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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 24 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation, and in light of the recommendations from health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on Thursday, November 25, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is also highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. Those attending must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer in the room. Please refrain from coming to the room if you are symptomatic.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute, and your camera must be on.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, May 4, 2022, the committee will consider Bill C-242, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act with regard to temporary resident visas for parents and grandparents.

I would like to welcome Mr. Kyle Seeback, the sponsor of this private member's bill, who will begin with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by rounds of questioning.

Welcome, Mr. Seeback, it's great to have you presenting Bill C-242. I've been part of this committee since 2015, and this is the first time we've had a private member's bill come before the committee.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes, and then members would love to ask you some questions.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I've been a member of Parliament for seven years, and this is the first time I've had a piece of legislation come to committee, so I'm pretty excited about it.

This is a bill to enhance the super visa. Of course, the super visa came out in November 2011 under the Conservative government. It's a multiple-entry visa to allow parents and grandparents to travel to Canada to reunite with their families here. The original super visa allows the family to stay for two years over 10 years. You have

to pass a health check, and you have to purchase private insurance. The sponsoring family has to have a minimum amount of income for you to qualify to come.

It's a very popular tool used to reunite families here in Canada. Over the years, I have certainly heard criticism of a number of aspects of it. Number one is with respect to the amount of time. If someone here in Canada has a child, even someone who is working can have more than a year off to help raise that child. If perhaps a parent—a mother or a father—wanted to come to help with that and they stayed for a year or maybe a year and a half, the time on that visa has almost expired. The two years are almost up. I don't think two years is long enough. A family could be having multiple children. There, again, I think the two years is certainly not long enough.

You can, of course, apply for an extension. I recognize that, but given the demands at IRCC with respect to various applications, why do we want people to have to submit another application that has to be processed for there to be an extension? I think five years is a very reasonable amount of time over a 10-year period.

Someone could come, for example, for five months, a year or 10 years and spend significant amounts of time with their children and their grandchildren. This is a significant boon to the family, not just for spending time with their family, but the studies really show that there's an economic boost to a family when they have a parent or grandparent come and stay. Maybe they take an extra shift at work because they have some extra help at home.

I think the time extension is reasonable and will be well used by Canadian families.

The second part of my bill is going to allow for the purchase of insurance from a country outside of Canada. I've had a lot of questions on why I would want to do that. I'm just going to briefly talk about this.

Purchasing health insurance for the duration of the stay of the super visa can be quite expensive. It can be between \$1,700 and \$4,600 a year for someone in their early seventies with no pre-existing medical condition. That's a significant cost to a family—especially a new family.

What I see is that this would create competition. It would also allow someone to purchase the insurance in the currency of the country they're coming from, which I think can also make it more affordable.

People are asking how they will be able to determine what a valid insurance company is, so the Canadian taxpayer isn't left on the hook for a hospital bill, for example. To that, I say that right now we pre-approve doctors to give those medical clearance certificates when someone is coming to this country. If we can actually take the time to determine which doctors we should trust to do these certificates, surely we can find some health insurance companies around the world in most countries that have proper assets and all these other kinds of things. That's why I put in here that it is "approved by the Minister". This doesn't mean you can go to any insurance company anywhere in the world. I'm encouraging the minister to set up a framework for the ground rules for when an insurance company would qualify, so that people can purchase insurance outside of the country.

The final part of the bill is asking for the government to reduce the low-income cut-off. The reason I ask for it is this: The view that bringing a parent or a grandparent to stay with you is an economic burden is wrong. What I actually found, from doing a little bit of research, is that when a parent or grandparent comes, it enhances the economic well-being of that family. It does that on a number of levels. It can be that they're providing some reduction of day care costs because the parent or grandparent is there to help with the family. It can provide opportunities for the child here in Canada because the parents can take an extra shift at work. They could have some extra time to be able to go out and get additional education.

• (1110)

I'm looking forward to your questions, and I hope that we will pass this bill out of committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

We will now go to our round of questioning. We will start with Mr. Benzen.

Mr. Benzen, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can please go ahead.

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Seeback, for being here today. Congratulations on bringing forward this great bill, your first private member's bill.

Just in general, can you elaborate a bit more on why you brought forward this bill? Why did you pick this as your first private member's bill?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Originally, I represented a riding in Brampton. It was the largest riding by population in the country, and it was incredibly diverse. What I've learned through my time in Brampton, and even in my riding now in different cultural communities, is the absolute importance of family and how important it is to have family be able to come and spend time with you.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

There was no interpretation, but I see that the problem has been resolved.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, please go ahead.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: It's the importance of having your family here. When I think about it, I was very fortunate. I was born here. My parents and grandparents were here, and I had lots of extended family. When you think about someone whose family decides to move their entire life—it doesn't matter from where—to come here and the challenges that are associated with that, whether that's trying to find employment or to learn a new culture and all these kinds of things, having the opportunity to have your family here really helps you through that transition.

Yes, of course, we do have a category of immigration where you can permanently bring your parents and grandparents here. We all know the challenges with that. There are a limited number of spaces and high demand. I'm not saying that the super visa will take that away, but I think it provides another avenue for families to spend a significant amount of time together, and we know the benefits of that.

Parents and grandparents pass on cultural knowledge to their children and grandchildren and, as I said, there are economic opportunities that happen. For me, Canada is a country of immigration, and we want to make that as positive an experience for new Canadians as possible, and that's really why I'm trying to enhance the super visa, so more parents can come and they can spend more time with their families.

Mr. Bob Benzen: One of the big factors in your bill is to lower the income cut-off point. We know in Canada that, if you live in Toronto, it's very expensive compared to, say, living in Saskatoon. Should we look at the regional disparities in terms of the cost of living and how we can adjust that to make it more fair for where people are living and the costs they're facing?

• (1115)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I think it's challenging to try to determine that across the country. I'm not sure that I'd want there to be a patchwork of different income levels.

Look, I'll be very forthright. I think the income test for this category of immigration should be eliminated entirely. I just don't know that we're ready to do that yet. I don't believe there's a cost to having your parents or grandparents come and stay with you. I know that, when my parents have come to stay with me, it was not a significant increased cost in my household, and I think that's the same case for new Canadians. What we see over and over again, in fact, is that this is an economic gain for families that bring their parents or grandparents here.

Why are we suggesting that you have to have a certain amount of income in order to bring parents or grandparents here? I don't think it makes sense, and if we can't eliminate it, let's significantly reduce it, because the people who are affected the most by the LICO are not the family that's been here for 20 years and is well established. They are the new family that's been here for two or three years, and that's the time when they probably need family here the most. That's why I think we should reduce it.

Mr. Bob Benzen: Since you introduced this bill, what response have you been getting from Canadians? What have you been hearing back? What are their thoughts on this bill? Are Canadians in general for this?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: The people I've talked to across my riding and across the country think it's a great bill. They really want the opportunity to make it easier for families to come and spend time together here in Canada.

Overwhelmingly, the response has been extraordinarily positive. Along the way, I've had many people suggest that the bill doesn't go far enough in a couple of aspects. I'm always open to people who want to make the bill better. The only concern I have heard is with respect to purchasing insurance from outside of Canada. I do believe that the bill presents a framework and that the minister can address all of those concerns by prescribing the qualifications that the insurance company has to have in order to be listed as an insurance company that you can purchase health insurance from.

This is a bill that I think all parties can support and all parties can feel good about because it's going to make it so much easier for families to spend time together, and they don't have to apply for a regular visa.

We all know too many stories where you can't get a parent here for the death of a child. They didn't make it to the funeral because they couldn't get the visa. This would help make sure that situations like that don't happen. I can't imagine if I couldn't go to my brother's funeral in the U.K. because I didn't get a visa. We want to fix things like that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

The time is up for Mr. Benzen. We will now proceed to Ms. Kayabaga.

Ms. Kayabaga, you have six minutes. Please begin.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to start by congratulating Mr. Seeback on the tabling of his PMB. I know that it's not an easy process, so congratulations, and welcome back to our committee.

I want to get back to the health insurance policy that you were talking about. We've also heard concerns that people have about procuring health insurance when they're coming to Canada. There is still a burden in verifying insurance from an international health insurance provider.

Can you comment on those concerns, what this bill does to address those issues and how we can make sure that people are not getting cheated while they're trying to get health insurance? I know you're trying to approach it in a way so that it can be affordable, but

how do we know that people are not going to invest money in health insurance that's not going to turn up?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you for the question. I'm concerned with that as well. The last thing I want is for someone to come here having purchased insurance from elsewhere and find that the insurance actually isn't going to cover what it is that they have here.

The government has made it clear that Canadian insurance companies have to have certain assets, a certain policy that's in place. They prescribe what all those rules are. In order for a Canadian insurance company to have insurance that you can buy, there have to be certain qualifications. I think you can use those same qualifications to approve international insurance companies.

I commented briefly on this in my remarks. All across the globe right now, when you are coming to this country, whether it's through family reunification or parent and grandparent, you have to have a valid health check. You have to be in good health. Canada has gone around the world and said that these are the doctors you can go to. You can't just go to any doctor. You have to go to certain specific doctors who the government has determined are trustworthy and thinks will not be subject to influence and will give a valid health check. So—

• (1120)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I'm sorry. I don't mean to cut you off at all, but it's for the sake of time. Are you saying that it could be any health insurance that is also Canadian or just international?

On that point, what kind of safeguards would there be, and who would be in charge of putting in place these safeguards to make sure that there not a theft situation in that process?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: This would be approved by the minister.

I have faith—Conservative colleagues, don't attack me for this—that the government can actually do this. It has put in place a system for Canadian insurance companies, a system for doctors. I have faith that it can put in place a robust system that will allow for the purchase of insurance from countries around the world. I have faith that it can set up the parameters and do whatever investigations are necessary.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: On that same question—I apologize that I'm taking a lot of time on this, but your answers keep giving me more questions—when you say “approved by the minister”, do you foresee this being a predetermined list of international health providers who meet Canadian standards? Does such a list currently exist? What criteria do people need to be on that list?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Obviously, there's no current list of this. This bill was challenging to draft, because the super visa is mostly through ministerial instruction, and that's not something you can legislate, so I've had to try to nibble around the corners, I guess, for a way to do it. I'm putting the onus on the government and on the minister to set up the framework to make sure that there is valid insurance from other countries and that the Canadian health care system won't be on the hook from an insurance company that cannot pay.

Now, the minister may choose not to approve anyone. That's going to be the government's decision. I don't think that's the right decision. I think they can put the work into doing this and doing it properly because, as I said, if you can investigate doctors around the world to make sure they're legitimate, surely you can investigate billion-dollar insurance companies from countries around the world.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: You know that ministerial instructions can be created in a matter of weeks, whereas legislative changes can take years to finalize. Do you have any concerns around that?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Look, I don't know how quickly the government is going to move to set up this insurance framework. I hope they would do it expeditiously, because I think it's so important for Canadian families. Will it take a year, or will it take two years? It might, but if it does, in the end it will allow for the purchase of insurance from other countries, and I think it's worth the wait. I honestly do. We should get it right. The government should do the hard work necessary, but it will be so great for Canadian families.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

I think I have 30 seconds left for my last question.

The super visa has been popular since its introduction, with over 139,000 visas issued and an approval rate of approximately 80%. Considering the known success of this program, why did you choose this PMB? What differences are in this program other than what we already have?

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have six minutes. You can please begin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague Mr. Seeback for his initiative and I commend him for it. I'm very pleased that he is with us today.

I'm going to go back to the question Ms. Kayabaga asked about the process for setting up a framework for foreign insurers.

As I understand it, Bill C-242 puts everything in the minister's hands in terms of setting up a framework for private insurers.

Is that correct?

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I don't think that I can draft those rules. I worked very hard with the drafters to try to come up with a solution, and we really couldn't. I don't have the resources of the government to go through and figure out all the things that need to be done. I think the fair thing to do is to put it back on the government to draft. Whatever those rules and requirements are going to be with respect to the insurance, they have the department. They have far more expertise than I do, and I think it's doable. Again, given that they are able to approve individual doctors, I think they can approve some large insurance companies from other countries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand that very well and it's completely legitimate. However, this framework absolutely must be set up before the bill is passed. If we pass the bill before we have a framework for foreign insurers, it would be like putting the cart before the horse.

Would you agree that the framework needs to be set up before the bill is passed? If not, it will turn into the wild West outside this country as far as insurers are concerned.

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: The actual bill adds a section. It's proposed section 15.1, which says, "A health insurance policy purchased from an insurance company outside Canada that is approved by the Minister satisfies any requirement in an instruction"—we're talking about a ministerial instruction—"given under subsection 15(4)".

If the government doesn't approve any, it doesn't approve any. That is legitimately what the government may choose to do. That is fine. The language in this bill doesn't allow someone to purchase insurance from, let's say, an insurance company in India and then claim the bill said that if they could buy insurance, they could come. It doesn't say that. It says that it has to be approved by the government.

The way I envision it is that the government would put a list of trusted insurance partners that you can buy insurance from, much like it has a list of doctors. The government, of course, will choose how it does this, and it will do the hard work to determine which ones should be on that list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You set limits to ensure that it can't turn into the wild West outside Canada, because the bill requires that insurance companies be approved, and that's a good thing.

One part of the bill that stands out the most is it allows applicants to be insured by companies outside Canada. That will spark healthy competition between insurers. It will save people money. I think everyone agrees on that.

In reality, you're asking the government to immediately look into what foreign insurers could be approved before the bill gets passed.

In my opinion, that's one of the most important things in the bill.

Am I mistaken?

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Ideally, I'd like the government to move very quickly to put together a list of insurance companies all across the world outside of Canada. It may choose not to do that, for a variety of reasons, and it may decide that we're not going to approve a single insurance company.

I'm prepared to accept that, in which case this section of the bill just sits there. It's not an enabling section that says you can go and buy insurance and take that to the government and ask if it is okay. It does not say that. It says that you can buy from an insurance company that is approved by the minister, so the government is going to have to set up a list of approved insurance companies you can purchase from.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Perfect.

I think the process is well defined, and I commend you for that. We hope the government will do its job, but I think they have shown that they're open to it.

In response to a question I believe Mr. Benzen asked, you said that some people felt the bill didn't go far enough. However, you didn't say why they felt that way.

Can you elaborate on that?

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: A lot of people think we should eliminate the low-income test altogether because it disenfranchises so many Canadians, especially newer Canadians who are working to establish themselves here in this country. As I said, that is the time when you really need your family even more. They are saying to me that I should have said the LICO test is out. That's what people have said, that it didn't go far enough.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes. You can begin, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the member, and congratulations on getting the bill passed at second reading and brought to committee.

I want to follow up on the question of affordability. You were just saying that community groups.... In fact, back in 2016 at the CIMM committee, we heard from witnesses about the family reunification issues, particularly for parents and grandparents. The issue of affordability was raised, as was the issue of medical coverage.

To the point around affordability and the wage requirement that is being put in, do you have any perspective on what that minimum threshold should be? As it stands right now, it's too high. It's impossible. I shouldn't say "impossible", but it is very limiting. It is abso-

lutely a major barrier for many families that hope to reunite with their loved ones.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I don't have an exact number that I would say, but I did read the committee report that was produced. On page 46 of that report, it actually talks about this. Several witnesses recommended that the MNI be repealed entirely. That testimony was here.

Look, if it's a 25% reduction, that's great. I think that would open this up to far more families. If it's a 30% reduction, that's even better. If it's 50%, I'm even happier. For me, the more we can reduce the minimum income requirement, the better.

I would go back to the reasons I mentioned before. Very new Canadians would benefit the most from being able to have a parent or a grandparent here while they're trying to establish themselves. Most new Canadians are not high-income earners. They're trying to establish their career or other things. Having a parent there or a grandparent would really help with that.

So, it's over to the Liberal government: Slash it down 50% or more.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You're saying 50% or more. Would you agree that it should be eliminated altogether?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I do think it should be eliminated, yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Your bill only calls for a report from the minister on reducing the minimum requirements. It is not in the actual bill itself. Of course, there are various limitations with private members' bills, so I understand that.

How can we ensure that the minister follows through with an actual reduction?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: The short answer is that we cannot. The minister is supposed to prepare a report on reducing the minimum income requirement. But there's also the option that the minister does not, and then just reports why they decided not to do it. That's in clause 5, which says, "If, within two years after this Act receives royal assent, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration does not reduce the minimum income requirement...the Minister must table in each House of Parliament a statement of the reasons for not doing so."

This was a very challenging bill to draft, as I said, because so much of this relies on ministerial instruction. As well, the minimum income test is also for different types of applications. It was a complicated drafting process. In the end, this was the recommendation that I accepted from the drafters. We're asking the minister to do it, but if not, then explain why not. It's not perfect, but I'm hoping it will accomplish what we want.

• (1135)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that.

I just want to point out that arising from the 2016 study, one of the recommendations from the committee was that IRCC “explore alternative options for accepting a broader range of health insurance coverage options outside the Canadian market that meets Canadian standards for coverage; and consult with domestic health insurance providers to ensure fairness to families in Canada.” It's been six years, of course, since that report and since that recommendation was made, and nothing has happened. Here we are with this bill.

I'm glad to see this bill. I support this bill, because I do think we need to look for alternatives to make it more affordable. Hopefully, this will move this forward, instead of just asking the minister to consider it and then nothing happens.

I'd like to touch on this other issue. I spoke with a family that had their application rejected in the third year of their income proof because the family's income dipped due to unexpected circumstances. In this instance, the baby came early. As a result, the person who made the application for the family had to go on maternity leave. For one month she went on mat leave, and then right after she went back to work, making the same salary she was before. But because her income dipped for that one month, they were disqualified. They lost that application.

Does the member agree that there should be an appeal process for extenuating circumstances?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I would be 100% open to that. When there are exceptional circumstances, I think those should be looked at. I don't think the tests should be rigidly applied. I had people in a similar circumstance. They didn't quite make the income requirement in one of the years, and therefore they were disqualified.

So yes, I would be very open to an amendment that looks at how we can try to make that a little bit better. My goal is that vastly more families qualify for a super visa. That's the goal of this bill.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you have five minutes. Please begin.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to congratulate my colleague Mr. Seeback and thank him and the team he has behind him for all their hard work in putting this together. As he has stated, it wasn't an easy bill to draft. We are here now in committee talking about it, so congratulations.

Right now, we're seeing a huge affordability issue in this country. I want to ask my colleague Mr. Seeback to speak a bit more about how this helps to address that for those families that are trying to get help and bring their parents over.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I think that the minimum income test is old and it doesn't reflect the new reality of the world. I'm really hoping the government will significantly reduce the minimum income requirement to allow more parents and grandparents.

I think we're looking at around 20,000 super visas issued a year. What are the immigration levels, 450,000? That's a pretty small percentage. I'd like to increase that. I think this is really clear.

There is not a significant financial burden for having a parent or a grandparent come and stay in your house. The belief that it is a financial burden is false, quite frankly. We know that when bringing a parent in, they're going to stay in your home. What's your extra cost? Maybe it's some additional food, and I don't even think it's that much. What we also know is that this can contribute to the economic well-being of those families. This can provide some additional child care, for example. Maybe it allows them to pick up an extra shift on the weekend, because they have a parent who will now be at home and be able to take care of the children. Maybe they decide on weekends that they're going to try to further their education or get additional training and therefore improve the economics of the family.

I think that more families having access to this is not only good for the families.... I'm not even talking about the social aspects of having a parent or a grandparent around. For so many families in so many cultures in Canada, this is a critical thing. My family was a nuclear family, but there are many cultures in Canada that have multi-generational families. This would help to encourage that. There's the social and cultural aspect of it.

I don't think the economic aspect of it can be overestimated. It's good for the family, which is good for the country. That's why I'm doing this.

• (1140)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you so much, Mr. Seeback.

I'd agree with you. In many of our constituencies, we can say this is a big deal. This is something that we know would help strengthen, as you said, the family structure here in Canada.

We saw throughout the last two years that people needed support at home, whether it was for child care.... I had a couple of cases in my office where there was a child who had special needs and they needed a parent here. It was so important for them to have that, not just for the child care part, but for the mental health part.

Could you touch upon the mental health piece of this? How important is it? How could this bill also help their family structure here in Canada?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I think for anyone who's going through a hard time, the ability to have a parent or a grandparent come and stay with them is going to be 100% beneficial for someone who's struggling, whether they're struggling with some mental health issues or through the pandemic.

We really have to change our thinking on this. I'm going to keep going back to this. We have to change the thinking that having a parent or a grandparent come and stay with a family here is an economic burden to the family and to Canada. I fundamentally disagree with that. I have far too many friends whose families have accessed the super visa and they've told me how beneficial it is—I'll say it again—not just economically, but socially. Parents and grandparents pass on language, culture and traditions. All of these things are good for families.

We should all want to have far more families being able to bring their parents and grandparents here for the variety of benefits.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I'd probably like to add that our parents also keep us in line.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mrs. Lalonde for five minutes.

You can please proceed.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Equally, I want to echo my colleagues and congratulate you. This is a huge aspect of being a parliamentarian and seeing this come to committee. I say congratulations, and I really mean it.

On a more personal note, my husband is an immigrant, and welcomed in 1995 his grandparents. At the time, I was pregnant, and they came here for the first time to Canada. Then, upon their return, sadly the grandfather passed away, so I can share how important it is to see our parents and our grandparents as we make Canada our new home. I appreciate this.

I do have questions about the super visa. As you pointed out during your statement, it was established by ministerial instruction on December 1, 2011, by the minister of citizenship and immigration and the minister of public safety at the time. It was pursuant to the authority found in subsection 15(4) of the act.

I want to hear about why your bill requests that the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act be amended to include the super visa, rather than to leave it in through ministerial instruction.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm happy to answer that question. I think there's a really good sense of collegiality and unity right now around the table, so I'm just going to preface my remarks by saying, please don't be offended by what I'm going to say.

We've passed motions in this Parliament, for example the motion on the 988 suicide line. I think we're at close to 600 days, and it hasn't happened. I could have done a motion that was very aspirational, and hoped that the government would take action and that these things would be done. My fear is that it actually would not have been done, because we've seen that with a number of motions in Parliament. I'm not criticizing the government. I know some of these things can be quite complicated, and something like this would be quite complicated as well.

I think Canadian families need relief sooner rather than later. I used to be a lawyer. I don't practise anymore, and I've never drafted

legislation. When I look at this bill, I think I did the best that I could working with the drafters. It gives us something now. It prescribes some rules around the minister giving instructions. That's how it's drafted. It's saying, "If the minister is going to give instructions on this, it has to have this." As I see it, it's the best way to deal with the situation, rather than doing a motion and hoping something comes out of it.

• (1145)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: On that front, I'm going to ask you this. I had the privilege, in a former life, of being a minister, and certainly ministerial instruction can be created in a matter of weeks, whereas legislative change often takes years to finalize. Are you concerned that enshrining new and untested conditions in the act could make it difficult to adapt the super visa in response to any potential unfavourable or unanticipated outcomes from the proposed changes?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I don't think so, because all the bill does is basically give some guardrails—I don't know what the best description is—on some ministerial instructions specifically with respect to the super visa. There are guardrails here. If you're going to give an instruction on this, it also has to pass between these two guardrails.

Ministerial instructions can be done very quickly. I was just concerned that they wouldn't actually happen, so I thought the legislative way was the way to actually do it.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: To finalize, I'm going to ask this very quickly. Did you consider amending the immigration and refugee protection regulations rather than the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, so it would be more in line with other temporary residence programs?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm not an expert in drafting legislation. I worked very hard with the Library of Parliament to come up with the bill the way it is, and this is how it was recommended to me to do it. I'm trusting their expertise that this is the best way to go about it. I know we're going to have some lawyers come to testify at committee—I have some coming—and I'm sure they'll provide some more expertise.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Seeback, the length of stay now granted by the super visa allows people to apply for permanent residence under better conditions. However, Bill C-242 implies a need to ensure that the family member will voluntarily leave Canada once their visit is over.

Isn't that contradictory?

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I think that's something we should probably discuss at committee, whether this would give someone an opportunity to make a different application. But I also think that you can't draft for every possible alternative that happens with respect to people. Whether that's going to be a risk, I don't know. Maybe the committee is going to come back after looking at this and say it should be four years or it should be three years. My goal was to extend it, and I'm certainly open to discussions on what that actual extension should be.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: As part of our study on international students, we discussed the issue of dual intent.

An Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada officer might refuse to grant a super visa to an individual on the grounds that, in their opinion, the individual will not return to their country once their stay in Canada is over. At the same time, that person can apply for permanent residence here.

Again, is that not a dual intent situation? Wouldn't that be risky?

Because of the visa's length of stay, the risk is even greater that these individuals' applications will be rejected because an officer might believe that they will not return to their country afterwards.

Given that, perhaps another guideline is in order.

What do you think?

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: That's always a risk. Someone who comes now on a temporary resident visa or a visitor visa can make an H and C application. Officers make the assessment whether they think the person is not going to return to their home country. These risks are always there whenever you're granting temporary resident status in Canada. I don't think this would lead to a massive amount of rejections by extending the time. Again, if we hear at committee that it should be four years, I'm open to that.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

[English]

The Chair: We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have two and a half minutes. You can please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

Alternatively, witnesses could say that it should be six years. In any event, I'll leave that be.

I think you raised a significant point, and that is the contributions of parents and grandparents. So often those contributions are not accounted for and they're not even evaluated. It is always viewed as though somehow they are just going to be a drain on our society.

I would like to hear from your perspective how IRCC can better evaluate those contributions and ensure that they are considered in the parents/grandparents immigration stream.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I think they have to. One of the recommendations from that report—and I read it in great detail—is recommendation 35, which says, “That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada gather data on the economic contribution to the family unit of the sponsored parents and/or grandparents who take care of children.” I don't know if that was done. It was a recommendation. I do think that it should be done.

The economic contribution of parents and grandparents to this country is enormous and we should 100% be looking at that. That's not to mention, as I keep going on about, that the cultural and social aspect is equally, critically important. When our parents would come to stay with me, my brother and I would often joke that when parents visit they should stay about the amount of time that it takes for fish to start not smelling good in your refrigerator.

But that's not the experience with so many communities in this country. They want their parents and grandparents here. They have multi-generational homes that add so much to the fabric of that family and the fabric of our country. That should be just as important as the economic aspect, because we want healthy families and healthy communities.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much for that.

To my knowledge, on that recommendation, I've never seen any data that's been gathered and shared back with the committee, or anywhere else for that matter. I do think it is absolutely critical.

I can tell you, for one, that when I was pregnant with my daughter, I was so lucky because my mom had just retired, and she was able to help me. It was the only way I could have done my job as a member of the Legislative Assembly at that time as a first-time mother. I can see the relationship they have built. It is beautiful to see. My mom is 83 years old now, and she's closest to my daughter out of all the grandchildren because of that time they spent together. My daughter even speaks Cantonese, although not as well as I would like, but still. It's because of the contributions that my mom made in caring for her.

The Chair: The time is up, Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have four minutes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: No, it's Mr. Redekopp.

The Chair: Mr. Redekopp, you will have four minutes. Please begin.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Seeback, for this awesome legislation.

I want to pick up on what Ms. Kwan was speaking about as well. I've witnessed in my riding families that I've gotten to know, and as you pointed out, newcomer families often struggle with learning the language and learning the culture. I've seen them burdened with all of these tasks—raising a family, becoming acclimatized and all that. Then I've noticed when their parents have come. You can see how the family dynamic changes. All of a sudden, things perk up. There's more time. They can get out and do things. I want to agree with this. It would be a very interesting thing to study at the committee.

In terms of your legislation, I assume that you consulted with different people. For example, one of the questions I would ask is why you picked two to five years. Maybe part of the answer is about the question of consultations. Could you explain a little more about some of the people and different areas that you consulted as you were developing this legislation?

• (1155)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I think Mr. Dhaliwal and my colleague Mr. Hallan will appreciate this. I represented a riding in Brampton that had a very large Punjabi community, and in my current riding, Dufferin—Caledon, there is also a very large Punjabi community. Even for parents who are here with PR, who go through the parent and grandparent family reunification class, once they're here and everything's established, they often only come for four or five months. They don't want to be here in the winter, and they have a much larger social network back in Punjab, for example, so they leave.

In talking to those families, I looked at it like this: They could come for five months a year for 10 years. That means they're never going to miss anything. For anything important that happens in that family, they're going to be there. If there are multiple children, they're going to be there. If there's a death in the family, they're going to be there. It gives that extra amount of time to make sure that you're not missing a wedding, that you're not missing a funeral and that you're not missing the birth of a child. In my mind, that's how I did it: come for May, June, July, August and September, and avoid the Canadian winter, as we would all like to. That's really how it came to me.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: That sounds pretty reasonable.

On the insurance concerns, I know there have been a few concerns listed and even talked about here today, and you've spoken about this already, but maybe once again explain why we shouldn't be worried about people being ripped off, for example, by an insurance company and how you're confident that this will work.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I can see the responses in question period after I answer these questions: “Well, the member for Dufferin—Caledon says he has faith in the government.” To all my colleagues asking questions and getting that answer, I apologize.

Look, I just think the government can do it. They have the capacity to set the framework for what an insurance company has to have, to go through it and to do that vetting process. Insurance companies may decide they want to apply to be licensed or somehow regulated to provide this service in Canada because there's an economic argument for it. I think it's possible. I don't think it's all that difficult, and I think the government, if they want to, can actually get this done and get it done reasonably quickly.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: I have one last question. What's your elevator pitch? You're sitting with an immigrant family. Why should they support this bill?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: This is going to allow them to spend so much more time with their family. They would not have to worry about getting a visa rejected for a wedding or for anything else. This bill means that the family will be together.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now end our panel with Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. El-Khoury, you have four minutes. You can proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Seeback, and thank you for your bill.

Are you aware that medical services and responsibility for their delivery rests on provincial governments, not the federal government?

Have you consulted provincial and territorial governments? If so, what were their views on this matter?

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: No, I have not consulted provincial governments.

I do understand that health care is a provincial responsibility. The federal government has set the requirements for insurance companies here in Canada for people to be able to access health care in the provinces. If they can set the requirements for insurance companies here in Canada for a family to come and protect provincial health insurance plans with insurance, I think they can do the same thing here. I don't think it infringes on provincial jurisdiction or anything like that, because the government is already doing it. They're telling Sun Life of Canada what they have to have in place for someone to purchase private health insurance, and I think they can do that with countries around the world and not cause problems for the provinces.

The provinces may have something to say when the government is putting this together, and if they do, that would be welcome, but I don't think it's an insurmountable issue.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Don't you think that if you had consulted the provinces and territories, you could have relied on their support?

Wouldn't that help you in your efforts at the federal level?

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Sure, I think it would.

I don't know what the process was when the federal government decided to say that you have to purchase private health insurance from a Canadian insurance company. Did they consult the provinces? I'm not 100% sure. I think they probably put something in place. I think they can probably do the same thing here, but if provinces want to have input on that, they should provide that input to the federal government, your government, as I anticipate your government very quickly moving to establish these parameters and approving certain insurance companies.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: For customers, one of the advantages of having local health insurance is that it often offers direct billing in the country it covers.

Do you know if international health insurance providers offer direct billing in Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I don't know. If that's what the government decides is the requirement, then that will be the requirement. The government has the authority to make the decisions on what those requirements are. I encourage the government to set those requirements in a way that's going to protect Canadian taxpayers and protect the health insurance system.

Honestly, I think you guys can do it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Have you considered the fact that the absence of direct billing may put an additional financial burden on super visa holders and their sponsors?

I'd like to give you an example of a situation that occurred in my riding.

A family came to Canada and the woman had a heart attack. The medical bill was over \$60,000. They came to my office to get help.

Can you explain what would happen in a situation like that?

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Again, I think I put it back to the government; the government can make the decision. If they want to say that a foreign insurance company can only be eligible to provide this insurance if they have direct billing, then that would solve that problem. I leave it to the expertise of the government to make that determination.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury. Your time is up.

With that, I will take a moment to thank Mr. Seeback for appearing before the committee today and for bringing this bill forward.

Of course, parents and grandparents are an asset to all of us. I came here as an immigrant, and I missed having grandparents around for my kids. That is the cost I paid for living here.

Thank you for that.

We will suspend the meeting.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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