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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)):
Good morning and welcome.

We are returning to our study on the economic security of women in Canada.

We're very pleased today to have with us Martha Friendly, who is the executive director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit. She's with us by video from Toronto.

[Translation]

We are also hearing from Pierre Fortin, who is a professor in the Department of Economics at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

Welcome.

[English]

We're going to start with Mr. Fortin for 10 minutes.

Professor Pierre Fortin (Professor, Department of Economics, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual): I will begin.

[Translation]

I want to begin by thanking you from the bottom of my heart. Being invited to testify before a committee like yours always stirs up special emotions in me, as several people in my family have been members of the House of Commons over the past 135 years.

Here is my list of questions and answers.

[English]

Number one: how does the child care system impact women's economic security? The answer is that the affordability of child care is a crucial consideration for the mother who has to decide whether she will return to work after she has had a new child.

The lower the cost of child care, the greater the interest of the mother in working during the period until the entry of child into kindergarten, and having a job then improves her economic security in many ways. I will name three: one, it gives her an independent source of income; two, it makes her career less discontinuous, which accelerates her acquisition of experience and raises her wages; and, three, perhaps new to you, but extremely important nowadays, it allows her to better face the financial consequences of the risk of separation, which is very high nowadays. The probability that a separation will occur within 10 years after a first union is currently in excess of 50% in Canada.

Number two: why is it important to focus on the Quebec low-fee universal child care system that was started in 1997? The answer is that the cost of child care varies enormously between cities and regions of Canada. It ranges from 5% of women's average earning power in Quebec to 35% in Ontario. On average, the Quebec system makes regulated child care five times more affordable than in other provinces. The consequence is that child care utilization and the labour force participation of mothers are very much higher in that province than elsewhere.

This is making a major contribution to the economic security of Quebec women. In 2014 there were regulated child care spaces for 60% of children from zero to four years in Quebec, but for only 28% of children in other provinces. Furthermore, from 1998 to 2014, the labour force participation rate of mothers of young children zoomed by 13 percentage points from 66% to 79% in Quebec, but outside the province, it increased by only four points on average.

Number three: how do we know that the increase in labour force participation of Quebec mothers has been caused by the low-fee universal child care system of that province? Causality has been carefully identified by teams of researchers from UQAM, which is my own university, and the University of Toronto, MIT, UBC, and Queen's. Their studies have been refereed and published in reputable scientific journals internationally. Their evidence is compelling and unanimous that, relative to other parts of the country, the increase in the labour force participation rate of mothers in Quebec was to a large extent an outcome of its low-fee universal child care system.

Crucially, the UQAM team—my colleagues, not me—showed that Quebec mothers participated more in the labour force not only when their children were very young but also later, when the kids had entered school. In other words, if you continue to work after you have your child, you have more of a chance to continue after that. Based on these results, my Université de Sherbrooke colleagues and I estimated that in 2008 there were 70,000 more Quebec mothers in employment than there would have been otherwise.

Number four: isn't pulling mothers away from home bad for child development?

There's no question that the family is and should remain the bedrock on which child education is built.

●(0850)

However, in a world where already more than 70% of Canadian mothers of very young children work, the question is not whether this is acceptable in theory, but what to do in practice, given that this is a reality we have to cope with. How do we ensure that the 70% majority of young children whose mothers work in Canada get the high-quality child care they need to complement the care they receive at home? This is the question.

Why is it preferable to run a low-fee universal system instead of simply enriching the existing traditional system outside of Quebec with higher quality and better targeted child care? The answer is because a low-fee universal system is more effective and less costly than the traditional, purely targeted system providing child care.

First, more than two-thirds of all vulnerable children come from middle- and higher-income families. Only a universal system can effectively catch all of them.

Second, the Quebec experiment has shown that the low-fee universal system can attract so many more mothers into the labour force that the additional taxes collected by the two levels of government, in total, come to exceed the additional subsidies that the province has to pay over what the targeted system would otherwise cost. There is a net fiscal dividend that can then be used to improve the quality of child care and respond to the special needs of disadvantaged children. There is no net cost to taxpayers. The traditional system cannot perform this financial trick. There is no revenue, just the cost, and it must be financed by higher taxes.

Does this mean that the Quebec child care system is near perfection? Not at all. It is far from perfect. Far too few children receive education and care of good to excellent quality, and far too few disadvantaged children access the good part of the system and have their special needs attended to. The network of high-quality, non-profit early childhood centres, the CPE in Quebec, does a very good job, but in order to economize on costs, the provincial government over the years has used its tax and subsidy policies to push parents away from the high-performance CPE and entice them towards low-quality private *garderies*.

Not surprisingly, with the distribution of children in care thus skewed toward low-quality providers, studies—by all those guys from Toronto, UBC, UQAM, and Queen's—have shown that the Quebec system as a whole does not seem to have improved child development. The main failure of the Quebec system is not that it is a universal low-fee system, but that it has badly managed quality. The main challenge now for the provincial government is to correct this policy error.

I end with my recommendation. The government, in my view, should quickly make good on its 2015 platform promise to deliver “affordable, high-quality, flexible, and fully inclusive child care for Canadian families”. Specifically, it should push forward the national early childhood education and care agenda by introducing a Canada child care act. Under this act there would be an annual financial contribution made by the government to provinces and territories on the condition that their educational child care programs be low fee and universal in design. That would contribute mightily to building a solid educational infrastructure in Canada.

●(0855)

The Chair: Those were excellent remarks, very well done to the time.

Now we go to Martha Friendly.

You also have 10 minutes. Go ahead.

Ms. Martha Friendly (Executive Director, Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU)): Thank you very much committee members and Madam Chair. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. In a way, maybe you don't need to hear from me, because I think Professor Fortin has made a number of the points I wanted to make.

I think I'll be making them in a different way, though. I've also submitted a written brief that you don't have. This will form the basis of my remarks today. I will more or less be summarizing it in point form.

First, I want to take as a starting point that 21st century women's economic security is closely linked to decently paid employment. I don't think I need to spend time arguing that the days when women's economic security came from marriage to a man earning at least the "family wage" has been over for decades. I'm not going to take any time making that point.

My second point, which others have made, is that access to child care is absolutely fundamental to advancing women's economic security. Many of us remember Justice Rosalie Abella's definitive quote from the time she was heading the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, in 1984, “Child care is the ramp that provides equal access to the workforce for mothers.”

I think it's really evident that if mothers of young children are to be in the workforce, accessible, affordable, and also, I would argue, high quality child care for their children is needed to cover their absence. This is merely common sense. If they're not there, something good has to be done for their children in their absence.

The third point I want to make is that having young children makes employment much harder for women. The data shows that mothers of young children are more disadvantaged in employment than women without children. Women with young children, especially single mothers, are less likely to be employed and to be well employed, thus undermining their own economic security as well as that of their families. I want to emphasize also that this is so, not only for low-income women, but for modest- and middle-income women as well, all of whom may have difficulty accessing the reliable, affordable child care they need to be well employed.

In my brief, I point to Finance Minister Morneau's interest in bringing more women with young children into the workforce, as his advisory council on economic growth has advised, in order to tap economic potential through greater workforce participation. The advisory council also links Quebec's much better funded child care to Quebec women's employment rate, which is much higher than women's employment rates in the rest of Canada. Of course, you've heard this in more detail from my colleague, Professor Fortin.

It's noteworthy, also, that not only does Quebec fund child care much more generously than elsewhere in Canada, but it's the sole province that has abandoned the ineffective fee subsidy system that is still used in other provinces and territories, presumably to target child care to those who are low income. I'm pointing this out because it's a really graphic illustration that's current, of the strong link between affordable child care and women's economic security. I just want to add that the International Monetary Fund has made this same point in its study of Canadian productivity.

The fourth point I want to make is about Canada's child care situation. I'm sure you've heard from other witnesses that this is demonstrably a very weak child care situation.

There are two characteristics that have particular relevance to women's economic security. The first of these is the severe space shortage in every province and territory. It's very hard to get a space, especially if you have an infant, a toddler, or a child with special needs; if you're indigenous; or if you live in a remote or rural community.

The second key characteristic of our child care situation is the sky-high parent fees in most of Canada. These prevent many families, including middle-income families, from using regulated child care, even if they can find a space. One study found that 75% of families in Toronto couldn't afford child care in Toronto, which is really significant.

My brief also points out that quality is a third, important, main element. This is of key importance because considerable research shows that quality is the key in determining whether child care is beneficial for children or negative for children.

• (0900)

This means that quality as well as the availability of spaces and whether the spaces are affordable need to be taken into account. I want to point out that these features are all directly linked to structural aspects of child care policy and they're amenable to policy solutions, as the evidence from Quebec and from other countries show.

The fifth point that I want to make is that the Government of Canada has made a commitment on child care. In the last federal election the federal Liberals committed to developing a national early learning and child care framework in collaboration with provinces and territories and indigenous communities under the rubric of economic security for middle-class families. The purpose of this policy framework is "to deliver affordable, high-quality, flexible, and fully inclusive child care for Canadian families". We understand that the senior levels of government have already developed a list of principles—accessibility, affordability, quality, inclusivity, and flex-

ibility—and that initial funds will be committed in tomorrow's federal budget.

The sixth point I want to make is that all of the best evidence shows that the relationship of child care to women's economic security shows that Canada needs to develop a much improved child care situation. I know you've heard this from other witnesses. This needs to be a transformative shift, not just more of the status quo, which is already not working for women or children or families, or for meeting other goals such as productivity.

To even begin to meet the anticipated principles, child care services need to be supported by two things: first, by substantial, long-term public funding; and second, by robust, well-designed policy based on the best evidence. Without both of these, much more money and much more and better policy, real economic security will continue to be elusive for women in Canada.

Just to summarize, my overall point is that the Government of Canada cannot address women's economic security without finally tackling child care, and overall poor access to child care wastes both women's and public resources.

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Martha Friendly: Before I conclude with a couple of concrete recommendations, I want to take a minute to comment personally. I've been a policy researcher on early childhood education and child care even before I immigrated to Canada in 1971, and I'm very familiar with child care issues not only from my work as a policy researcher, but personally, as many women and family members are.

When I was a young working mother in the 1970s and 1980s, both my children went to excellent, non-profit child care. One of them was a parent co-op. But I'm now a grandmother of four-year-old twins, and they also have been in excellent municipal child care since they were babies. My daughter, who's a young academic, and her partner can afford the fees only because they are lucky enough to have a fee subsidy. Virtually nobody in Toronto can afford those fees for two children. Just to point out the luck piece, there are 18,000 children on the Toronto subsidy waiting list at any one time now. So you can see that the subsidy system does not work, and you can appreciate that this has made all the difference in my life, and it's making a difference in my daughter's life.

Since I was a day care parent 30-odd years ago, however, around the time that the Status of Women minister released the “Report of the Task Force on Child Care”, on International Women's Day in 1986, little about child care has fundamentally changed in Canada. It's still very hard to get a space, outside of Quebec it's exorbitantly expensive, and too often the quality isn't good enough to qualify as “high” or “educational”. What has changed, though, is that we know much more about what governments need to do to change the status quo. Today there is so much more international and Canadian information about what should be done.

Based on all of this, here are my recommendations.

First, I echo what other people have said: the Government of Canada needs to act decisively to put in place its 2015 platform promise “to deliver affordable, high-quality, flexible, and fully inclusive child care for Canadian families”. The process of achieving a system that will deliver this will take many years. It will probably take a decade to put this in place, but it needs to begin now with a clear vision for the future. To make this happen, it needs to start with a robust policy framework that will be based on the best available evidence. It also needs to be supported that changing child care needs substantial, long-term, sustained funding that ramps up predictably over time to be at least the international benchmark of 1% of GDP.

Just to conclude, because I'm getting a signal—

• (0905)

The Chair: I'm sorry to cut you off, but that's your time.

Ms. Martha Friendly: That's okay.

The Chair: We're going to start with our questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin has requested that everyone ask their questions slowly and clearly, as he has difficulty hearing.

[English]

We'll begin with Ms. Damoff, for seven minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Ms. Friendly, if you wanted to just finish what you had to say, that's fine if it's brief.

Ms. Martha Friendly: I urge you to do all you can to ensure that Canadian women don't have to wait.

Thank you.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you both very much for being here and for sharing what we've heard before about the importance of quality universal child care for children.

Professor Fortin, I'm wondering if you've ever done an estimate on how much tax revenue would be generated by the federal government if women were working and able to access universal child care?

Prof. Pierre Fortin: In 2013 I published a paper with my Université de Sherbrooke colleagues, Luc Godbout and Suzie St-Cerny. Luc is the chair of the centre for research on tax policy. Our paper shows that in 2008, as a result of the Quebec system having generated much higher labour force participation among Quebec mothers, the federal government had cashed in \$650 million.

Overall, the two levels of government got \$900 million in associated tax revenues that year, 2008.

Of course, the \$250 million that Quebec got was net of what it had to pay for the system itself. In other words, the federal government doesn't pay a penny for that system, but cashes in everything. There is no absolute necessity that the federal government return something to the population, to the province, or to the system, but it would seem more fair if the revenue coming from more mothers being in the labour force were shared between the two levels of government.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You also talked on the issue of quality child care. One of the issues that has arisen in Quebec—and they've made some changes—is that it isn't necessarily quality child care.

If the federal government were looking at implementing some kind of universal child care system, what would your recommendations be so that we avoid those pitfalls and ensure that universal and quality child care is available for children?

Prof. Pierre Fortin: I would say it would be to avoid the big refundable tax credit system that Quebec instituted in 2009. In 2008 and starting in 2009, it decided to enlarge the refundable tax credit for parents who were sending their children to a private *garderie* so that the net cost after tax credit would be similar to the \$7 a day fee that they had to pay in the licensed subsidized sector so that there would be full competition between the private *garderies* and the non-profit sector.

The incentive for the government to do that is, for example, that, if you look at 2016, it paid on average \$45 to any CPE or early childhood centre non-profit, but only \$21, or 60% of \$35, is the refundable tax credit, which is the daily cost in a private *garderie*. The government pays 60% of that in a refundable tax credit to the parents so it makes a profit of \$24—\$45 minus \$21—when a parent decides to go to a private *garderie* instead of a CPE.

I said that the government was pushing people toward the private *garderies*. The problem with the private *garderies* is that they have been universally, and by many studies, calibrated as giving just average or totally inadequate services to the population as opposed to the CPE system, where about half of the centres have been measured as giving good to excellent quality services, with the rest giving average quality services.

This is what we would have to avoid. The problem, of course, is to what extent here our government can contribute to financing a national child care system by imposing some constraints on the provinces. Of course, just as in the Canada Health Act, there could be some dispositions, some clauses, that would help to avoid that trap, because in Quebec it's really a low-quality trap we're in now.

• (0910)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have only about 30 seconds left. I think basically you're saying core funding versus tax credits is—

Prof. Pierre Fortin: Yes. You can achieve the same level of net after tax credit, which is the case now for various....

The stupidest thing the provincial government has done is to maintain the financial incentive for poorer families to send their kids to those private *garderies*. It's less costly for them to go to the private *garderies* than to go to a CPE, which is totally the reverse of what you should have for those people whose children have many more needs.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Vecchio for seven minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Good morning.

Martha, I would like to start with you. It's nice to see you again today.

You talked about Toronto and how in Toronto over 12,000 people are on the waiting list for the subsidy. Have you seen an impact or a stalling out due to the child benefit that was released last year? Has this had any impact on the subsidy wait-list, or do you find more families are still asking for that subsidy even with the child benefit that incorporates all three benefits for families?

Ms. Martha Friendly: Child care, which is what the subsidy pays, costs much more than the amount of the child benefit. Nobody has studied this, but the subsidy waiting list has been at about 18,000 generally for the last five to six years.

From a practical point of view, I don't think anybody has seen any impact, but just from a common sense point of view, it's too little money to pay for child care. It's not intended to pay for child care.

• (0915)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: The reason I asked that was because it actually does have that component in there, because the universal child care was folded into the CCB. I appreciate that, but that is one thing that was missing.

I want to go on to a quote. This is something that when we talk a lot about Quebec day care—I am a parent of five children, and I believe parental choice is still my number one priority. We talk about these facilities and the subsidies and a variety of things. Back in 2014, there was a debate within the provincial government. They had a look at making some changes, specifically because greater than 50% of the families who were using child care had the opportunity to plan for it because they were the wealthier families. I quote:

Spots don't necessarily go to families who need it most. Because the very nature of universal childcare means that everyone is eligible, wealthier families inevitably occupy spots that could go to families in desperate need of affordable daycare. In fact, families with the highest annual incomes in the province are twice as likely to have a child enrolled in the universal program as compared to families earning the lowest incomes.

For me, that's an important fact, because we're still leaving out the people who need to have this financial support. They're on waiting lists that can be two to three years long as well.

When we're talking about this subsidy, I recognize it's not perfect. We realize there's going to be a child care framework that's going to be put forward by this government. Therefore, we need to make sure that it's going to be flexible, and it's going to be something that can be seen from coast to coast, even if you're living in a community of 300 people with the closest city 25 minutes or an hour away.

What do you see as something that's going to still be able to target...? I believe it's important to make sure that those people who need to get back in the workplace, and who need the financial assistance, still have these opportunities, and wealthier families are not taking these spots, because they're not getting these opportunities to go forward and for work.

How can we make a flexible plan that will work for communities of three million or 300, which will work and be flexible for people who, in my community, work a lot of shift work? What do we have there?

I'd like you both to speak to this and also, what do we do for workers? I'm thinking of a mother I know who puts her children to bed at 11 p.m. and comes home every morning at 7 a.m. How do we help families like hers who want their children to be home? She works the night shift and allows them to sleep in their own beds.

If you can come up with a formula for that, that would be awesome. Thanks.

Ms. Martha Friendly: Karen, let me answer this in several ways. First, we who work on child care policy agree with the idea that families need to have options, call it choice, options. All of the evidence that we have reviewed, and all of the research shows that the best way to do that is by developing a comprehensive, publicly funded system.

There are a lot of things in what you said. For example, I've done a lot of work on rural child care, on non-standard hours child care. The things that mitigate against developing that are that we don't have a system; we have a market. A child care centre that springs up and that's very small, for example, in a rural community, has to make it on its own and cover its own costs. This is one of the reasons they either don't spring up, or they don't survive.

I would be very happy to forward some of our recommendations to you that talk about developing a comprehensive system that includes, for example, part-day child care, which we call nursery school in much of Canada, which parents can't get unless they can pay fees for it, and a range of services, including regulated home child care—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Martha, I want to be a little more specific. I'll be happy to read the study, but because you have so much work in this background, what would you do for smaller communities where there are 300 to 500 people? People want to go to work, but the child care facilities are going to be outside of their community. What does that look like? Say that it is comprehensive and that we have a formula, where are we at steps 3 and 4 then?

Ms. Martha Friendly: There isn't any reason that a small community or collection of small communities cannot have a small child care facility. You see this all around Europe. You see it at the top of Norway on the tundra. You can also incorporate regulated home child care into the system as it is all around Canada.

The reason we can't have small child care facilities that may be located in the school or in a public building is that there isn't any way for them to operate. There is no operating funding system. We're proposing that that be changed.

When we talk about a comprehensive system, that's what we mean. It's that you have a system—and this works very well in other countries—where you turn it around, and it's not up to parents to fund it. Therefore, you don't necessarily give them money, a tax credit, or a cheque to pay for it, but rather you fund the services. This way you can actually make them work for all kinds of communities, and this way—

• (0920)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Martha, I have about 30 seconds and I quickly want to hear from Pierre on that, but I would love to talk to you more some time, if you don't mind.

Ms. Martha Friendly: I would love to talk to you.

Prof. Pierre Fortin: I would like to make a couple of points. First of all, I have 19 years of day care under my belt because I have many children. My wife has run a very large organization, so we've had to make sure that there was flexibility, reliability, and high quality in the day care centres where we sent our children. It's extremely important in my view that, if we want women to stop sticking just at the intermediate or lower levels of management in organizations, that if they take this higher job, as my wife did—she has a good husband and that makes up for it—they have to be guaranteed that their children are going to be well taken care of. This is one condition.

The Chair: I'm sorry, that's the time.

We'll go now to Sheila Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

The conversation this morning is very rich from both of the witnesses. I'm grateful for your work. I've just returned, along with many of my colleagues, from the United Nations status of women convention last week in New York, and the focus was entirely women's economic justice. There wasn't a single panel where pay equity and child care were not mentioned. Then many witnesses from around the world talked about the link between an absence of affordable child care and women inevitably falling into part-time work. They're the parent who falls back from their career, and that puts them into more precarious work, and there's a domino effect throughout a women's life.

I want to start with Martha Friendly. I note the letter that you wrote in combination with a number of other labour, social justice, and non-governmental organizations in November to Minister Duclos asking the government to create a universal public child care system and improve employment insurance access and benefits for precarious workers. There's a very nice linkage of those issues that we were hearing about last week at the UN. I'm interested in whether you've had a good response from the government to this letter. I'd also like you to elaborate on your concerns about parental leave changes by the Liberal government such as spreading parental leave over a longer time period without increasing that actual benefit.

Ms. Martha Friendly: Those are really good questions.

Let me start by saying that we who work in child care policy don't see it as a free-standing policy. It needs to be supported by better parental leave policy and better policies for families overall. That's because child care is an important piece of family policy, but it's not the only piece. I really appreciate your putting it into that context.

I've always seen parental leave policy as going hand in hand with child care policy. When you read reports by UNICEF, for example, they do make the point that countries that have good parental leave policy also tend to have good child care policy, and that they go hand in hand.

I responded to the consultation on parental leave. I said that parental leave policy is really important because, in reality, we don't really see tiny babies in child care centres unless the families really want and need to do that. We don't see it being a widespread solution to what families do, though. They need to have family time. I think this is quite consistent with what other people have said.

I have always thought that parental leave policy needs to be more flexible. However, if you look at the way it's now set up, it's also very inequitable. The reason it's really inequitable—it's been declared ineffective parental leave policy by organizations like UNICEF, for example—is because it pays so low and because so many women and men are excluded from it. It also is very heavily weighted towards women taking the leave, which disadvantages them, especially if it goes on for a long time.

To keep this really concise, flexibility is important, but flexibility needs to go along with the money that will pay for the parent, the mother, to make the choice to stay at home. I would recommend that, yes, we need to make it more flexible, and not necessarily longer. Flexibility is different from length. Some women or men might like to take it for shorter or longer.

We would like to see earmarked father leave to encourage fathers to enter into caring for their children at a younger age.

We think it needs to be redesigned to make more women and men eligible, as they are in Quebec where it pays much more and the amount of earning is much lower. It needs to cover more kinds of workers—Quebec has already included self-employed workers.

To keep this in one sentence, I support the idea of more flexible parental leave, but I don't think the way it's being pursued by the government is the right way to do it. I think that will make it more inequitable, and I would argue that it should be done in a different way.

• (0925)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: With regard to the November 4 letter, have you had a good response from the government yet?

Ms. Martha Friendly: There has been discussion about it. I think, from our point of view, it was in the discussion stage. They just published the report from the consultation, which didn't say very much, actually.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you.

To Dr. Fortin, I'm very grateful for your work and especially your linkage between the economic benefit of child care and spending on child care. Although this study is just one month old, we've already had witnesses come to argue that programs aimed at low-income Canadians become underfunded. We had Dr. Donna Lero saying, "programs targeted for poor families and poor children tend over time to become poor themselves".

I'm hoping you can talk with us more about the concept of universality and how that can relate to making sure parents have continuing access to affordable and accessible child care.

Prof. Pierre Fortin: First of all, there has to be a lot more investment. I'm talking from the point of view of my province and the program I know. It's quite obvious that we're missing a large number of children from low-income families and that more resources have to be invested, not only in the child care centres, but if they want to stay in their home, services that would get to the children there. Certainly more resources are needed in that way. The nice thing, *la beauté des choses*, is that the system itself, by bringing so much more tax revenue into government coffers, makes the additional resources available that are needed to raise quality and take care of the special needs of the poorer members of our community.

Another important aspect of universality is that it generates contacts between higher-income children and lower-income children. I come from a high-income family—my wife and I are in the 1%—but in the 19 years I've had in a non-profit day care centre, all my children have had contacts with much lower-income people. Today, when they are 35, 40, their groups of friends are still with

lower or middle-class families. It is an investment in equality in Canada.

• (0930)

The Chair: I'm sorry, I have to go now to Mr. Fraser, for seven minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I'd ask that we try to keep our answers short, because I have a lot that I'd like to cover and I really benefit from the expertise that you've brought to table.

Prof. Pierre Fortin: It's passion.

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's good. We need more of that.

Monsieur Fortin, I'll begin with you.

You ended your remarks on a recommendation that we create a piece of legislation that would essentially see a federal-provincial transfer for the purpose of universal low-fee child care. I'm wondering if you think that's the one thing the federal government should do and, say, leave the management to the provinces. I see a number of other areas where the federal government has a role, whether it's investing in child care infrastructure or potentially investing in skills and training development for the workers we need if we're going to extend access universally.

Could you comment on what you see as the role the federal government?

Prof. Pierre Fortin: You're definitely right. However, we live in the country we live in, and there certainly has to be a negotiation between the national government and the provincial governments.

If I were Jean-Yves Duclos —he's a long-time friend—I would definitely push forward those elements that you're thinking about. Of course, at that end of the day, the result would be what it would be with the various governments.

Basically, I think the constraint is that the program should be low fee and universal. I'm not against the market. I've spent all my life defending the market to those left-wing guys. However, in the case of child care, market-based brings low cost but at the cost of no quality.

Mr. Sean Fraser: As a follow-up, on the issue of quality, then, what happens when quality does fail? Should we tie funding to performance? Should we have some sort of an ombudsperson people can complain to and who can investigate, so we can target our investments to those areas that are failing? What do we do when quality breaks down?

Prof. Pierre Fortin: It would be provincial programs, but I think the idea of an ombudsman is a good idea. I don't know to what extent it would be possible, but definitely

[Translation]

that really appeals to me.

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser: Ms. Friendly, feel free to comment on the previous questions. I saw you nodding.

You touched very lightly on some of the rural and remote areas. I come from a constituency that is primarily defined by small towns and rural communities, and access to child care is in small pockets.

Could you comment about the unique features that we should be considering in the development of policy to ensure that those small communities are effectively serviced in any kind of a national framework on child care?

Ms. Martha Friendly: In answer to your question, I think it really goes back to this question of building a system and moving away from the market. I think that's the key thing we really need to do, and this goes right across the country. We leave it to the market to let child care appear wherever somebody decides to put it at this point. It's not a planned service like education and hospitals.

Absolutely that is key. There is not an instance in the world of a child care situation that serves families' needs that's done through the market. The market applies to lots of things such as how it's funded, how it gets there, and how it's supported.

I don't think child care is the absolute answer for every family's need, but it's very clear from looking around internationally that we could do much better in rural communities and remote communities, and for non-standard hours workers.

Your questions about quality are very related to this question of the market. We don't have assistance for supporting child care. We don't support the workforce. I don't know if anybody has talked to you about the child care workforce and where that fits into women's economic security, but we completely underfund child care so that parent fees are paying the workers' wages. We have never really established any standards for training and for quality, compared to other countries.

Before we start using market techniques, consumerist techniques like an ombudsperson, we need to think about building the infrastructure of a system that supports the workforce. This is the key to any good early childhood education program. It's not all there is to it. That's why I—

● (0935)

Mr. Sean Fraser: On that question, just before we wrap up, has there ever been an assessment done that either of you are aware of on the extent of either the infrastructure or skills deficit that would lay the groundwork for success in the national child care framework?

Ms. Martha Friendly: Years ago a national study was done of the workforce. I think it's time for another one.

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes.

Ms. Martha Friendly: A study of the workforce was done in the 1990s, but this is 2017. I think one of the pieces of what the federal government should convene in its role as social policy convenor is a national workforce strategy. It is within provincial jurisdiction. One of the things that unites the provinces and territories is that the workforce issues are relatively the same across Canada: training, low wages, low recognition, poor working conditions, and not enough people.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay.

Mr. Fortin.

Prof. Pierre Fortin: In the high performance CPE network, early childhood centre networks in Quebec, about 80% of personnel have a CEGEP degree in child care services. In the private sector, which is the low-quality sector, it's 40%.

It would be an interesting idea to explore the possibility that a federal program would put a minimum training level required for a subsidy to be made.

The Chair: Thanks so much to both of the witnesses for the excellence of the work that you do and for your testimony. We are now going to do a bit of committee business squeezed in between this panel and the next one.

First, I want to thank all the committee members for the excellent job on the press conference yesterday. We had some good pickup and that was lovely.

Second, we did such an amazing job on the gender equality bill that they have forwarded to us Bill C-337.

Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I asked if we could go in camera for the last 15 minutes of this meeting just to discuss that bill, the timing of witnesses, and the study of it.

Could we still do that?

The Chair: Yes, we can.

I'll suspend until we go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

● (0935)

(Pause)

● (0945)

The Chair: We're back for our second panel.

We're very happy to have with us by video conference today Andrea Doucet. Andrea Doucet is a professor and Canada research chair in gender, work, and care at Brock University. Also, we have with us Morna Ballantyne, who is with Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. She is the executive director.

We will start with Andrea. You have 10 minutes for your remarks, then we'll go from there.

Professor Andrea Doucet (Professor, Canada Research Chair in Gender, Work and Care, Brock University, As an Individual): Thank you for this invitation. We did send a brief on behalf of my research team and I want to acknowledge that I'll be speaking today from my research and from my research with Dr. Lindsey McKay and Dr. Sophie Mathieu.

I want to make three key points that relate to women's economic security and their participation in the Canadian economy. I will read research evidence with some stories that are both personal and political.

My first point is about men's involvement in unpaid care work. My second point is also about men and their take-up of paternity and parental leave and why this is important for women's economic participation.

Third, I will speak about how low-income women in Canada are systemically excluded from maternity and parental leave benefits. Let me begin with a brief story.

I take you back to 1989, when I was just beginning my Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge. I was pregnant with my first child and I was planning to write my doctoral dissertation on women's paid and unpaid work. After giving birth, I changed my dissertation topic to women and men and paid and unpaid work.

One key moment that led me to make that shift was the day that my husband went to his first play group, a moms-and-tots group that met in the basement of a local church. While he was assured that he would be welcomed, each time he entered the church basement with our daughter, he felt like he was entering a very closed and cold club reserved for mothers only. People wondered why he was there. Why wasn't he working full-time? He was treated like an alien, a pervert, and sometimes, as a rock star. Of course, everyone wondered, where was the child's mother?

What has stayed with me from that time 27 years ago and from the research that I have done across those years is the deeply ingrained assumption that men should be primary breadwinners and women should be primary caregivers. These assumptions have shifted a great deal over the last quarter century, but what has changed little is the expectation that it is women and not men who will care for infants and toddlers

• (0950)

This was well expressed to me by an Ottawa father, a stay-at-home dad I interviewed four times between 2000 and 2010 for the first and second editions of my book *Do Men Mother?*. He said to me, "Even in a society where people believe that men and women are equal and can do just about everything, they don't really believe that men can do this with a baby, especially a really tiny baby."

My first point, then, is this. I believe that men's increased involvement in caring can and does lead to a shift in political and cultural values and socio-economic conditions around paid and unpaid work. Here I borrow from the words of feminist theorist Dorothy Dinnerstein, who wrote 40 years ago, in 1977, about the losses—personal, psychological, and economic—for both women and men in a society in which, as she put it, one gender does the "rocking of the cradle" while the other "rules the world".

I want to close this first point by being very clear that I state this position about men and care not as a universal or a categorical one. This is a panel on women's economic security. There are contexts, sites, and instances in which it might not be appropriate to bring men into this issue. I am thinking here of issues of domestic violence, which I believe this committee has already addressed, or difficult custody cases, in which these arguments on gender equality play out

in a very different way. I thus want to clarify that I make this point informed by what social scientists call a "contextualist approach", which attends to the context and complexity of women's lives. One must always ask, "Which women are we talking about?"

My second point is about men and paternity leave. In 2001, as all of you well know, the federal government, under the EI program, expanded parental leave benefits, for mothers or fathers, from 10 weeks to 35 weeks. The number of fathers taking leave jumped significantly, from 3% to 10% in just five years. Then in 2006 Quebec introduced the Québec parental insurance plan, QPIP, a separate and more generous parental leave policy, with three to five weeks of non-transferable paternity leave. By 2008 it was clear that far more Québécois fathers were taking government-sponsored paid leave benefits than were fathers outside Quebec. In Quebec, nine out of 10 fathers take leave. In the rest of Canada, it is about one in 10. Those numbers are stark, and they have remained fairly constant across the last eight years.

The difference between fathers in Quebec and fathers in the rest of Canada led Lindsey McKay and me to examine these two policy regimes. Our research included interviews with 26 families in Ontario and Quebec, which we conducted between 2006 and 2008. We recently followed up—a decade later, in 2016—with nine of the 26 couples. Following here are four key findings and arguments from our work across this past decade.

Ten years ago we found that parental leave decisions were shaped by gendered norms in the workplace. A number of men expressed concern about losing their jobs. One father in our study was fired after he took nine weeks of parental leave. When we returned to interview fathers and mothers in 2016, we learned from them that the workplace is slowly beginning to change, but that fathers can still feel pressure from work colleagues and bosses when they take time off to care for infants. There's still an expectation that this is women's work. Several fathers told us that they were sometimes treated differently and negatively at work after taking more than one period of parental leave.

We support a growing international argument that designated paternity leave, implemented in a "use it or lose it" scheme so that if the family don't use it they lose it, with high replacement rates and low eligibility criteria, as in Quebec, Norway, and Sweden, is a key motivator for families to take up leave.

Our final point is that top-ups—benefits with replacement rates that are higher than the EI rate of 55%—make a huge difference to fathers' take-up of leave and that they thus indirectly support women's employment. As women still earn less than men, it is women who take most of the leave time, and this can translate into long-term loss of income, benefits, and professional opportunities.

I am now at my third and final point, concerning low-income mothers' access to maternity leave and parental leave benefits.

In a 2016 research article published in *The Journal of Industrial Relations* on work conducted by McKay, Mathieu, and me, we argued, based on our analysis of EI and the QPIP program, that there's a rich-poor gap in receipt of maternity and parental leave benefits among Canadian mothers. The gap is geographic, reflecting the two benefit programs—Quebec's and the rest of Canada's—and it is income-related.

• (0955)

Our findings, in brief, are the following.

Women work throughout their lives and contribute to EI. An average of 25% of mothers pay into EI during their pregnancy, but they don't have enough hours to qualify for their parental leave. Other mothers pay into EI for their whole working lives, but they don't make the cut when it matters; that is, they need to accumulate 600 hours in the 52 weeks prior to giving birth. This stands as the major barrier to benefits access.

Under EI rules, 36% of mothers do not qualify, compared to only 11% in Quebec. Mothers in lower-income families are most excluded, with 56% left out under EI, compared with 15% in Quebec. One of the reasons for this difference is radically different eligibility criteria. EI requires 600 hours; QPIP only requires having earned \$2,000, which is about 186 hours at minimum wage.

The revision currently on the table for Canada's parental leave policy will exacerbate the rich-poor gap in parental leave, as well as the gendered wage gap. In our view, it's a poorly crafted policy in terms of women's economic security, especially for mothers without standard, well-paid, full-time employment.

I want to conclude my presentation with three brief remarks.

My first point is a conceptual one. Maternity leave and parental leave are currently lodged in the EI system, but these are care policies and not unemployment policies. In the long-term, my colleagues and I believe there should be a wider discussion of how to structure the support of the caring needs and demands of all diverse Canadian families.

Second, maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, and child care should be brought together in a more coherent plan that recognizes the interconnections between family caregiving and child care. One thing that struck us in our parental leave research is how awful it is for many Canadian parents who end their parental leave time, and then face the dire situation of limited and poor child care options.

Finally, I return to the story that I told you about 10 minutes ago about my partner and our infant daughter. She and her twin sisters are now young adults. They all graduated from high school with honours, two completed post-secondary programs, and one is in process. All three are in precarious work: an actor, a video editor, a project manager in the non-profit sector.

They do not have benefits; they go from contract to contract. They do not accumulate 600 hours with the same employer in any given year. Two of them have partners who are in precarious employment.

If and when they choose to have children, they will likely not qualify for parental leave benefits, so I'm speaking today not only as a scholar who's written about gender equality issues for about a quarter-century, I speak as a mother of three adult children who are all in precarious work. A lot of Canadian families, especially lower-income families but also middle-class families like mine, worry a great deal about women's economic security for the next generation.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to Morna Ballantyne, for 10 minutes.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne (Executive Director, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

You heard two excellent presentations earlier this morning detailing the positive impact of affordable child care on women's economic security. They made the case that women's economic security is enhanced by participation in the paid labour force and that levels of female participation increase when mothers have access to child care. I will focus on three things the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada thinks should happen now to make that access a reality. Our viewpoint has been developed through extensive consultation with parents, early childhood educators, policy experts, researchers, and others involved in child care. We hope that you will include it in your report.

First, please push to get the federal-provincial-territorial child care policy framework right. Building a child care system in Canada will take at least a decade. It's critical that the federal government commit for the long haul and put in place foundational building blocks that will stand the test of time. We want to see the federal government keep working with the provincial and territorial governments to develop a sound, extensive policy approach to early childhood education and child care as a fully funded, high quality inclusive public service that all Canadians can access regardless of their economic circumstances, their place of residence, or the individual needs of their children.

Currently, parents in Canada are forced to purchase services from a child care market. Some of that market is regulated and some is not. Some of it is not for profit; some of it is for profit. It's a market that offers a confusing array of scarce offerings, too many of which are of poor quality, and almost all of which are unaffordable for families. This child care market is particularly bad at meeting the needs of children with disabilities, children whose parents work non-standard hours or irregular hours, and children who live in rural and remote communities.

Leaving the provision of care to the market doesn't work for child care any better than it would for health care, for primary education, for secondary education, for sanitation, or for countless other areas in which governments have intervened for the benefit of all Canadians in order to enhance equality of opportunity and provide a higher standard of living for all and just because doing it that way makes economic sense.

We need both levels of government to work together. While the provinces and territories have constitutional jurisdiction over the delivery of child care services, the federal government has the spending power to drive the change. The federal government also has a legal obligation to make changes to child care, because the current system makes it impossible for Canada to live up to its international commitments with respect to women's equality and the rights of the child. Unfortunately, we will not likely get the federal-provincial-territorial policy framework that we need when the federal government's multilateral framework agreement is announced, which we expect to be within weeks of the federal budget.

We don't know a lot about the negotiations that have been under way now off and on for more than a year, because, honestly, they've been carried out in secret with no meaningful input from stakeholders. But everything points to the promised agreement being little more than a broad commitment to make child care more affordable and accessible and of better quality and also, more flexible. Instead of principles, we need a framework that says how those objectives will be achieved. For example, we need to have an agreement for direct public funding of child care services rather than indirect funding through fee subsidies to parents. I read a report the other day—I think it was produced by Wellington County in Ontario—that said the child care system in Canada is funded 88% by user fees and only 12% through direct government support of services. That's no way to finance a system so critical to women's economic security. Giving a very small number of parents help with their user fees through subsidies is just not good enough.

We need a policy framework that sets out direction for solving the problems that plague the child care workforce. Quality of child care is directly linked to the qualifications and the stability of the workforce. Expanding the system is just not possible without more trained early childhood educators, but attracting and retaining staff to the ECE profession is not possible when the predominantly female child care workforce works for substandard wages and in impossibly difficult conditions.

● (1000)

The policy framework has to include commitments to putting in place the infrastructure required for system-building, including the regular collection and the analysis of data.

We have put a proposal for the kind of policy framework we are looking for in a three-page document, and I've brought it with me. I gave it to the clerk to pass to you, along with our vision of the kind of system we need to build.

The second thing we urge you to do is support our view that early childhood education and child care needs of indigenous communities have to be addressed through a separate and distinct policy framework, one developed by both levels of government and representatives of Canada's indigenous peoples. Truth and reconcili-

ation demands no less, and the law requires that indigenous children services receive funding equal to that provided for non-indigenous children.

Third, we call for sustained and proper levels of federal funding. When the budget is introduced tomorrow, we'll know how much if anything the federal government proposes to budget for child care beyond the one-time-only \$500 million that was in the 2016 budget. We expect, however, to see a flat rate allocation of \$500 million for each of the next 10 years, taken from the social infrastructure fund.

If this does occur, Canadians won't see more or improved child care services unless the federal government bumps up its financial support for future years. We need a separate stream of funding for child care also, so that we're not in competition for dollars with other priorities, such as housing.

The first year of funding already announced for 2017-18 is not as high as we would like, but it could help with some immediate problems in child care, such as the long wait-lists in many jurisdictions for parent fee subsidies, or the lack of spaces in remote and rural communities.

After 2018, however, we need to dramatically increase the funding commitment each year, until we reach the target of 1% of GDP being allocated for early childhood education. This may seem like a lot, but as Professor Fortin and others have already testified, the spending will generate significant returns in economic growth, including boosting women's participation in the workforce. The cost of the program will pay for itself through increased tax revenues and productivity. It's spending that will make women more equal, and most importantly, it will ensure the best care for our country's children.

● (1005)

Like the others, I want to move to a personal note. It's absolutely impossible for women to make a presentation to the status of women committee without speaking about our own experience, because of course the personal is political.

I want to tell you that I came to child care advocacy not as a policy expert; I really came as a parent, as a single mother of two children. I became interested in advocacy and in the issue of child care when I became pregnant with my first child and was told that I'd better get my name on the waiting list or I would never have access to child care. Then I did, luckily enough, get a space for my son in a good, high-quality child care, and I had to pay for the fees in the form of a debt for the following 10 years, because it was that much money, and then of course I had a second child and had to pay the fees for two children.

My son is now 32; my daughter is 26. I became a grandmother exactly three weeks ago today. It just breaks my heart that my son and his partner are going to have even a harder time than I had more than 30 years ago. I can't believe that in Canada, as wealthy as we are, with all the expert advice that we have, we know what to do and still haven't done it. It really is a question of political will, and your committee can play a huge role in making sure that this point is made and that we get the politics right and the finances right.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent.

With that, we'll start our round of questioning, with Ms. Ludwig for seven minutes.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Thank you both for your very moving and informative presentations.

I'm a mother of two. I can give my personal experience. When I first started working full-time, teaching at the community college, I knew it was going to take extra hours, and I will not say publicly how much I paid in child care, but it was extensive, and that allowed me to do the things that I wanted to do with flexibility. Looking at standardized day care versus bringing someone into my home, it had limited hours, and when you're trying to build your career—we men and women around this table can all speak about that—it does typically take longer hours than nine to five. There's the flexibility and the guilt that goes along with that, so thank you.

My question is around the area of training. When we're looking at employees working at these regulated child care facilities, one of the things that I have found over the years is that, because it just didn't pay very well, we didn't see a lot of uptake from men who wanted to work in that field, and I do think, and I wonder if you feel the same, that there's a value to having a diverse labour force in the area of child care. That's one question.

The second is, how do we standardize the training across the country if we implement a federal framework on this, which I think is an important area, if it's still regulated provincially? The consistency of delivery and potentially the learning outcomes may differ from province to province. I'm wondering, based on your experience, what recommendations you could offer there.

I'll start with Ms. Ballantyne.

• (1010)

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: First of all, we would absolutely support the need to diversify the workforce. It is more than 95% female, and obviously, it's good for kids to have a diversity of adults in their lives. One of the reasons, of course, that it's predominantly female is that it's a low-paid sector, and so one of the ways to bring more men into the field would actually be to take a really focused approach to improving the working conditions and the wages and benefits for the workforce.

Now it's true that this is an area that falls within provincial and territorial jurisdiction. However, there have been lots of periods in Canadian history very recently when the federal government has played an active role in workforce development, and in fact, the Government of Canada right now has indicated that workforce development is a serious concern. So we think, as the next step, that

a good chunk of the discussions going on between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments should focus on workforce development. We and they can look, with the involvement and inclusion of the child care sector, at what could be done and what strategies and best policy approaches could be developed to address the workforce problems. That has been done in the past; we can do it again in the future.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Great. Thank you.

Professor Doucet.

Prof. Andrea Doucet: I agree with Morna Ballantyne about the need for higher pay for men to be involved in this sector.

The other issue for me is that it's kind of a catch-22 in the sense that it's assumed that women do caring, and then nobody wants men in early child care, and then those assumptions just get perpetuated again and again and again.

I do think it has to be a comprehensive approach with higher pay, cultural training around men and early infant care, and just working slowly to bring more men into early care. I can say that I have visited Swedish day cares, and there are lots of men in these day cares, but they have had a much longer time of building high-quality, affordable, accessible, universal child care. They also worked on a sort of public campaign about men's roles with children. It has to come in a number of ways. Right now there is still an assumption that it is women who will care for infants and young children, so we need to break those stereotypes and cultural assumptions, and that has to be done through a number of programs and targeted campaigns, maybe. That's what Sweden did. Sweden had a lot of campaigns where they showed images of men with children.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: My next question is related to entrepreneurship. We look across the world for economic security. We focus a lot on helping women develop and create their own businesses and sustain them. If someone has a home-based business, or someone is an entrepreneur, they're not paying into employment insurance. What do we do for that young woman, the woman who would like to have a child or becomes pregnant, when there is no employment insurance? What are your recommendations to help people like that?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I think that one's for you.

Prof. Andrea Doucet: There is a provision for self-employed people to choose to pay into EI so they can access parental leave benefits. That's a new provision that was put in place a couple of years ago.

The larger question for me is around extending the eligibility of people who have access to parental leave benefits and looking to our neighbours in Quebec for lower eligibility criteria. We know that women have patchwork careers because they tend to care for their children so they're moving in and out of work. That means they're often not eligible. If someone is self-employed, she may not be able to afford to pay into EI for a while. If we lowered the eligibility criteria we would widen the access for people to have parental leave benefits.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Ms. Ballantyne, if we had more men staying home taking parental leave, how might that affect women's economic security?

•(1015)

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I think the issue around women's economic security is to make sure they have access to the paid labour force and also have access to full pay when they're away from the paid labour force when their children are young. That's really the only way to do it.

The issue of engaging more fathers in the care, especially of young children, is important especially in later years of life. Studies have shown that when fathers are engaged in the early care of young children through parental leave provisions then they would more likely take shared responsibility for the duration of their children's childhood. That will contribute to women's economic security. The fact is that women continue to be the ones who must take time away from work for a number of reasons, not just when their children are very young but until their children graduate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we're going to Ms. Harder for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Morna, I'm going to direct most of my questions to you.

The first one here is with regard to the child care system, specifically the one in Quebec right now.

My understanding is that 52% of the families who access the Quebec child care system are in the middle- to upper-income bracket. Meanwhile, we have a waiting list that is two years' long and a lot are lower-income families who aren't able to access the system. When I look at this, if this is an example of what we're supposed to be going for as an entire country I'm quite discouraged by that. In my estimation we should be looking at the child care needs of those in lower-income brackets, especially those women in single-income households who are more prone to live in poverty or have lower incomes. I'd be very interested in having them have access but I just don't see the Quebec system, that model, providing for this.

Can you help me understand what we can do differently to make sure that these low-income women have the access they need?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: Sure.

I think in part this issue was addressed in the testimony earlier this morning.

It was clearly stated by Professor Fortin that the Quebec child care system is not the ideal system. One of the reasons it isn't is that there continue to be two Quebec systems of child care. One is a regulated,

subsidized child care system, and the other is a for-profit system that operates outside. Parents who access the regulated system have very low fees, and the money is paid directly to the service. In the other part of the sector parents have to pay and then apply for a tax refund. It's not a completely universal system. What we should do in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada is develop a genuinely universal system. The only way to do that effectively is to provide public funding directly to the services rather than direct funding through either tax credits or through subsidies to assist parents paying the user fee. As long as there's a high user fee, lower-income earners are going to be discouraged from accessing the system.

I've got a paper that I co-authored on why universality is important, and I would be happy to share that with you afterwards.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

I hear what you are saying. Now, if I'm understanding you correctly, what you are really steering us toward is almost a fully publicly funded system. Gone are the days of having home care and privatization within the child care system.

This is my concern with that approach: when I look at the research, it shows me that the children who exist in these public spaces are far more prone to levels of anxiety and depression than the children in private centres. The research also shows me that those individuals who are within these public centres, these larger centres, are more likely to commit crimes later in life than those who are in the private centres. The truth is I could go on and on with statistics like this, showing that often those home-based centres are, in fact, better for the well-being of our children and produce positive results.

How, then, would we go about taking care of these social issues that face our society?

•(1020)

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I could probably go on and on trying to dispute the evidence you just made reference to, but instead what I'd like to do is just maybe clarify what we mean by a fully publicly funded system. For us, a publicly funded system does not mean one type of day care only. A publicly funded system can and should include home-based child care, centre-based child care, and a number of other child care arrangements—flexible child care arrangements, for example, so that women who work part-time or irregular hours can access the system.

We're not saying a publicly funded child care system means centre-based, institutional child care. This is a myth. This is not what we've ever said, and we continue to reiterate that point.

The reason why we need a publicly funded system is so that we can then pay attention to developing the kind of quality services that will in fact lead to the really good, positive development of children and families. That's our answer.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sure.

Morna, I've noticed there's this buzzword that's being used by all four witnesses, and that is "quality". We like to use the term "quality", but no one's taken the time to define what it means to provide "quality child care". What would you define that as? How do we know we're providing quality care to our children in Canada?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: There are two ways to answer that.

One is to talk about a quality system, and the other is to talk about quality care. There's all kinds of evidence and research that's been done on what good quality care is in terms of the provision of care to children. We know what that evidence is, and it relates to the relationship between the early childhood educator and the child, to the physical environment, and to the curriculum. We have a good sense about what constitutes quality care.

A quality system is one that has public financial, and other support, so that quality care can actually take place.

Ms. Rachael Harder: You made reference to the current government and decisions "being made in secret". My question for you, then, is what would a proper consultation process look like, going forward?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: First of all, we haven't given up hope. We think this project is ongoing. It would be completely unrealistic to expect any government of Canada to be able to put in place and develop a universal child care system within a few months. It's an ongoing process. We want to give the government—whatever government is in power over the next 10 years—10 years to get it right.

Good consultation would be openness with respect to the positions the government is taking to the table with the provinces and territories, getting the best evidence and information from experts to inform that position, and then providing regular reports on how negotiations are proceeding, including timetables of progress.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Chair: That's your time.

Now we're going to Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

I'm very grateful to both witnesses. You've been extremely clear on a bunch of issues that we've already heard witness testimony on, that government spending in the form of tax credits doesn't necessarily actually create more child care spaces in which to spend that money. You've been really clear on the impact of unpaid care. You've provided tons of testimony that I know we're going to be able to draw on.

Ms. Doucet, just last week I was at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. A number of us on the committee were attending for Canada. Unpaid care was a huge part of the agenda. The solution of parental leave, "use it or lose it", for the male half of the family was one of those innovative ideas. Iceland was bragging that 70% of Iceland's men are using their "use it or lose it" male parental leave, to make sure that those men get hooked into that child care side. It was really great to hear.

I'm going to try to ask two questions in my time.

One is for Ms. Ballantyne. Can you talk a bit more about the federal role? You flagged in one of your reports, "We are concerned that these negotiations will result in a federal government hand-over of money to the provinces and territories to merely bolster the current patchwork and inadequate approach to child care."

I'm hoping that you can expand on that a bit and again just give us your encapsulated vision of that federal leadership on bringing the provinces together to have a truly universal system.

● (1025)

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I'm by no means an expert in federal-provincial-territorial relations, but there are a lot of examples where the federal government has used what is known constitutionally as its spending power to be able to help direct what provincial and territorial governments do in areas that actually fall in provincial and territorial jurisdictions. That's what we want to see the federal government do, actually use its spending power to attach conditions on the money that it transfers to the provinces and territories for the purposes of developing a child care system.

We also think that the federal government can play a leadership role in continuing ongoing discussions, as I said, with the provinces, territories, and stakeholders to explore best practices and to provide infrastructure support to the development of good policy at both levels of government.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thanks very much.

Ms. Doucet, I'd like to hear more about some of your work on women who are particularly subject to economic discrimination in the country. We already know that women, more than men, are subject to increased levels of poverty, unpaid work, and precarious work compared to men, but I hear particularly from my seat in British Columbia of women who face additional layers of systemic discrimination. Women with disabilities are overrepresented in low-wage positions and they earn less than other women. In British Columbia, for indigenous women, the Highway of Tears has been a particularly visible and tragic example of indigenous women not being able to get to work because of the lack of transportation in their region, and that makes them more vulnerable to sexual predators.

Can you speak more about the lack of policies for indigenous women and other communities that you've seen nationally and some suggestions on what leadership the federal government could take to make sure that those particularly vulnerable groups are respected and accommodated?

Prof. Andrea Doucet: Thank you. That's a great question.

The first thing I would say is that the really frustrating thing about studying parental leave is the lack of comprehensive data. When we started working with the statistics from EI we were told that the statistics were for Quebec and the rest of Canada and then somewhere along in the fine print it was that actually we don't have data on the three territories or for people living on reserves. So we don't actually have any data on indigenous Canadians who live on reserve or indigenous Canadians living in the three territories, in terms of their access to these programs. For us that was one of the most shocking revelations of working with the statistics. So my first point is that we need to learn more.

My second point is on parental leave. I'll talk about parental leave and maternity leave benefits because that's the area I've been working on for quite a while. Their being lodged in the EI program means that they are available for people who are in standardized employment. By design, they exclude all of the people you're talking about. As I said, we don't have good data. Also, the data we do have is not aggregated for indigenous Canadians living in cities.

If longer term we redesign parental leave and maternity leave policies... European countries have zero. They have flat rates by which they give a certain amount of money to new mothers, to new parents. In Sweden there's no minimal contribution or pay that a Swede has to earn in order to qualify for parental leave benefits. I think we need to rethink this as a care policy. It's not an unemployment policy. The way it's designed it only supports people who are in standardized employment. It doesn't support all of the people you are talking about. They don't have access to child care and they don't have access to parental leave benefits. I think we need to think about a redesign and think about child benefits and family supplements in the same package.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thanks. I've got just a minute left.

I'll ask Ms. Ballantyne for a little testimony about the very poor rate of pay for child care workers.

Do you want to add a few words on the impact of that?

• (1030)

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I don't know how much to add except that it's not just an issue of pay. There's a problem of pension coverage, for example. Also, we have a huge problem, and this is recognized everywhere, related to pay, related to benefits, related to working conditions of retention. We have a problem of attracting workers to the profession and we have a problem retaining workers in the profession.

On a day-to-day basis in operating child care, whether it's home based or centre based, it's a problem to have high turnover of staff. It has a huge impact on the quality of the care provided.

The Chair: Excellent.

Now we go to Mr. Serré for seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): *Merci*, Madam Chair.

I'll share my time with Ms. Vandembeld.

Thank you to both witnesses for your dedication and your work and also for the preparation that you did to present to us today.

My first question is about parental leave. We talked about one in 10 Canadian men and nine in 10 men in Quebec. These numbers are shocking. I benefited in the late 1990s. For two of my daughters I took the maximum 10 weeks.

I want to get a sense from you about something. We heard some testimony a while back that, yes, granting more parental leave for men is good but so long as it doesn't take away from maternity leave for women. I want to get a sense of balance. If we're looking at shared responsibilities, is there a conflict with that or are there recommendations that you've made in your studies to enhance a model that is more of a shared responsibility?

Prof. Andrea Doucet: Thank you. That's a very good point.

Again, I'd look to Sweden. They were very clear that they didn't want to take benefits away from women because the policy could then fail. The idea is to keep maternity leave benefits in place and to have designated paternity leave. It has to be designated or men will not take it and it has to be high paid or there's no incentive for them to take it and the family takes a hit economically.

What we've seen with countries like Iceland and also Sweden is that there's a period for the mother and a period for the father and then there's a period when they could both perhaps take some of it. Sweden and Iceland have put in incentives so that there will be more sharing of it. The more sharing of the parental leave, the higher the financial payments Swedish families receive. The reason they've done that is so that it would lead to... These are cultural shifts that take a long time.

We do have the 35 weeks that can be shared, but it tends to be women who take most of that leave. If it was higher paid and if there were incentives for them to share it, I'm sure sharing would happen.

Mr. Marc Serré: Our witness in the previous hour, Ms. Friendly, indicated that a national workforce study framework is needed.

Mr. Fraser talked about the importance of skills development, operations, and infrastructure, when we look at day cares.

Ms. Doucet, you spoke about the EI system versus a care system. We have a maternity leave, a parental leave, and a child care.... To your knowledge—and I congratulate you on being a Canada research chair in gender—are there any studies?

I know you also had the comprehensive national framework policy in component one, but is there any national workforce framework that exists today that looks at that comprehensive care system, instead of having it in silos? Is there something that exists today?

Prof. Andrea Doucet: In Canada, most research has been done in those silos. It's been very interesting to see. This is where Lindsay McKay and I realized....

We participated in a book project that was all on child care and we were the only ones writing about parental leave. In the seminar that we participated in, we realized that there needs to be a more comprehensive conversation.

In Sweden, they look at this as a care policy, so they have a much more systematic framework. It is focused on children and the raising of productive citizens, so it is a care policy that has economic implications.

In Canada, people are just starting to look at this together, but I will look and see what's coming out on that.

• (1035)

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I think Martha Friendly raised this as well in her testimony. What child care advocates have always said is that child care can only be one part of a broader support system for women's equality, for the welfare of children, and for the benefit of families.

It's interesting because you can make the argument for child care that it's good for women's equality. You can make it from the perspective of the rights of the child; children have the right to quality education and care from birth. You can also make the economic argument that it's really good for the economy, and in that respect it benefits everybody.

Mr. Marc Serré: Great, thank you.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I thank all of the witnesses and extend a particular welcome to Ms. Ballantyne.

I note that your organization is based in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean, so welcome to the committee. My question is for you, Ms. Ballantyne. I know that you have talked about a policy framework, and suggested that now is the time to be laying the foundational building blocks. I also noted that you recognize that a lot of this is a provincial jurisdiction and that it can take a decade to be able to negotiate a truly universal system.

There was a framework, the Dryden framework, which was dismantled by the previous government. It had the agreement of the provinces.

How many of these foundational blocks can we draw from that framework? What, in your opinion, are some of the lessons we might be able to learn from that? Do we need to start from scratch, or can we go back to the provinces with something based somewhat on that?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I'm glad you pointed out that we should not be starting from scratch. We've been talking about this issue for too long. Actually, I think in many ways the document that is most instructive is the Katie Cooke task force report. She was appointed by prime minister Trudeau senior in 1984. Two years of work went into developing what exactly the federal government's role could be and what a good framework agreement would be.

It stated that there had to be co-operation among the federal, provincial, and territorial governments and it laid out a path for that to happen. That was in 1984. Recommendations were actually given to the Brian Mulroney government in 1986. Then, yes, we do have the Dryden initiative under the Paul Martin government. It is something that I think can absolutely be built on.

So could the multilateral framework agreement that came before that, that was initiated by Jane Stewart, who was then the minister of whatever it was called then, because I can't remember these name changes.

We have a lot. We know what has to be done. We also have some idea of how much money it's going to cost. All I want to do quickly is point out that actually the Dryden plan, and the federal budget that supported that, offered \$5 billion over five years. If we get what we think we might be getting in the budget tomorrow, which is \$500 million over 10 years—we're talking about \$5 billion over 10 years valued in 2017 dollars—we would actually be doing a lot worse than what we would have done under the previous initiatives.

Money is a big part of it. It has to be enough money. The other thing about the money is it has to ramp up. You can't give a billion dollars in the first year. We won't know what to do with the money. It will be too much. We need a little the first year. We've asked for \$600 million; if we get \$500 million, that's fine for 2017. But every year after we need that, plus more. We can't grow a system, we can't improve quality, and we can't improve access if you're giving the same flat allocation each year. It has to be more. That has to come from the federal government because the federal government has fiscal capacity that the provinces and territories don't have.

We also have to keep in mind that the provinces and the territories have really been shouldering the entire cost for the last decade. It's time for the federal government to get back into the field, as they say. It's hard to avoid sports metaphors. But they really have to get back into the game. They have to pay and show that leadership in money and also in policy development.

The Chair: Very good.

We'll go to our final five minutes of questions from Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Andrea, thanks very much. At the beginning you talked about your husband taking time off and being that rock star or "what's he doing here?" Our son is 14. My husband stayed home with him. When we talk about the bonds, I do see my husband.... He does have shared responsibility. Maybe it's also because I'm in this field of work, but he does have 100% shared responsibility with my son. We see that. I do know that has a great impact.

We talked about the parental leave and if there are top-ups available. Now, we have to recognize that many of the jobs, when we talk of top-ups, are from the public sector. We have to look at the economics here. When we're doing this, what we're asking then of our private sector is to take on a brand new payroll, whether it's going to be a tax or something that they're going to be paying more on.

With where our economy is now, how are our private sector businesses going to be successful if they're topping up a 35% to 40% increase when a person is not at work, and they'll have to pay somebody full time? I understand the rationale, but how does it fiscally work? How does it benefit both the employers and the employees, so the employers can stay in business as well?

●(1040)

Prof. Andrea Doucet: It's a very good question.

The first step would be if the wage replacement rates were higher, for example, if in the rest of Canada we had the same wage replacement rates as Quebec, where the wage replacement rates are 75%.

If we started with higher wage replacement rates that recognize that it's really hard for a family to sustain 55% of pay over a long period of time, and it's really hard for men to give up their pay and take 55% of their pay. If we even just look to Quebec and raise the wage replacement rate, then we would be asking for less of a burden from employers. That would be the first step for me. I think that's where the problem starts: the eligibility criteria needs to be reworked.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Morna, do you have any comments on that?

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I would echo that.

I think it would be really helpful for governments to contribute to or put in place systems that would allow for paid parental leave without individual employees and employers necessarily shouldering the cost.

You will get that, if, as Ms. Doucet said, you see parental leave as a policy in support of families and children in care. You would get more of that than if you see it as an employment policy.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay, fantastic.

Andrea, going back to you, we talked about the 600 hours being too high a ceiling for many women to get to. Rationally, if you're looking at just the numbers, that's 37.5 hours in a 16-week period over a 52-week envelope.

You also mentioned that maybe the work is precarious for women, but at the same time how do we do this? I recognize that there are the employment insurance options for men or women, and if they're entrepreneurs they can put money aside, but what is the holdup? Are you saying that women who are working part time cannot get up to

that 16 weeks of 52-week employment, or are you saying that women are working maybe on contract and that sometimes it should be the employer who should be paying into that?

What is the link here? I think if we're looking at it, many of us have said, well 16 weeks doesn't seem like a lot of time out of a 52-week period, so why are we not making those contributions when, if you're in the workforce, those are mandatory contributions in the first place?

Prof. Andrea Doucet: Well, it has to be with the same employer, so if you're working—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: No, that's not correct.

You can add all your records of employment to add up to 600 hours.

Prof. Andrea Doucet: Okay, thank you. That detail slipped my mind.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Sorry, I did this for 12 years.

Prof. Andrea Doucet: Thank you.

I'm a qualitative researcher, so the statistics tend to fall away from me.

All I would say is that we look at the numbers and we look at how in Quebec the number of low-income mothers earning less than \$30,000 a year are accessing parental leave benefits at a much higher rate than mothers in the rest of Canada.

I think the numbers tell us that a lot of women—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: But what's holding women back from obtaining 16 weeks of full-time work in a 52-week period to make those contributions?

Prof. Andrea Doucet: I go back to the question about very low-income women, women who have mental health issues, the populations in our country who are not able to be in full-time work over a long period of time.

I don't know the answer to the question, but I know that women are not meeting that 600 hours—

●(1045)

The Chair: I'm really sorry, but we're over our time for our meeting today.

I want to thank both of our witnesses for very intelligent and very excellent input to our discussion today. If you have things that you want to send as a result of the discussion, please feel free to send those to the clerk.

Thank you to the committee, and we will see you again on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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