appointments as a result of our having to lay off staff, and greater rates of placement breakdown for recently placed clients on the job.

All of this has led to greater consumer frustration, with more and more consumers giving up hope. In fact, we are already beginning to see increasing numbers of employment service consumers requiring mental health counselling as they try to cope with yet another job loss and the prospect of many more months of unemployment.

We know these are certainly not the outcomes that were intended by HRSDC, but these are, and continue to be, the impacts that our consumers and we at the Canadian Hearing Society face.

In conclusion, we demand that HRSDC restore funding for the CHS Sault Ste. Marie employment office, and that HRSDC formally recognize specialized employment services as a necessity and a right for deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing job seekers, including specialized assessment, specialized job development, and job maintenance.

HRSDC should develop clear, orderly, and standardized financial reporting procedures and provide compensation for the time and effort required to prepare these reports. HRSDC should also recognize and reimburse all costs associated with providing specialized employment services, including the cost of accessibility, such as interpreters, specialized assessment, job development, job maintenance, and specialized staff training, as required by CHS employment services employees and employment services consumers.

We would look forward to working with the minister and her officials to assist in any way we can to better the lives of deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing people through gainful, meaningful, and permanent employment that is their birthright as Canadians.

I would also like to take this time to thank Mr. Peter Adams and Mr. Tony Martin for helping us to make it possible to come and be witnesses.

• (1145)

We do look forward to hearing from this committee and to hearing the recommendations from the minister. We're also looking forward to working together as partners in reaching a solution, and we look for your guidance.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Malkowski.

I will now move on to Madame Bernadette Beaupré of the Ontario Network of Employment Skills Training Project.

Go ahead, please, Madame Beaupré.

Ms. Bernadette Beaupré (Executive Director, Ontario Network of Employment Skills Training Project): Good morning, everyone, Madame Folco and members of the committee.

I want to say hello to my fellow colleagues, Sandra and Norma, who I work with out west and, of course, Gary I've known from the deaf community from the 1980s, and the folks from the CED Network.

First I want to thank you for taking the time to listen to the concerns that we have regarding HRSDC's funding of community programs.

We have submitted a larger brief to the committee, but today I will speak to a number of specific issues. The first one I'm going to talk to is something in our sector that we call advocacy chill. We've talked about this earlier, but I have to mention it because it is real.

ONESTEP is a network of about 100 agencies, all non-profit, in about 40 communities across the province. They are remote, they're rural, they're urban. I happen to be the person who answers the phone on a regular basis and hears from our members—and certainly over the last year very frequently—about the issues around HRSDC. I also was the one who collected evidence, and in our brief you will see evidence from organizations stating that they had to put their name and organization forward to talk about the very specific hardships they were having in dealing with HRSDC.

I can't tell you how much time I had to spend coercing people, saying, listen, you can speak; this is a democratic country. There are agencies in Ontario that are terrified to speak out because of reprisal. They think that their HRCC office will lash back and not support them. I'm sorry, this is real, it's across the country, and I'm sure the folks in Victoria can speak to it as well. I wanted to say that right off the top in my presentation.

As I mentioned, ONESTEP is a network. Our success rates are 70%. This means that 70% of the clients who come to our programs move into jobs, into other skills development programs, or they return to school. Our members work with over 150,000 clients per year. HRSDC has worked with us and other funders over the last five decades to build strong and effective delivery networks in regions across Ontario.

The clients our members work with are the most vulnerable in our society: immigrants and refugees, young people who have left school early and are not able to get into the job market, people with disabilities, those who have been incarcerated, and those with numeracy and literacy problems. The federal government has stated repeatedly that increasing the participation in work and learning experiences for marginalized groups of people is a priority for them. Our agencies have a long and successful history of doing just that. We are experts in developing partnerships with numerous providers in our communities so that clients with barriers to employment can more fully participate in the workforce and in their communities.

As Gary mentioned, we also want to continue to work together with the federal government to deliver employment programs to the many Canadians who require support to enter or re-enter the workforce. We, like the federal government, want accountability to clients and communities, and of course to the government. We also want transparency in all processes that involve providers of employment and skills development programs. We also want a sensible balance between accountability and responsiveness to issues that need to be addressed in our communities and the need for sectoral stability and capacity. I'm talking about the stability in the voluntary sector across the country.

HRSDC's process for funding of community programs is not working. We have collected evidence of this. ONESTEP and many of its members have informed HRSDC staff at local, regional, and national levels that the impacts of the policy directives are not working, and that they are in fact seriously damaging employment services in regions across the country. Very recently, ONESTEP met with very high-level folks at national headquarters. This was on March 14. We know that very minimal changes are being offered by senior staff, even though for a full year and even longer we have been telling them that things are in a state of disrepair.

In 2001 the Government of Canada endorsed something called the voluntary sector accord as part of an initiative that had as its main goal building a stronger relationship between the voluntary sector and all of the government departments. The other goal was to strengthen the sector's capacity to continue to develop high-quality programs for Canadians. The accord is the framework by which the federal government and the sector are supposed to work together in an open, transparent, and consistent way. Apart from calling on both sectors to be accountable to Canadians, it calls for dialogue, cooperation, and collaboration. This was endorsed by former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and the voluntary sector across the country, with all of the government departments.

• (1150)

Regrettably, much of the way that the government introduced and implemented the policy directives is in complete contradiction to the accord, specifically two of the accord codes.

All of the 100 ONESTEP agencies that receive HRSDC funding have been adversely affected by the new directives. Below we have listed a number of concerns that we would like to be addressed by this standing committee. One of them is the need for the voluntary sector to be actively involved in developing policy and implementation of government initiatives that affect our clients and our agencies.

These directives, as you probably already know, were introduced by Minister Volpe. There was no infrastructure in place, and they were pretty well done overnight. We know that ADMs in the provinces got the policy directives after the close of business on February 16, 2004. That was the day they were supposed to be implemented. So it was with great haste that these directives were introduced, and there was no consultation at all with the voluntary sector—no communication.

Madame Folco is telling me my time is up.

The Chair: Well, please finish your sentence. Your time has been up for a little while.

Ms. Bernadette Beaupré: I wanted to just get at the other issue that I wanted to talk about today, which was disrupting services. We have evidence, and you'll see them in our paper, of the real services that have been affected and the gaps in services to clients across communities in Ontario.

I'm going to turn it over to Minerva, who is going to speak a few minutes. She is one of our board members and will speak to one of the requests that we're making of this committee.

Thank you for taking the time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before I give you the floor, I just want to remind members that we do have a brief and that whatever has been left out of the oral presentation is included in the brief.

Is that correct, Madame Beaupré?

Ms. Bernadette Beaupré: Thank you, that's right.

The Chair: Madame Hui.

Ms. Minerva Hui (Board Member, Ontario Network of Employment Skills Training Project): Thank you, Madame Folco.

I am also the executive director of Working Skills Centre. The centre at this point only has four working days left before our contract with HRSDC, along with that of LinkUp Employment Services in Toronto, Ontario, ends.

What I wanted to do was share our experience of the damage the CFP has created, both in terms of the community resources and also of the impact it has had on our clients. When we heard that this CFP was coming, we had a lot of apprehension because we knew the department was having a difficult time just running its daily business. We were micromanaged, and there was a lot of documentation and has been a lot of evidence of that through other people's presentations.

We knew we had to move forward, but we were also very surprised that the CFP was going to be done in such a short order of time, again because of the capacity issue of the department. Indeed, our worries were found to be true. The Canadian employment and immigration union on March 8 at a press conference said they had flagged the department back in the summer saying they weren't ready for this, that there were going to be issues of lack of time to develop new agreements, and inconsistency in negotiations, that there would be no contingency plans in place for the sponsors, and also that there would be negative impacts for the current service delivery.

We were given some assurance from the former minister, Mr. Volpe. He was at a June 2 meeting at JVS Toronto, and he and his senior bureaucrats said they were going to agree to two things we recommended there on that day. One was that they were going to agree to transitional or emergency funding, and the second thing was that they were going to review any unintended results. In both cases, what has happened is that they've contradicted those two recommendations.

We were only given 10 working days to put in a very detailed proposal. This really favoured large organizations that had the ability to hire consultants to write a number of proposals, and it also favoured large organizations that had a larger infrastructure to submit more than one proposal.

There are three agencies in Toronto on the brink of closure: Working Skills Centre, Linkup, and Gateway Cafe. All the three winners are larger organizations and were awarded multiple contracts.

What was really glaring about this implementation is that we were never given the detailed version of the assessment grid. When you had your first hearing back on March 8 and we saw the assessment grid that was actually used, we were dumbfounded to find out that experience with clients only accounted for 4%. This resulted in a number of CFPs going to agencies that didn't have the kind of track record that I think taxpayers would want to see those contracts awarded to. References were not checked. Site visits were not conducted. These are standard practices for many funders, and certainly given the amount and size of the contract, this should have been done as a standard practice.

What happened with the agencies that were displaced through the CFP has been very challenging. Rather than being able to do a smooth winding-down, Working Skills Centre had to ask HRSDC

three times for written notification that our funding was going to be cut. Eventually we had to use a lawyer's letter to get it.

They gave LinkUp only six weeks of notification to shut down their operation, because they didn't want to pay for LinkUp's moving costs.

Then the department told both of our agencies that we should be giving information to the new contract holder. Meanwhile, these agreements were not signed, so we were possibly transferring confidential client file information to a project that wasn't even set up. It really created a lot of stress on the community centres that were running these agencies, and a lot of confusion for our clients.

In terms of what the taxpayers have gained, what has happened now is that taxpayers' money—additional funding—will be used to wind down existing services and start up new ones.

What is very frustrating about the CFP process is there was no contingency plan in place to keep the investment of this department intact. Working Skills Centre has received 26 years of continuous funding from HRSDC and its predecessor. This department has not thought out that this is going to be millions of dollars lost to the community because of one CFP process.

• (1155)

Our centre ran one of two SARS centres. These are employment centres that opened up to help displaced workers when the two outbreaks of SARS opened up.

That's the investment that this department has made into the community and how this centre has given back to the city and to the country.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Hui.

We'll now go to Mr. Rupert Downing of the Canadian CED Network. Mr. Downing.

Mr. Rupert Downing (Executive Director, Canadian CED Network): Thank you, Madame Folco, and members of the committee, for investing your time in examining this very important issue for communities across Canada.

I'm going to provide some brief remarks and then hand over to my colleague Eunice Grayson.

We have provided a detailed brief to the committee on the experience of several hundred member community organizations in every province and territory with changes in the policies and practices of HRSDC. Our member organizations are non-profit groups engaged in integrated, collaborative programs to create employment, social, and economic opportunities to reduce poverty and unemployment.

The impacts of the changes in the department's policies and procedures have been felt across the country, and the kinds of stories my colleagues have been sharing with you are really multiplied across the country. Most of the impacts we've seen are being concentrated in Ontario and British Columbia, where there are no devolved arrangements for employment and skills development. However, the department's stated intent is to extend these procedures to all of its contracting of any value, such as, for example, in youth programs. Therefore, the impact has been felt and will be felt in other provinces. Our members in Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Quebec have been sharing their concerns about this situation.

The impact of these changes in the department's approach to communities has been most harshly experienced by unemployed Canadians, who have not been able to access supports needed because of the disruption to their local services.

The impact has also been felt, as we've heard today, by community non-profit organizations that provide a continuum of services based on local priorities, assets, opportunities, collaboration, and innovation. This sector and these organizations represent a tremendous investment of people's time and expertise in building better communities and meeting the needs of Canadians in their local areas.

To quote from our brief: CED and social economy organizations are trying to put baskets of services together in support of local citizens and the Department's new contracting process is moving in the opposite direction: cutting holes in the basket by focussing narrowly on one program or service at a time and failing to value the connections that need to be made among them.

The issue is not only a call for proposals process and related micromanagement of contracts, but it is more about the underlying change in the department's approach to partnership with communities, in developing flexible approaches to employment and skills development that are rooted in local assets, labour markets, economic conditions, and local expertise in the community non-profit sector.

The shift from a community development approach to centralized cookie-cutting of program design and contract criteria has been apparent since 2000. A procurement model more fitted to the commercial contracting of the construction of bridges is being imposed on community-based employment and skills development. There has been no consultation with our organization or with our members on these changes and no effective response to our repeated inputs to the department on this issue.

I would stress that our approach is to strengthen the partnership between the department, communities, and their development organizations. That is what we're seeking to recommend to help create that kind of partnership.

We have pointed out at meetings of the round table on the social economy, in our brief, and in letters to the department that their approach contradicts other priorities of the Government of Canada with regard to the social economy, the voluntary sector accord, principles of administrative fairness, and the government's own innovation strategy.

I want to briefly summarize the recommendations that are in our brief.

First, we think the department needs to commit to consultation and development of a clear policy framework on supporting community- or place-based employment and skills development. That policy framework is blatantly absent in the department's thinking about how to enhance the employment opportunities of Canadians.

● (1200)

Second, we would like to see the department review its terms and conditions for employment development programs with its local staff, who really are currently excluded from many of these discussions, and its community partners to balance accountability with the need for flexible, innovative approaches customized to meet local needs and opportunities.

The review also needs to help create terms and conditions that are inclusive of social enterprise models that blend entrepreneurship and social mandates, something that Madame Bakopanos has been encouraging in her discussions on the social economy round table.

Third, we'd like to see the department review its contract criteria with stakeholders in community-based organizations to increase the weight and attention given to local knowledge, performance, assets, and the inclusion of diversity.

Fourth, we'd like to see the current contracting process stopped—suspended—and instead, an engagement process be started with community stakeholders to develop an alternative system that provides adequate time and information for proposal development within criteria that encourage community-wide collaboration rather than fragmentation and competition, and the leveraging of assets to meet the local needs of unemployed Canadians by and from local community organizations.

Finally, we would recommend that the current administrative burden on HRSDC-funded community organizations be relieved by the adoption of an accounting framework that ensures financial accountability while allowing budget flexibility within reasonable envelopes.

I'm going to ask Madame Grayson to speak to this point.

● (1205)

The Chair: Madame Grayson, I would just ask you to be relatively brief, because I've given Mr. Downing much more time, but I wanted him to finish his list.

Ms. Eunice Grayson (Founding member, Canadian CED Network): Yes, thank you, and because he did such a good job, I don't have to say too much.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, for allowing me to speak at all, and thank you very much, members, for listening to me.

I'm one of the founding members of the Canadian CED Network. I'm the executive director of the Learning Enrichment Foundation in Toronto.

The Learning Enrichment Foundation has submitted a brief in French and in English. I have it with me and I am going to speak from that brief, but a very small part of it.

The Chair: I think that brief has been distributed to everyone in the committee.

Please go ahead, Madame Grayson.

Ms. Eunice Grayson: Thank you very much.

Two overriding new policies and procedures are getting in our way. The first is the budgeting process, in which HRSDC insists on silo-isolated, line-by-line accounting practices. These practices preclude partnerships being created through the leveraging of funds charities bring to the table, through donations and social enterprise, with HRSDC funds, which would exponentially increase the level and extent of services offered in marginalized communities.

The second disincentive for community economic development practices is the withdrawal of support in low-income communities due to the murky call for proposals process. This process is anything but transparent. Funds have been transferred outside particularly needy communities into other areas less in need of the additional services that could be leveraged. While we have no problem with the call for proposals, the criteria and decision-making processes were not apparent.

In my brief I then talk about the call for proposals process, which has been covered, and I spoke about the Learning Enrichment Foundation's sad experience with the call for proposals.

I'd like now to tell you a little bit about what we do so you understand how this new development is impacting in marginalized communities. I'm speaking now of the Learning Enrichment Foundation as an example of one organization that has other manifestations across the country.

Over the years LEF has developed a method of helping unemployed people to prepare for, and find, employment. The program for which LEF receives HRSDC funds has changed several times to conform to HRSDC's changing guidelines. Let me describe what LEF does with foundation support, with social enterprise income, with fees, and with government money.

Any unemployed individual may walk into LEF. Some just come for a job, to look at the job board, or for a job fair. Some come in response to a list of available jobs LEF faxes out each week to 300 community partners. Many job-finding clubs in Toronto send their graduates to LEF to find employment. Some immigrants are here anyway, learning English, and then wish to find employment. Some youth are referred by the courts as a diversion from jail, or by schools prior to expulsion.

For those people who are skilled but lack Canadian experience, and for at-risk youth, we have social enterprises. For those who are unskilled, we have training programs that reflect the recruitment needs of local employers. For those who need training but have no government training subsidy—at least 50% of our clients—LEF has a community skills development loan fund. In the past two years, only 18 trainees out of a total of 441 graduates had HRSDC funding.

A 35-telephone call centre, from which clients call to uncover jobs, generates more leads than we can use. As well, employers now

call us with their recruitment needs. Therefore, we are placing many more people than would be reflected in our self-marketing workshop numbers, for which we receive HRSDC funds.

Self-marketing workshops are just one aspect of this integrated program. Funding them was an accommodation made years ago by a director who understood the value of the entire integrated model in a marginalized community. Now, silo-isolated budgeting has become a barrier to LEF's successful operation of a holistic integrated service.

LEF grew out of a determination in our marginalized community to help ourselves. We have many colleagues and partners who have similar aspirations and concerns. However, from coast to coast, I know of people who are fearful of speaking out, because they feel they are vulnerable.

All across the country people who are part of the social economy, who are making a difference in their communities, are watching these proceedings and are expecting to be heard and valued as partners, not adversaries.

Thank you very much.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Grayson.

We'll now go by video to Madame Sandra Glass, vice-chair of the Canadian Coalition of Community Based Employability Training. Madame Glass.

Ms. Sandra Glass (Vice-Chair, Canadian Coalition of Community Based Employability Training): Thank you, Madam Chair.

There has been some confusion. I put in the application for CCCBET to be a witness at these hearings, but our chair is Nicole Galarneau, from Quebec, and I understand she has submitted a letter requesting that she be a witness and present for CCCBET in French, from Quebec. I'm not sure where that's at; I'm here sitting with Norma Strachan this morning, but I will not be presenting CCCBET's brief.

The Chair: Does that mean that you will not be presenting at all, Madame Glass?

Ms. Sandra Glass: I will not, but Norma Strachan will.

The Chair: Thank you. I have received a letter from Madame Galarneau, and we will be discussing that later on, in the second part of our meeting.

Madame Strachan.

Ms. Norma Strachan (Executive Director, Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training): Thank you very much for allowing us to present on behalf of ASPECT.

We're an association of service providers here in British Columbia. We have more than 125 member organizations, both rural and urban. These are the agencies that provide services to new immigrants, youth, persons with disabilities, employment insurance clients, and social assistance clients.

You have my brief in front of you. I'm not going to repeat what's in my brief, but I do want to underscore some of the issues that have been outlined today by some of the other presenters and also by my own members.

We do have 125 members, all of whom would love to have the opportunity to present to the committee today. However, as has been cited earlier in this meeting, most of our members live in terror of presenting to HRSDC on HRSDC issues.

Some of that is predicated by a meeting that was held here in September 2002. Senator Ed Lawson, whom some of you may know, got the understanding that there were a number of issues around the micromanagement of contracts and actual abuse of management of contracts, and so he called a meeting of all the service providers, the contractors, of HRSDC throughout British Columbia. More than 50 agencies took their courage in their hands and came to that meeting, presenting in front of the director general of HRSDC regional headquarters and some of the staff from that office.

As I said, it took a great amount of courage. They came forward and spoke about the issues regarding the administrative nightmare that they felt they were experiencing. Many agencies have reported back to me that they have since that time, three years ago, felt that they have been more micromanaged, that there has been a movement towards decreasing their funding, and they've certainly felt there has been reprimand and punishment from their HRCC staff.

That saddened me too. It's not democratic. It saddened me more to know the courage with which our members spoke up.

ASPECT took on the role of trying to follow up that meeting that Senator Lawson called. We took on the role of negotiating with HRSDC regional headquarters. I had many meetings with staff from that office. They had helped to clarify issues on both sides, if there was any clarity that I could give to my members on issues that were real management problems that HRCC was experiencing, and so that would help our members understand how to do business better with their HRCC offices. I tried to convey those messages to them. I also tried to convey the messages to HRCC that clarified the issues that were brought up at the Senator Lawson meeting. Very little resolution came from those meetings.

In February ASPECT conducted a survey of our members to find out exactly what the situation is right now. Members called me and asked what I was going to do with the information, because they were afraid to give comments or information to me if their agencies were going to be cited, if their agencies were going to be named, or even if their communities were going to be mentioned, because they feared that HRCC would figure out which agency it was and there would be problems again in the management.

I want to say that the director of program services from HRSDC regional, Jo Ann Hall, has been very collaborative with ASPECT. She has attended two of our board meetings in the last year. One of them was a board meeting that she phoned about and asked if she could attend. That was just as the new directives were coming down in February 2004. She came and informed my board of the policy directives. She did ask for some feedback on how we thought that would impact our agencies. My board provided feedback, but really,

I have to say I think regional headquarters has its hands tied by national policy.

● (1215)

What we have here are agencies that are suffering from micromanagement of contracts, and the violation of employer-employee relationships is extreme. The call for proposal process was not as onerous for us here as it was in some other parts of the country, I feel, because we had experience in responding to calls for proposals. The provincial government here goes through that process all the time for contracts. However, the call for proposal process was so flawed, and with such a short response time allowed, that it was a great problem for our agencies to be able to respond. Many agencies only had two weeks, as you'll see from the statistics in my survey. Most agencies only had two weeks, and we are recommending at least four to six weeks to respond.

You'll notice again from the statistics and the recommendations, which are noticeable for their lack of consistency in the way the call for proposal process was delivered across the province, that there were differing levels of management in the call for proposal process. Some areas had a Q and A process, many didn't. Some areas allowed for debriefing, most didn't. Those were the worst areas.

With respect to negotiations, my members tell me it's a non-negotiable process. They are told what they can provide, but it's a guessing game. The metaphor is that we're playing a game of cards with HRSDC, only we don't know what the game is, so we don't know if they're playing bridge, crib, or fish; we just don't know what game it is. We may all have the same deck of cards, but we don't know what rules they're playing by. The negotiation process is lengthy and disrespectful, and this was an issue long before the call for proposal process was introduced.

A good call for proposal process should have resulted in a much reduced negotiating time if HRSDC had been clear in their call for proposal process as to the services they required and the money available to deliver those services. Then when an organization that prepared a proposal was declared successful, you would consider that negotiations would be relatively straightforward. That has not been the situation. Negotiations go on for several weeks. Most of my members tell me that they spend more than 100 hours in negotiation.

We support the recommendations that have been put forward by ONESTEP and Canadian CED Network, and I hope you will look at the recommendations that are in our brief, as well, around the call for proposal process specifically. We would like to see an end to the fragmentation and competition that HRSDC sets upon communities.

Thank you.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Strachan.

We'll now go on to the period of questions. The way we normally do it is that we start with the opposition. Each of the members of the committee can ask a question of one or several of the panel members.

Mr. Forseth.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Thank you, chair.

We have heard a lot of complaints and concern today. I would like each group to address their minds to answer what I put to them.

Minister Dryden came on Tuesday and he essentially said that organizations that didn't make the cut under the new rules were just not good enough for the criteria, but they were welcome to apply again, and perhaps they might even get ministerial help through the process to try again next time. In view of this, I think we could go through a lot of testimony and hear lots of complaints, but I want to emphasize what solutions and changes you would recommend in view of the problems. We have to put solutions on the record.

We know things are going on, we can't change the past and we can't change the last timeframe, which was a problem, but we need to emphasize now what needs to be changed. If some of the accusations get a little out of turn, if someone has any evidence of any wrongdoing or undue political interference, it's their duty to bring it forward. The committee here is the appropriate place to do that. We will continue to hear complaints, but I want to emphasize solutions.

In view of all of that's happened and all of what you've been through as organizations, where do we go from here? Now that we've arrived at this point and there appears to be some collaboration and similarity and experience of problems, I want to hear some concrete solutions so that we can find a way out of this, because Canadians need the service. That's the end result.

The Chair: Excuse me. Before I give anyone else the floor, I think this is an extremely important question Mr. Forseth has put on the floor and so I will give a lot of time to the answers. If several of you in the panel wish to address this question, please raise your hands. I will give you the floor as we go.

Madame Hui.

Ms. Minerva Hui: We need to give immediate extensions to those agencies that were incumbent organizations and that now have been displaced. The big worry is that once we close down, when you guys get this mess fixed we won't be around. We need immediate extensions for at least a year, and this CFP needs to have a moratorium for at least a year to be studied properly.

The Chair: Madame Doolittle-Romas.

Ms. Monique Doolittle-Romas: I would concur with that comment. In fact, some of our agencies are living on three-month extensions. That's just not feasible. We have fabulous staff, very qualified staff who are picking up and leaving because they have mortgages to meet, they have bills to pay, and they can't go on three-month extensions. They need to know they're going to have a job for longer than a three-month period.

So I agree with the moratorium. Give us a year contract. And the rules have to be clear. The criteria have to be clear and have to be applied fairly. I speak of the Canadian Hearing Society; to hear that they were not good enough to make the cut—because they lost their funding—I find unbelievable. I know HRSDC offices in other regions have selected the Barrier Free Communication to Employment program from Sault Ste. Marie to use in other communities. They more than met all of the statistics; they more than met all of the criteria. They were told they were too expensive.

Specialized services for the deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing are too expensive. That doesn't mean not being good enough. What it means is there's a high need to recognize that there is a need for specialized employment services. What we do is so important, and a generalist cannot explain to you why it's so important to provide specialized services for the deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing. The needs are unique.

•(1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Downing.

Mr. Gary Malkowski (Interpretation): Thank you. Let me add one point along with that. We're talking about—

The Chair: Excuse me.

We'll come back to Mr. Malkowski, but right now Mr. Downing has the floor. We will come back to the list. I have Madame Strachan, Madame Beaupré, and Mr. Malkowski.

Mr. Downing.

Mr. Rupert Downing: I think the points that have been made about dealing with the short term, in terms of stopping the contracting process as it's currently constituted and providing one-year contracts to help stabilize the service delivery agencies and stop the churning of staff that's going on at the moment, are very important.

In addition to that, I think the long-term solution is a process of engagement with the expertise that exists among stakeholders to help generate the policy framework and therefore the contract criteria that can work in terms of looking at the successful strategies and programs that agencies have been running in communities for years and taking out of that review what the success factors are in doing this kind of work in different typologies of community.

There are big differences between a resource-based community, such as Prince George in British Columbia or the Sault in Ontario, and Ottawa or neighbourhoods of Toronto. What's happened is that at the community level these agencies have developed very specific types of programs and strategies that fit with the local economy and labour market and fit the needs of local employers as well.

What we have to do is create terms and conditions and contract criteria that actually are informed by what the best practices have been in these different kinds of communities, and there needs to be a policy framework that really does value that kind of flexible, community-based approach to employment skills development.

I think that can be done in a year. I think if we can stabilize the situation in the short term and then get people in the different regions together to help generate best practices on which to base criteria and policy, we can get this fixed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Strachan.

Ms. Norma Strachan: Thank you.

I want to address Mr. Dryden's comment that the agencies that are not getting their funding are not good enough to make the cut. In fact, HRSDC has a policy in place now that they're reducing the number of service providers in order to reduce, apparently, the amount of administration. That's a flaw in their thinking, I believe, because what's happening is they're creating huge agencies in a community where the administration is in fact increased. So there are no cost savings at all.

I'm recommending that there should be consultation with communities, real consultation with communities, where the policies are helped to be developed from the ground up. I've offered HRSDC in British Columbia the opportunity of attending our conference and meeting 150 agencies from around the province of B.C. to consult with those agencies and help develop policies and to help determine what hasn't worked.

So our recommendation is that they consult with communities, that they consult with regions to develop policies, and that they post their policies and procedures on their website so that everybody knows, to level the playing ground.

There are agencies here in British Columbia that are currently ending on March 31. If there's an opportunity to extend contracts for one year while HRSDC reconsiders the flaws in their thinking, we would highly recommend that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bakopanos.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: As a point of clarification for the witnesses, when Mr. Dryden was before this committee, which was on Tuesday, he was not referring at all to HRSD. He was referring, in fact, to one contract on autism that was given by Social Development Canada. It had nothing to do with his comments.

I'm his parliamentary secretary. I think Mr. Forseth might have muddied the waters a little bit, unintentionally, but I just want to make sure everybody understands there were no comments made by Minister Dryden on HRDC funding. It had to do only with one group on autism.

•(1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Forseth also asked for clarification.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Yes. I might have described perhaps the wrong term. What I was trying to summarize was his comments about the process, that they weren't successful through the process.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: That has nothing to do with this.

Mr. Paul Forseth: That's right, but the general principle applies. On these calls for proposals there is a set of criteria, and some groups are successful and other groups are not. The minister made the comment that maybe the ministry would work with these groups, and perhaps he can't speak for his fellow minister, but obviously, when you go through a proposal process, there are ones that are going to be successful and others that aren't. So we need to look at this whole situation, because when there are those that are not successful, there's a great social disturbance of the workplace and a great reorganization, a reshuffling of the chairs on the deck.

So I want to get to solutions, and that was the thrust of my comment. I don't want to put the minister in an inappropriate light.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Beaupré.

Ms. Bernadette Beaupré: Mr. Forseth, as one comment in terms of being solution focused—we have said this a number of times and in our paper, as have others—we have to focus on outcomes, that is, getting clients to work. Right now, the staff are interpreting the Treasury Board of Canada's policy on transfer payments really rigorously, to the point where we spend exorbitant amounts of time on administration.

I have evidence of groups spending two weeks negotiating on \$38, whether it's a parking cost or whatever. That is absolutely ridiculous. I think we have to move forward in that area. You've heard it time and time again, and it has been going on since 2000. So that has to happen immediately.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Malkowski.

Mr. Gary Malkowski (Interpretation): I just want to respond.

I strongly recommend the importance for the HRSDC of their policy directives, which is not public information. I think it should become public. I think we need to evaluate the accessibility costs inherent with that.

An example would be that at the Canadian Hearing Society we have to pay our own staff, 50% of whom are deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing, and HRSDC will refuse to cover those costs for accommodation. As well, there are additional costs for accommodation for the consumers that we do support. They've referred us to Social Development Canada.

I strongly recommend that HRDC and Social Development Canada, SDC, work together to talk about how they can absorb the accommodation costs, clarify what is entailed with that to make sure the services are accessible not just to their consumers but also to staff, with the goal of keeping and maintaining employment and, at the end of the day, saving the tax dollars for Canadians.

I have sent a letter requesting a meeting with the Minister of HRDC and Social Development Canada. Peter Adams has promised us that there will be response, and I'm waiting for Peter to keep that promise for that meeting.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Grayson.

Ms. Eunice Grayson: Thank you very much.

I want to talk about how we are paid for the services. We desperately want to be accountable, but we don't want to be accountable through a forensic audit. We want the criteria for government funding to be the results expected from the use of the funds, the results being closely monitored, not the silo-isolated, line-by-line forensic accounting.

We would like the criteria used to determine who gets funding to be the practices of integration and holistic services in marginalized communities. We would like them to be encouraged by examining current policies and practices that conflict with the implementation and by retraining HRSD staff in both communications and collaborative skills.

•(1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, I realize that I've given a great deal of time to the answers to Mr. Forseth's question.

As I explained earlier, it seemed to me that it was an important question, perhaps the most important question that we had to ask here, considering the presentations that have been made by our guests. So I felt it important to give as much time as possible.

We'll now go back to Madame Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Thank you for your testimony. It is with a great deal of respect that I receive not your complaints, contrary to what was said just before my intervention, but rather your assessment of the situation. When one takes note of a situation, perhaps solutions can be discussed, but if one is not aware of a situation, solutions cannot be discussed. I think that it is a given, consequently, that we must understand the stakes, because when the NDP pointed to the situation which prevails in two provinces and territories in Canada, we in Quebec had not heard about the situation before.

I made an inquiry and I can tell you that we have concluded a Quebec-Canada agreement concerning all of the employability programs that can be accessed via the employment insurance program of the Human Resources and Skills Development Department of Canada. However, the whole matter of skills development remains, and we know that there are federal government programs that are also concerned by this call for proposals.

You spoke about several irritants this morning. I was told that the groups were competing against each other, that the deadlines were too tight and that people had not been consulted. A few organizations from Quebec came here precisely to tell us about the situation regarding this new approach involving calls for proposals.

So, I thank you for having come here. It is with a great deal of openness and respect for the reality you are experiencing in the field that I welcome you here.

If I could make a comparison, I would say that this is comparable to a situation where members would be running for election every year. You can imagine what state of mind we would be in to save our ridings and to keep the work that we love. We love our work, we love what we do, and it also provides a living. I can thus say that I understand you and your search for funding that will allow you to continue to do what you love and to settle into your communities.

I would like to move on to two background questions. We talked about reports. At the very end, in the new call for proposals, there is an evaluation. I know that this is an irritant for many organizations in

community networks. They would prefer to be evaluated rather than having interim reports before the end of the process.

I would also like you to explain what advantages there could be to having reports submitted in the middle of a process, for instance, instead of at the end.

Secondly, are there administration fees you must assume for the evaluation of a program that is requested in mid-process? Do you have to pay these administration fees? What percentage is paid by your organizations in the budget you are given?

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Who would like to answer, please?

Madame Beaupré.

Ms. Bernadette Beaupré: Thank you, Madame Gagnon.

I have a question of clarification. When you say "evaluation", are you talking about the external audit that we have to have done on agreements over \$350,000?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Yes.

[*English*]

Ms. Bernadette Beaupré: Okay. I have a couple of things to say about this.

Yes, you include that cost. You give an estimate on the external audit required. For all the members here, something to be aware of—and my own organization had to do this—is all charities and non-profits are required by law to have a formal audit. We in Ontario had KPMG visit us in May to do a full audit on my organization. Then on every agreement over \$350,000, they came in again. One of ours was \$4,200, and KPMG laughed all the way to the bank. We found this...well, overkill is what it is.

Imagine the amount of money the federal government is spending on external audits across the country. Imagine! I don't even want to know the number. We believe that's unnecessary.

•(1240)

The Chair: There's a little bit of time left.

Madame Hui.

Ms. Minerva Hui: In terms of checks and balances, we submit monthly claims and we do performance evaluation, so if there are any problems with our numbers, the project officer will come to us and discuss it with us. On the CFP process, sometimes people think there are no checks and balances with the community agency, with the service providers. There are many.

Again, that's why it's so distressing to find out organizations with such long track records are not given that consideration.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry, I'm going to have to cut you off. Perhaps Mr. Martin might be able to follow up on that.

Mr. Martin.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: You really have decided to interrupt me, this morning.

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin: Thank you.

I actually wasn't going to go down this road before I came here this morning, but this whole issue of intimidation is very important here and very central to what we're trying to get at. It's very central to whether we're actually going to be successful at getting at exactly what's going on here, and why the upheaval, and why this new approach, and why we find ourselves sitting around the table today looking at this whole question.

On the whole issue of intimidation, one of the questions I'd like to put on the table is, what would it take to actually get people to come here and share honestly with us exactly what's going on out there? Let me just frame that a little bit.

It seems to me you have been at it longer than I have. Minerva, your organization has been in this business for...24 years?

Ms. Minerva Hui: It has been 26 years.

Mr. Tony Martin: It has been 26 years of delivering services to at-risk, marginalized people in Toronto, so you know a lot more about it than I do. I am looking for some answers.

I heard referenced terms such as competitive, entrepreneurial, commercial, micromanagement, and those kinds of things—those new values—as opposed to cooperative, interconnectedness, community-based, and that kind of thing. I also read, before I came here today, just to be prepared, that there is also the issue of sometimes being afraid to speak of the elephant in the room. That is another level of intimidation here—the whole political influence that may in fact be involved. We've heard of two big organizations that have contributed to the Liberal Party and have now been successful in taking some of the work you've been doing.

The Chair: Excuse me, there is a point of order.

Madame Bakopanos.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: We started out, Mr. Martin, with your stating there was intimidation. Now you're going down another road, which you yourself, and your leader before you, said you were not going to go down—the political road.

Mr. Tony Martin: Is this a point of order?

The Chair: It is a point of order, yes.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I would appreciate very much if you would keep the questioning in terms of the witnesses present, in terms of the issue before this committee, which has nothing to do with political interference or intimidation, unless any of the witnesses feels it has. That would put them in a terrible situation.

Mr. Tony Martin: That's the question I'm asking.

The Chair: Let me ask the question myself, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: No, it's my turn here to ask the questions. I would like my chance at this. I don't need you to ask my questions for me.

Could I ask my question, please?

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Even we have trouble speaking.

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin: I did not bring up the issue of political contributions by some of these bigger organizations that have now been successful. It's out there in the public domain. It has been reported in the media that in fact it has happened.

Hon. Peter Adams: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I have never heard of this. If it is in the public domain, let's hear chapter and verse.

The Chair: This is the first time I have heard of this, Mr. Martin. Do you have proof of what you are saying?

Hon. Peter Adams: Is it one of the organizations represented here?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I asked you before.

Mr. Tony Martin: No, it's not one of the organizations represented here.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Then what are you saying, Mr. Martin?

The Chair: Mr. Martin, excuse me—

Mr. Tony Martin: May I ask my question?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: No, we want to see the proof.

The Chair: No, Mr. Martin. I would like to ask something of you if you don't mind. You are putting forward some very serious allegations here. I would ask you if you have proof of what you're saying about political interference. This is very strong.

Mr. Tony Martin: I am saying it has been reported in the public domain.

•(1245)

The Chair: I am not aware of this, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: CBC has reported it. The *Toronto Star* has reported on the March of Dimes and JVS.

Hon. Peter Adams: Name names.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, I would ask you—

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Name the names.

Hon. Peter Adams: On a point of clarification, the March of Dimes has made contributions to the Liberal Party in order that they can get grants from HRSD? The March of Dimes?

Mr. Tony Martin: What I want to do is ask the witnesses before us here if they would like to respond to this.

The Chair: Mr. Martin!

Mr. Tony Martin: This is part of the intimidation. We now have the Liberals, including the chair, trying to stop me from asking my question of the witnesses who are here before us today. This is part of the intimidation that we're speaking of. I can't even ask the question of you so that we can get to the root cause of what's going on here.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, I will let you ask the question, but as chair of this committee, I would say to you that if you are saying there has been Liberal interference or Liberal pressure on any one of the groups you have mentioned, or on any other group, I would ask you to make sure—and I ask you this formally—that you bring proof of this before this committee.

Mr. Tony Martin: What I'm saying is that it's out there in the public domain. It has been reported by—

The Chair: The chair is not aware of any of these allegations. If you are aware of such allegations, Mr. Martin, I ask you to bring them forward and make them available to the members of this committee.

Mr. Tony Martin: I will certainly table that information with the committee.

Can I ask my question?

The Chair: Yes, you can, but I have made my request very clear.

Go ahead with your question, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I will table all the media reports and will share them with everybody so that you can see them for yourselves. I'm surprised that you haven't seen them, because they're a very important—

The Chair: Please ask your question, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: —part of this whole deliberation here today.

My question is on the depth and the breadth of the intimidation. In my own community, the Canadian Hearing Society didn't come to me until the very last minute, until they had no other recourse but to come to their member of Parliament to try to get their issues addressed. Then we find out that HRSD has gone to the March of Dimes in my own community to see if that organization would in fact take over this service. The March of Dimes in my own community said, "No, we don't have the expertise. We can't do it".

It begs the question, why the March of Dimes? Why did they go to the March of Dimes in my community? Why is it that in my community the March of Dimes said no, yet in your community the March of Dimes has taken over that contract and is moving forward with it? You can connect that with the fact that political contributions by the March of Dimes and JVS to the Liberal Party were reported in the media.

I just want some response from you on how that interacts and connects here, if you're able and willing to share that with me, because I think this issue of intimidation... It was mentioned by the presenter from British Columbia that there are 150 agencies across the province of B.C. Many agencies would be afraid to come before this committee because they're afraid of what the ramifications would be.

The Chair: I will give some time for the answers, but I will not give very much time, I'm very sorry. I've withdrawn from your question the time during which we had this long conversation amongst ourselves, Mr. Martin, but you are way over time.

Madam Hui, on this.

Ms. Minerva Hui: All of our clients are exclusively immigrants, so they come from abroad. When former Minister Volpe came in and

said the Working Skills Centre had done a wonderful job but six months later we were told that our funding was cut, we wondered what kind of democracy this is. A politician comes in and says we have their support, but he then turns around and cuts our funding. For many of our clients, this is their first exposure to Canadian politics.

In our negotiations with the department, I feel the department has been very heavy-handed. We had to ask three times for our written notification. We had no recourse when we received the bad news, so we appealed to Minister Volpe. The Ontario director general said we were wasting money on lawyers and that the department was very upset with us that we had made it political.

The Chair: Who said you had made it political?

Ms. Minerva Hui: David Carter-Whitney.

The Chair: Is this your lawyer, or who is he?

Ms. Minerva Hui: He is a director general of HRSDC, Ontario region.

The Chair: Thank you.

Does anybody else wish to reply?

I beg your pardon. Mr. Malkowski wanted to reply on this.

[*Translation*]

It will then be Ms. Grayson's turn.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Malkowski (Interpretation): I did want to respond.

Last week I had a meeting with Mr. Peter Adams, and we did share our concerns. Basically we didn't feel we were ready to give our presentation, because we were afraid. Mr. Adams did assure us that we would be protected from any repercussions due to our testimony. In effect, a lot of our regional directors are afraid to talk about these issues, and at the same time we're trying to convince our regional directors to go ahead with the proposals. We're trying to maintain and build good relationships; that's one of the key points for regional directors. We're not here to criticize; we're not here to cause problems; we're not looking to be afraid.

It was in fact a month ago that I had a meeting with Mr. David Carter-Whitney, and he blasted us. He was very critical of us. I was shocked. I said, "You know, we're in here to offer solutions; we're here to offer resources. We don't need to be intimidated by people from the Ontario region of HRSDC". I know that after this presentation that I'm making right now—I can guarantee you—I'm at risk. That's a fact; I know that. I am at risk. That's why I'm asking here to look for a solution—resources.

You can see that the deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing are suffering. They're losing jobs; they're being laid off; they're not being employed. Sault Ste. Marie has one of the best employment services programs in all of Ontario, the highest rate of placement. It's been a success, and now it's been cut off. We don't get this sort of intimidation from the Sault HRDC, and they cut our funding.

They've been picking on us and they've been intimidating us, and that's an unacceptable practice. I'm here to ask for your help. We need help and we need your support. We need your resources to bring deaf people back into the workforce. Now I'm afraid. I'm worried about the Canadian Hearing Society's employment services and the cuts that may face them.

• (1250)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Grayson.

[English]

Ms. Eunice Grayson: Thank you very much.

I think the question was what it would take to get people to come to talk about it. Our experience at the Learning Enrichment Foundation is this: we have not been afraid. We have very often sought out members of Parliament to ask their advice. We continue to ask them and tell them what's happening on the ground. I'm sure every MP in Toronto knows about what's happening, and we make sure they do, because we visit them and we tell them.

I can tell you it's not a political issue; it's an issue with the bureaucracy. They don't want to write briefing notes. They don't want to continually have to justify what's happening. When those of us in the community have problems and go to our MPs—and we have no fear of doing it, no fear of making it a political issue, because it isn't a political issue—it's an issue between those people who are administering the programs in the community on behalf of the department and those organizations that get funding.

Thank you.

The Chair: Before I go further, I will let Mr. Forseth speak. He's been waiting a long time.

Let me say that what you have been saying since the very beginning has been heard by the members of this committee and by the chair. In the second part of our meeting today, which should start in a few minutes, we will be discussing how to follow up. I'll have some suggestions to make to the members of this committee.

I will now pass the floor to Mr. Forseth.

Mr. Paul Forseth: You recall in my opening question I said that if anyone has anything untoward, they have a duty to bring it forward, and that this committee is not afraid to hear evidence. But it's of no use for members to launch into political speeches, because that doesn't help. We will ask hard questions and we need good evidence.

I've often criticized witnesses who go into a big reverie about generalities of accusations but, when you pin them down, cannot give you a name, an incident, a time, a place, or a document. That's what we need. We need good, hard evidence and we're prepared to hear it. If you're not able to say it today, you'll be able to bring the evidence later and continue to submit evidence to this committee. I'm sure the members of this committee do want to find out; that if there is any intimidation, wrongdoing, or whatever, we will hear it.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: I think that is disgraceful.

Mr. Yves Lessard: On a point of order, Madam Chair. I think that there are people here who took the time to come here to share their expertise with us, as we had invited them to do. That required some courage and they did so with such rigour and precision that their testimony here will contribute to Canadian democracy.

I think it is unacceptable and disrespectful to our witnesses that our colleague should say such things. We wish to disassociate ourselves with such statements and say that we condemn and deplore such an attitude.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

[English]

What I was saying a moment ago is that I will continue. I think this is an important topic.

Madame Beaurpré, you wanted to speak on this.

Ms. Bernadette Beaurpré: I guess I got distracted in all this.

If you look at our brief, we have five good examples of the experiences organizations have been having. They all agreed, under coercion, to give their own personal name and their organization. When people become so nervous about doing that, you know something is wrong.

I am the executive director of an advocacy organization and am shaking in my booties sometimes when I talk to the director general of Ontario region, who lately hasn't been returning my phone calls, and with whom I can't get a meeting, no matter how hard I try. You know there is something wrong. Trying to access the bureaucrats, then accessing them, feeling like you're getting a commitment.... Then I had a meeting on March 14 and I thought I was moving the ADM and some high-level staff forward—this was one step; we gave them the position paper—then one of my moles on the inside phoned me up and said the little internal briefing note said Mr. So-and-so did not make any commitments.

We do our best, Madam Chair and committee members, to give our input and in good faith believe that things will change, but this has gone on way too long. That's why we've come to Ottawa. That's why we have spent much money developing position papers, making them bilingual, trying to get meetings with Madame Robillard, and we feel as though we have not been heard. We know we haven't been heard, plain and simple.

There is something wrong with the system when you've tried locally, regionally, and nationally, and the political route too, and nothing happens. There is a problem.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will repeat what I said a moment ago, and I will give Madam Strachan a word in a second. In the second part of this meeting we will be discussing the follow-up to some of the things we have heard this morning.

Madame Strachan.

Ms. Norma Strachan: Thank you.

I want to give you an example of the intimidation that's occurred in one agency here in Victoria. An agency in Victoria went through the call for proposal process and was deemed to be unsuccessful. They understood that they were going to have to be closing down. They felt the call for proposal hadn't been as fair as it ought to be. They appealed in every way they could.

As a last resort, one of the staff members of the organization wrote a letter to their MP. Within 10 minutes of that letter going to the MP's office here in Victoria, the HRSDC manager from Victoria was on the phone to the executive director of the agency that was losing funding asking, "What are you doing letting your staff write letters to the MP? You shouldn't be doing that, and that's one of the reasons we're not doing business with you anymore".

That is the kind of intimidation that's been going on here for years. It didn't start after the call for proposal process; it's been going on for years.

I work for a not-for-profit advocacy association that does not get any funding from HRSDC, thankfully, and I have to say I'm sitting in a room here today in the Victoria HRSDC office and I'm uncomfortable. They have no repercussions on me. They have no opportunity to do anything to my organization personally, but I fear for my members, on whose behalf I'm speaking.

The Chair: Ms. Strachan, I would ask if you would give us—not necessarily at this particular time, but send it to us—the information as to who it was, who spoke to this official, and what day it was, so that we can document it very clearly. That will be part of the response we will be discussing after this part of the meeting this morning.

Thank you very much.

Madame Doolittle-Romas is next, and then I'll go on to Madame Bakopanos.

Ms. Monique Doolittle-Romas: Thank you.

I believe we've given you a specific example. The Canadian Hearing Society in Sault Ste. Marie has done an incredible job. They have met all the criteria. The regional director is one of the most dedicated I know. She put in her proposal four months and one day ahead, before her existing contract ended. She called and called and called and sent e-mails asking for a meeting. No one would return her calls. After a lot of pressure, she was given a small, two-month extension.

It wasn't an open process. They told her they were ending her funding and went behind her back at the same time and asked the Ontario March of Dimes to take over the program. How open is that? How fair is that? She wasn't even given a chance to defend her program—which, by the way, met all criteria. That is not open.

Ontario March of Dimes then submitted a report saying they don't have the expertise to take the program—which I think takes courage as well, and I commend them. Now the regional director of the Canadian Hearing Society has gone back and asked if we can have the program. We want the program. No one will speak to her, absolutely no one.

If this is an open and fair process, which we want it to be—and believe me, we're happy to be accountable; we do a great job and we can show it; we don't spend a lot of money on things we shouldn't—where's the appeal process?

• (1300)

The Chair: Madame Bakopanos.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me just put a few things on the record so nobody imputes any motives in my questioning either. I spent 20 years in the voluntary sector with Sandra. I worked with the voluntary sector for a very long time. I have in fact worked very closely with Rupert Downing—he said it—on the social economy. It's been a consultation that from day one was from the bottom up. I believe in multi-year funding. It's something I have championed while I've been here as a member of Parliament.

Some of the things you have said today as witnesses are very disturbing. I applaud the courage. I didn't think it took courage to come before your equals—I do consider us your equals in terms of some of the experiences some of us have had on the ground.

When you speak about a consultation process—if I understood, on February 16, 2004, the four national directives were actually put on a website and stated by HRSD—are you telling me that there was, from the time of those directives, between February 16, 2004, and March 8 of this year when the HRSD officials came before us, no consultation on the ground? That's my first question.

Second, regarding the type of experience you have had, I'd like to think that all public servants do their best to do a good evaluation to ensure that those organizations that have had a long history with a department are evaluated justly. So did you ever know...? I'm addressing this specifically to Ms. Doolittle. Did you not ask to look at the criteria for the evaluation that had been done and how your organization didn't in fact fit those criteria?

I know that has been always possible in the 12 years I've been here as a parliamentary secretary and as a member of Parliament. When an organization comes to my riding and says they have been evaluated negatively, I can ask for the file and have access to the file, and so can the organization have access to the file. I'd like to know how it comes that you have not had access to that file. That's a very specific question.

I'll stop there, Madam Chair, because we're running out of time.

The Chair: Who would like to respond to this question, please?

Madame Doolittle, and then Madame Beauré.

Ms. Monique Doolittle-Romas: I can respond to the specific question. The only thing the regional director in Sault Ste. Marie was told as to a reason why her program was cut is that specialized employment services for the deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing are too expensive. That was the only answer.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Did you see the evaluation of it? It's a specific question.

Ms. Monique Doolittle-Romas: I'm not the regional director in Sault Ste. Marie. The only answer I can give you is what I have, that she was told it was too expensive.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Well, I'd like you to come back to this committee to tell me, please, as a member of this committee, that if you asked to look at your evaluation you were denied that right. So far, as a member of Parliament, I have not seen it in any of the organizations I have dealt with on the ground. You have the right to look at that evaluation and to discuss it with the local HRSD public servant. That's always been done in my riding and across this country, I believe.

The Chair: I will ask you then to do this, if that is agreeable to you, and then to send an e-mail back to the clerk of this committee. We will make that information known to all the members, obviously including Madame Bakopanos.

Ms. Monique Doolittle-Romas: Just to clarify specifically, did she ask for an evaluation?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Did you see your evaluation? That's the exact question.

Ms. Monique Doolittle-Romas: Okay, I will ask her.

• (1305)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I'd like actually to know from all the witnesses if they ever asked for any access to their evaluation to know why their funding had either been increased or decreased.

The Chair: I would ask all the people present, and on video as well, to let us know the results of this sort of inquiry that you have—

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: And to let us know what consultation was done, which was my first question.

The Chair: —and to let us know through the clerk, so that we can give this information back to the members.

I have Madame Beaupré, and then Madame Strachan.

Ms. Bernadette Beaupré: In terms of consultation, we know that the information was given to the department around the policy directives, but we were told it was being implemented; there was no debate. Bang, bang, bang—there was absolutely no.... We were surprised.

Lucky me. Because I have contacts at NHQ, I received a little phone call a few days in advance. Of course, I was shocked, because these were very significant changes in direction.

In Toronto, the umbrella groups meet with HRSDC. After the directives were all announced—there was no debate about them—we met with them to give them some ideas about doing a call for proposal. One thing very specifically, and I remember saying it myself—and I wish I could find that e-mail, but my computer was stolen—was that we asked to have the assessment grid, that the tools for evaluation be given to us in advance, with the weightings. If

community experience is important, what's it worth? If partnerships are important, if experience with that client group is, what's it worth? Blah, blah, blah.

Never did we.... Well, I got a leaked document—again, I have some contacts, some moles—but the assessment grid was never given out to us, never. We asked for it.

So in answer to your question, was that a consultation? No. If you look at the voluntary sector initiative accord that Jean Chrétien signed with the voluntary sector in 2001 and 2002, it specifically states that there must be consultation before it's developed, as it's developing, and as it's being implemented—whether it's being piloted, or that kind of thing. No, this was one huge significant change in direction without consultation.

The Chair: Madame Strachan, did you want to add something?

I've lost track of how to pronounce your name; I beg your pardon.

Ms. Norma Strachan: I'll answer to anything for you.

In the aspect survey we did of our members, 90% of the respondents said they were not made aware of a scoring process for the proposals, and 48% of them said they had no access to debriefing afterwards.

One of my members, I know for sure, had to go to their member of Parliament in order to.... They asked for a debriefing from HRSDC. They were denied one, so they had to go to their member of Parliament, and they did get a debriefing after that.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish...? Madame Grayson, I believe.

Ms. Eunice Grayson: Yes, thank you very much.

I have not been concentrating on the Learning Enrichment Foundation's experience, because I really wanted to represent a broader group; however, the Learning Enrichment Foundation lost a very major part of what we do, because we no longer offer the self-employment benefits program. We started when it started, 12 years ago. We were called—a telephone call from the director general—on December 23 to say that we would no longer have funding for our SEB program. We did not receive it in writing. We asked for it in writing; it didn't come. We were told there was no appeal. We were told they didn't have the criteria.

Indeed, when I look at the whole situation of the criteria, I would like to have written the criteria. I think one would then write the criteria very much according to what the Learning Enrichment Foundation is able to do, because we were successful for 12 years.

It wasn't because the management didn't work well, because the organization that was successful in getting their own project—and our project—doubled had induced our manager to them six months ago. So the management was pretty good at LEF, and it was good at the new organization. And it wasn't because we were too expensive, I don't think, because the manager went there for a raise. We don't know why we lost the program.

My argument is, in a marginalized community like ours—

• (1310)

The Chair: Excuse my interruption. Are you saying that they gave you no reason? They did not give you a motive.

Ms. Eunice Grayson: That's right. No reason was given, and there was no appeal.

My problem with it is the general idea that you take something from a marginalized community—and in this case it was the city of York and Rexdale, because we were partners with another marginalized community in this—and give it to a program downtown that didn't do anything other than self-employment. And in a marginalized community, you can take a program like that and leverage it, and you can do so much more, if you're using the community economic development methods—which we use and which were used in Rexdale as well.

Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, I know this has not been a meeting that was precisely timed to the minute, the way we have done in the past, but I felt as chair that this was a serious thing that we were discussing and that, beyond time, there were some very fundamental things we had

to clear up so that all members really understood what the witnesses were bringing before us and how serious this was.

So to those members who may not be satisfied as to how this meeting was organized, I would answer that it seems to me...and I hope the witnesses who are before us are clear on the fact that we have heard what you have said, and that we will be discussing this in the next few minutes, at the end of this part of the meeting, to see what we can do in the immediate future to try to help in the situation. It's not for us to change the situation, but we can try to help you to change the situation. Certainly, I think we can do some things.

I would like to thank you all for coming and to say that I do deplore the fact that you are experiencing fear over possible repercussions that you feel may occur. We will address this among ourselves and see what we can do to get through this particular type of problem.

Thank you very much for coming. We are waiting for more news from you as to the results of your communications with your respective regional HRSD offices, and we will follow through. Thank you so much.

I will suspend for a few minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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