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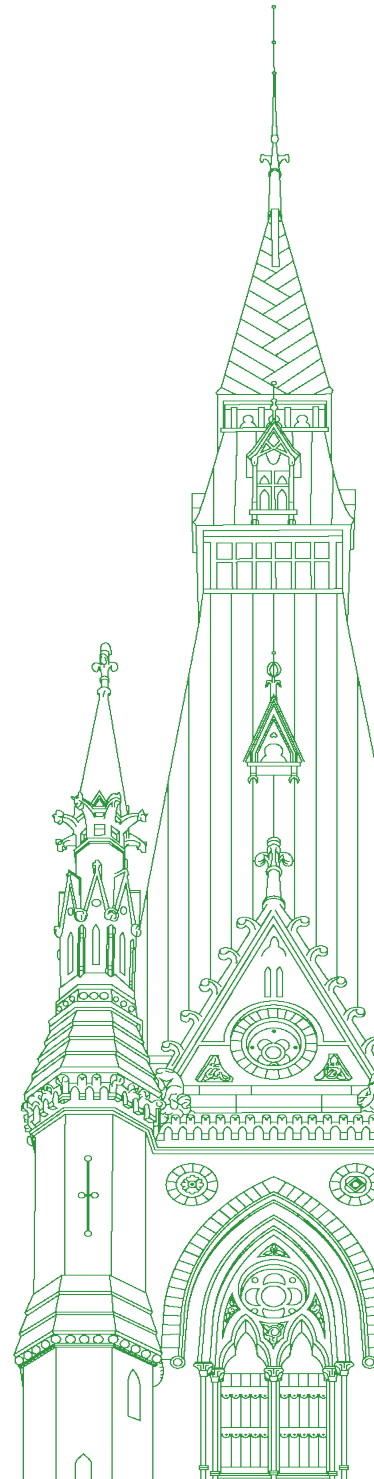
Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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Tuesday, February 6, 2024

Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 94 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. I won't go through all of the things, but I will just remind everyone that if you are not using your microphone, ensure that it's off. Make sure you do not put your earpiece beside the microphone.

There are different channels that you can select for English or French translation, because I know that some of the questions will be in French today.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please raise your hand, as well, from there.

It's very exciting to have all of us together and returning to our study. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 21, 2023, we will continue our study on women's economic empowerment.

I would like to welcome our first panel for today. Each speaker will be given five minutes for their opening statement. Karen Campbell is the senior director of community initiatives with the Canadian Women's Foundation. She is on video conference. In the room, we have Jamie McMillan, who is the founder of Made in the Trades, and we also have Caitlin Morrison, who is the director of operations and communications for The Prosperity Project.

We'll begin with five minutes for Karen, who is online.

Ms. Karen Campbell (Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation): Good morning. I'm Karen Campbell from the Canadian Women's Foundation, Canada's public foundation for gender justice and equality. I'm joining today from London, Ontario, on the traditional territories of the Attawandaron, Anishinabe, Lunaapéewak and Haudenosaunee peoples.

Thank you for the invitation to speak on the pressing issue of women's economic empowerment. Women, particularly Black, racialized, migrant and low-income women, bore the brunt of economic losses in the pandemic. An uncertain recovery has ushered in neither stability nor security. Those who experienced the most

marginalization are feeling cost-of-living pressures disproportionately.

For close to 30 years we have funded organizations serving women and gender-diverse people in the community economic development sector. We have invested more than \$17 million in programs supporting them to pursue careers in the lucrative trades and tech industries, to explore self-employment and to join the social finance ecosystem.

Despite significant gains in women's educational attainment, many of the barriers to entry and advancement that we saw in the 1990s remain. Representation is still woefully inadequate in the tech and trade sectors. The gender pay gap persists; workplace violence and sexual harassment occur at alarming rates; not enough workplaces have embraced flexible work schedules to accommodate caregiving needs; and sexist workplace cultures persist, hindering women's economic empowerment.

At the foundation we know that funding community-based, labour market-access programs is vitally important. However, it is only a partial solution when the work environment's diverse women and gender-diverse workers enter, and it is set up to exclude them. Transformative culture shifts in male-dominated sectors and policies that support system changes are needed to achieve women's economic empowerment.

In recent years, we've seen an exciting example of this kind of transformative change. For a decade, we funded an organization called Women Unlimited, which partnered with Nova Scotia Community College to provide preapprenticeship training and wraparound supports to women entering the skilled trades. In 2021 that program was formally integrated into the college system, and a wraparound support fund for women was established to enable their full participation in their educational program. The integration of Women Unlimited into the college system demonstrates the school's commitment to providing the gender-specific supports that students need when training for and entering a male-dominated field.

At the foundation we have taken on a range of strategic partnerships that build momentum for transformative change. For example, in 2018 we partnered with YWCA Canada, Catalyst Canada and Plan International Canada on a project called “In Good Company”, through which we work with a small, motivated group of businesses in the skilled trades and tech sectors to enhance their diversity, equity and inclusion practices with a view to modelling what it takes to build more inclusive and welcoming workplaces for diverse women and gender-diverse people.

Over the decades, we have seen that women and gender-diverse people often turn to self-employment because of the barriers and forms of discrimination they encounter in the labour market. Many of these entrepreneurs are motivated by social justice goals, and they are not interested in replicating the barriers and challenges that have impeded their economic empowerment.

Last year we welcomed funding through the Government of Canada's women entrepreneurship strategy, which has enabled us to support Black, indigenous and racialized women and gender-diverse entrepreneurs, to build businesses grounded in feminist business practices that foster inclusive workplaces and to build equitable local economies. Continued federal investment in the women entrepreneurship strategy holds considerable transformative potential.

Since 2019 we have also invested in 90 diverse social-purpose enterprises led by women and gender-diverse people through our investment readiness program, which is funded by Employment and Social Development Canada. Through this program, we are supporting innovative entrepreneurs to join the social innovation ecosystem. Strengthening these organizations ensures that they can thrive and keep making a positive impact in communities all over the country. This highly effective program is coming to an end in March 2024. We hope to see it renewed and extended to match the full 10 years of the social finance fund.

That being said, the economic empowerment of women and gender-diverse people requires more than the kinds of investments that the Canadian Women's Foundation can make, even though it is Canada's largest foundation focused on gender equity.

Systems change, such as the development of national, affordable child care, closing the gender pay gap through effective pay equity policies, and creating affordable housing targeted to women and their families, is essential. These strategies, along with ensuring that workplaces are violence- and harassment-free, are crucial to setting a stage on which programs and individual efforts can achieve individual empowerment.

Thank you.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Karen. You can tell that you've done this before. You were at five minutes on the dot.

We're now going to move over, and we will be speaking to Jamie McMillan, who is the founder of Made in the Trades.

Jamie, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jamie McMillan (Founder, Made in the Trades): All right. I'm very new at this, but thank you very much.

I'm speaking from the perspective of a woman in the trades. By “woman in the trades”, I mean that I am a contract worker, so it's very different from full-time employment. I am a very proud woman in trades and love to support women in trades; however, I promote everyone in trades. I am about equality, inclusion and diversity.

Recruitment is very easy. I am part of an effort to recruit the next generation of skilled trades workers through Made in the Trades, where I'm a professional speaker through KickAss Careers and Made in the Trades, as well as an educator for kids in school, all the way from pre-kindergarten right through to kids of all ages who will listen to me, and that's including full-grown adults.

I love speaking to kids, and I do speak to kids all over North America, and specifically across Ontario. I get to speak to employers as well. My message to kids is always the same. It's about promoting and supporting skilled trades as a viable career pathway for anyone, regardless of differences.

I don't find that recruitment is an issue at all. I find recruitment very easy. Retention, however, is not as easy. Instead of looking at people entering into the trades, I would like to see the statistics for people retiring from the trades. I think the numbers would be extremely different.

There is a lack of opportunity in the skilled trades, which is a barrier to recruiting the next generation into the skilled trades. We have a lack of funding for co-op opportunities. Students aren't getting co-op opportunities. Apprenticeship opportunities are very few and are not working with the school programs a lot of the time. Employers are not willing to take on first-year apprentices or newer apprentices a lot of the time, despite the labour shortages.

Overcoming challenges and barriers in the trades is a huge thing, but this is not about the workplace. Harassment, bullying and all of those things exist outside of the skilled trades. These are human issues. They are not specific to the skilled trades or to any other workplace. I want that to be very clear, because the issues we face in the skilled trades are everywhere. It's not just women who deal with these issues. It is men as well.

I heard a very inspiring quote the other day that really resonates with me: “If we are not intentionally inclusive, we are unintentionally exclusive.” There are so many efforts being made to promote women or under-represented groups in this industry.

Speaking as a contract worker, I can say that this is very detrimental to the careers of women in the trades who are contract workers. We do not need to deal with the same problems as women in full-time construction employment do. The issues that we deal with are very unique in contract construction, and I believe that we need more voices at the table to speak about the issues we have, because they are very different, and I don't see them addressed very often. I think there has to be more conversation with grassroots workers, not so much always focused on the employers. I think you need to speak to the employees.

We really need to shift the paradigm in the skilled trades. It's been a male-dominated industry for very many years, and the paradigm has been shifted all the way to the male side. Now I feel like we're going through a bit of a cultural shift, where we're taking it all the way from one side of the pendulum to the other side of the pendulum, and that is also doing a lot of harm to women in contract construction.

I believe in supporting a safe working environment, with proper PPE and fitting tools, but what I'm not exclusive about is that, again, this is not just a female issue. This is an issue that we all have. We should all have fitting PPE and workwear that is safe for us. We should all have clean bathrooms on site. However, in contract construction, this seems to be an issue sometimes, because contract workers do not always know if they will be getting a woman on their work site, so it is sometimes almost impossible for them to provide all the required clothing and PPE to fit all different sizes of women when the chances of their getting a woman could be very low. To be honest, most PPE does not fit men comfortably either. They struggle a lot with this as well.

There are many issues that I would like to bring to the table, and I can speak all day on this, but what I think we really need to do to change the culture of the workplace is to look at early childhood education. We need to bring more training and knowledge to students. We need to talk more about these opportunities and stop making it sound like college and university are the only pathways to success. As somebody who struggled in school with learning disabilities and ADHD and who spent most of my time in classrooms that were for special education, I can tell you that the skilled trades saved my life, and I wish that everybody got the same message I did.

• (1110)

Thank you for your time today.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Jamie, thank you so much for that very personal testimony. We really appreciate it.

We are now going to Caitlin Morrison.

Caitlin, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caitlin Morrison (Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project): Good morning.

[*English*]

Thank you, Madam Chair, for having me today.

I represent The Prosperity Project, an organization that believes women's success is directly tied to Canadian economic prosperity and works to dismantle barriers impeding that success.

Our organization applauds this committee for conducting a study on women's economic empowerment. We believe it is an important step for women and for Canada's economy.

Many of the witnesses you heard from have pointed to the importance of supporting women entrepreneurs. We see merit in this thinking, but we believe this addresses only part of the gender inequity problem. The advancement of women in corporate Canada is also of critical concern.

One of our organization's key initiatives is the collection and analysis of data related to gender equity and diversity. Our annual report card assesses gender disaggregated data from some of Canada's top 500 corporations by revenue. To be more specific, we look at the number of Black women, indigenous women, women of colour, women with disabilities and 2SLGBTQIA+ women at four levels of leadership.

Our 2023 report has been circulated to the committee. Members will note that this report shows worrying trends. It shows a significant year-over-year drop in women in the pipeline to leadership. This indicates a possible reversal in trends toward gender equity in the years ahead. We worry about who will be sitting at the decision-making table in five to 10 years. More troubling are our stats related to Black women, indigenous women, women of colour, women with disabilities and 2SLGBTQIA+ women. These groups remain all but absent from high-level leadership roles in corporate Canada. Sadly, our 2024 report, to be released later this month, indicates that this woeful under-representation of some groups of women persists. In short, our data shows that corporate leadership in Canada is still very much a white man's game. Why is that?

Our "Canadian Households' Perspective" report shows that women are facing tremendous burnout. They feel a lack of support at home and a lack of support in the workplace. They feel they have been passed over for promotions and are underpaid, and they are less confident than their male colleagues about speaking out for their own advancement. In a way, this makes sense. Corporate Canada was not built with women in mind. It certainly was not built with racialized women in mind. This is why the entrepreneurship model seems so appealing. It is easier sometimes to build something new than it is to change established practice, yet we believe Canada must address the inequities in established practice to create widespread economic empowerment for women.

I come here today with a challenge for this committee and the government: Support a corporate model that uplifts all women and encourages their advancement.

First, encourage and support the collection of gender-disaggregated data in Canada at all levels of leadership, including the pipeline to leadership. As one of the few organizations to collect such data, we know this is not an easy task, but we know it is crucial. To address inequity, we must have a clear understanding of where women stand in corporate Canada, not just with an eye for gender. The status of women from under-represented groups must also be tracked. One cannot fix a problem of inequity unless one can detect it.

Second, incentivize corporate Canada to publicly report gender-disaggregated data. We have already seen shareholders request racial equity audits. We posit that such incentives will spur corporations to take action to ensure that their policies and workplaces remain inclusive and equitable.

Third, encourage and support mentorship initiatives like The Prosperity Project's Rosie mentorship program that help encourage women from all backgrounds to feel supported in the workplace and have the confidence to speak up about their own goals for professional advancement.

We know such measures are important steps to building women's economic empowerment. As our organization's tag line states, when women succeed, we all prosper.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much to the three panellists today.

We will now be starting our round of questions. We will start with six minutes each.

I will now pass the floor over to Dominique Vien.

Dominique, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The witnesses today have given us some very good insight. Unfortunately, we aren't learning much. We know that women's economic empowerment and equity are lagging. We're seeing this issue and we would like to see it much more easily resolved.

Data from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada shows that women-owned small and medium-sized businesses are less likely to survive than businesses of the same size owned or managed by men.

Ms. Morrison, since your focus is on data compilation, do you have any information on this topic?

[*English*]

Ms. Caitlin Morrison: I apologize, but I'll answer in English. My colleague Julie would be happy to discuss it in French after this hearing.

Our organization does not collect data on women-run small businesses. Our focus is on corporate Canada and the top 500 corporations in Canada by revenue. We have not seen any trends that would indicate that women-led businesses struggle compared with male-led businesses. However, that's not really part of the data we collect. We focus on understanding the totality of women's representation and leadership, not entirely on the corporate success.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you for bringing up this nuance. I thought that you might have some information.

It's worth noting that women are increasingly taking their place in politics, for example in the National Assembly of Quebec and here in Ottawa. The situation is improving. You said that leadership positions for women aren't increasing as quickly as desired. Men are still the ones accessing these positions. I believe that the situation is better in the public sector, for example, where pay equity legislation applies and where men and women really do have the same opportunities for advancement.

Your concerns apply more to the private sector. Right?

• (1120)

[*English*]

Ms. Caitlin Morrison: Yes, I do. That's a wonderful question. I believe we've seen a lot of factors in our "Canadian Households' Perspective" report.

When we ask women what kinds of things encourage them to seek leadership positions and what kinds of things discourage them from seeking leadership positions, we see that a lack of support in the workplace is a major factor. We're told that women are more likely to seek leadership positions if they have access to mentorship. Often they prefer mentorship outside their workplace, because it gives them the opportunity to be more open in the things they're discussing.

We also see women telling us that access to child care remains an issue. We believe encouraging more access to child care among some of the provinces would be a very helpful thing in order for women to continue to seek leadership roles.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: One of my colleagues will certainly have some questions about this.

Perhaps Ms. Ferreri would like to ask a question about day care.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go for it. You have a minute and a half left.

We'll switch over to Michelle.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to both witnesses.

I guess I would ask if you could just expand on that, if you could, Ms. Morrison.

I'm very interested also in what you said, Ms. McMillan. I loved your testimony. For kids out there watching who don't feel that they're worth it, as a mom with kids with identified learning differences, your testimony really rings true for me, especially for young girls, who are often overlooked with that. I think your testimony was incredibly powerful, and I want to thank you for that. It was excellent.

I guess I would ask first, Ms. McMillan, if you have children.

Ms. Jamie McMillan: I do not.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: You do not have children.

The child care issue is a very significant one, as I look around the room here. We're seeing a lot of issues rolling out across the country with the affordable child care program. Do you think expanding it to who can offer this program would be beneficial to increase access?

Ms. Caitlin Morrison: First of all, affordable child care is an extraordinary thing that this government has done and implemented. I think what would be beneficial would be sorting out the best way to incentivize certain jurisdictions to increase the availability of spots.

There are lots of ways to do that, but I'm very short on time. Hopefully, we can come back to that later.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sure we will.

I'll now pass it over to Lisa.

Lisa, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hefner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Welcome to all our witnesses.

Jamie McMillan, we have met many times in the past. I'm so glad you were able to make it here today. You are always such an engaging speaker. You always speak personally and from the heart, and we really appreciate it.

We've met over round tables about how to get more women into the trades. A lot of the discussions we've had are about how the workplaces aren't conducive to women's participation. They don't encourage women to participate. I was really interested in your observation that you would like to see retirement numbers from the trades, and that recruitment is easy but retention is really difficult.

Would you explain a bit more how that works and what you've seen?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: Yes. As somebody who promotes actively in this community, I don't find that there are any issues with getting anyone to be interested in the skilled trades, but we do have a lot of issues when it comes to the skilled trades, because they're not viewed as viable or lucrative pathways. There are lots of misconceptions. People think it's not a good job and it's terrible, hard

work. There are lots of reasons we can't keep people in the trades once we get them in.

Once we get past all the challenges and barriers and convince people that these are lucrative pathways, some of the problems we have are that, yes, women are under-represented in this industry. Because this is a human issue and not a women's issue, it does take women with a bit of a thick skin and a good sense of humour to stand up in the face of that animosity sometimes. For me, I like the challenge. I think success is the best revenge. If somebody tells me I can't do something, I'll do it better than them—

Voices: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jamie McMillan: —or I'll at least try to. Win, lose or draw, at times I'll have some people come up to me who are really difficult personality styles to deal with. Once I prove myself, they shake my hand and tell me I've proven myself as a woman in the skilled trades. I like to refer it back to them: I don't identify on this job site as a woman in the skilled trades. Here I identify as an ironworker, a welder, a boilermaker—a skilled trades professional. That is how I like to identify.

We need to change the workplace culture. We need to work on the emotional maturity and dysregulation that's in the culture. I think we need to really hold people accountable for the behaviours that happen in the workplace. We have to figure out how to create solutions around this. If we want to create a diverse, inclusive workplace culture, we have to include everyone in the conversation. We have to start gathering men as our allies to be part of this conversation, and sometimes just make it their idea, because that works better.

Voices: Oh, oh!

• (1125)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: On that note, last week I visited a woman-led construction company that had a lot more gender diversity than most work crews. Men on that work crew told me they found it a nicer work environment. Have you heard the same sort of testimony from people?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: Yes. You know, when you go out and work with somebody in the first place, I think sometimes there's a pride factor in the skilled trades, right? Men don't want to admit to their wives that women can do the same job and not come home sore and tired and ask for a foot rub.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Jamie McMillan: Once you get past those barriers and you prove that you're all there, the work site goes so easily. Women and men both bring a different aspect to the trades. It's awesome when you can work in a culture together. When we can work together and use our creativity and different body mechanics, production goes up. Attitudes are better. The banter is a lot more fun. It makes you go home feeling a lot happier. You're not going home walking on eggshells.

We really do love our career. That's what we excel in. Sometimes it's just the toxic work environment that really discourages us.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: It's the toxic work environment. There's nothing in the trades anymore that physically limits women from participating, is there? We have all the technology and all the equipment. There's no physical reason that women can't do just as well as men on the work site. In fact, I've heard from LiUNA and some of the other trainers of women that women are actually better at some skills. Would you agree?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: That is absolutely true. I will use an analogy. I like to use this with students and people who come to my presentations.

It's like building an Ikea cabinet. Women go to Ikea, take all the instructions and lay everything out on the floor to put it together. Men don't do that. Men jump right in and want to prove themselves. They are eager to get the job done. By the time they get to the end, the last piece that was supposed to go in first is still sitting on the floor.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: That's an excellent analogy.

You mentioned that we need more investment in co-ops and apprenticeships. Our government has invested and put more money into these programs.

What more do you think we need to do?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: I think we need to focus more on early childhood education.

For example, bring skilled trades into early childhood education in schools. Let kids know at an earlier age that these are career pathways. Let them understand the infrastructure around them and see what a crucial role being part of that building and construction sector is on the earth. As long as humans are on this earth, we are going to need skilled trades professionals to build and maintain it.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Would you say it's a good career for women in terms of being flexible and in terms of income and other things like that?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: Absolutely. It is a fantastic career. It is sustainable. It's great in terms of finances. It offers you independence, and the greatest thing about the skilled trades is that they're not just in one place. You can work anywhere in the world.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you.

The Chair: Awesome. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move it over to Andréanne Larouche.

You have six minutes.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Ms. McMillan, Ms. Morrison and Ms. Campbell, for joining us today for this study. I understand more and more why it's so useful and necessary, for so many reasons.

Each of you said something that struck a chord with me. I want to ask you all about a specific issue that affected me, both as a woman in politics and as the young mother of a little girl who will be two years old in a few days and for whom I want the best possible future. I hope that she follows her heart and that she helps to break glass ceilings.

Ms. Campbell, you spoke of a strategy that ends in 2024. Can you elaborate on this topic? What has this strategy achieved, and what will happen when it ends in 2024?

[English]

Ms. Karen Campbell: What I was referring to is a program we've been running at the Canadian Women's Foundation since 2019. It's our investment readiness program. We are one of a number of investment readiness programs across Canada funded by Employment and Social Development Canada. The point of the investment readiness program is to support, in our case, women and gender-diverse folks entering the social innovation ecosystem. They are running social-purpose enterprises. The idea is to support them in being ready to access investment through the federal government's social finance fund.

Since 2019, we've worked with 90 of these social enterprises. They're amazing and are doing incredible things. They are focused on social good and gender equity outcomes as a way of building a more inclusive economy. They are breaking down the sorts of barriers we see to entrepreneurship, access to financing and all the things that keep women and gender-diverse people out of building, sustaining and growing their businesses. We're supporting them in taking their place in the social innovation ecosystem.

It's been a highly effective program. We've been supporting them in developing their business plans and marketing strategies and in knowing how to access financing. That can be very difficult, especially for Black, indigenous and racialized entrepreneurs.

This program is very successful. As I said, the funding for this is coming to an end. That means we will no longer be able to support these social enterprises. We're hoping the investment readiness program via ESDC will be renewed. We're not certain that will happen. The implication of this is that we won't be able to offer those supports to those organizations anymore.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Women traditionally take fewer risks in business. Financing is a challenge for women entrepreneurs in particular.

[English]

Ms. Karen Campbell: Yes, I think so. It's very interesting to see how women and gender-diverse people experience barriers to labour market access. They go into the workforce and experience hostile work environments. They experience discrimination, violence and harassment in the workplace. Many of them turn to entrepreneurship and self-employment as a way—as my co-panellist mentioned—to make their own way and to create different standards in the businesses they will run.

There is a tendency to see businesses that are run by women and gender-diverse entrepreneurs having this social good at the heart of what they're doing. This is not because women are very altruistic and kind-hearted in ways that men are not. It's not as essentialized as that. It's really a matter of having had these experiences and not wanting to replicate them in the businesses they create. They are worth supporting. They are worth incubating. They are deserving of the kinds of programming that organizations like ours can provide. We hope we can continue it.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Ms. Campbell.

I see that I have one minute left, Madam Chair.

My next question is for you, Ms. McMillan. What you said particularly affects women in non-traditional jobs or skilled trades.

In Quebec, we have a great campaign that made me aware, as a young woman, of other job prospects. It's a contest called "Hats Off to You!" This contest has greatly benefitted women by encouraging them to opt for non-traditional jobs or skilled trades.

Obviously, this question falls more within the realm of education, a provincial matter. That said, how could the federal government raise awareness among women and encourage them to embrace jobs that sometimes fall outside the traditional employment model for women?

[English]

Ms. Jamie McMillan: I feel that normalizing gender equality in the trades is very important, just normalizing that women are here and under-represented groups are here. In doing that, what we need to focus on is having kids see real role models going into schools, having credible role models talking to students and giving them tangible experiences with hands-on education and stories and telling their own stories of successful careers. I think that kids ultimately can be what they see, but they need to see it.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

My first question is for Karen Campbell.

You spoke a lot about women and gender-diverse people. We're seeing a movement certainly in the country right now that's particularly targeting the trans community. Yesterday I was in the House, and there was a petition floored that was limiting the use of shared washroom space—public spaces—gender-neutral spaces for trans folks, in the name of protecting bodily autonomy.

You spoke about the importance of inclusive workplaces. I'm wondering how these kinds of new policies and the legislation that's brewing in Canada—and certainly is being discussed now at the federal level—may further impact realizing inclusive work environments.

Ms. Karen Campbell: It's certainly worrying. One of our colleagues on the panel talked about this with an example of washrooms and access to those kinds of spaces equitably in trades. Those things are already difficult to come by for women and gender-diverse folks. The kind of toxic backlash towards trans communities is certainly not going to be helping in creating more inclusive workspaces.

I can draw an example from some of the work we've done on entrepreneurship. There's a report. I think it's from WEC. I'll look for the direct source for you. It talks about entrepreneurs who are queer, who are 2SLGBTQ+ folks, who actually have decided to hide their identities because of the discrimination they face in their communities. That has an impact on their client base, their bottom line and the revenues they can generate, because people don't want to shop at their stores or frequent their businesses.

This is a very alarming and worrying concern, this kind of homophobia and transphobia that is in the broader environment. It really speaks to the link between economic empowerment and gender justice in general in Canada and how we need to have our attention on all of these things together at once.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

I agree with you a hundred per cent, and I will state on record that I firmly support trans rights as human rights.

I just want to move over to you, Caitlin Morrison. You spoke about child care. One of the things I brought up in the House yesterday, in terms of really being able to fully implement a robust child care strategy, is to support and ensure that the government, in terms of transfers, ensures livable wages, benefits and pensions for early childhood educators. I was an early childhood educator, and I decided that I didn't want to live on minimum wage for the rest of my life, so I left my job and became a teacher, so that I could get benefits and holidays, even though I really loved the little ones.

Would you agree with me that one of the critical issues impacting the ability to get \$10-per-day child care off the ground is a failure to provide, I guess, incentives that would enable ECEs to live in dignity?

• (1140)

Ms. Caitlin Morrison: I think that's a very big issue, certainly.

There are a lot of issues, I think, that are impacting child care at the moment, but that's a huge one. You know, I'm a mother myself. I want the best for my children. I want the early childhood educators of my daughter, who is of day care age, to be insightful and intelligent and to build her with the knowledge and skills that she needs to do well in school.

Not only do I think it would be important, as a way to draw more people to the early childhood career, to ensure that they are properly compensated for the work that they're doing. I also think it would draw the best of the best. I don't think there is a single parent in this country who doesn't want their early childhood educator to be the best of the best.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much. I totally agree with your assessment.

Jamie McMillan, thank you so much for your testimony. Like you, I kind of waffled through school and became a professor. School was a trip for me. Good on you for everything you're doing today.

I was a teacher and an early childhood educator. You spoke about starting young and normalizing it as viable, a career in the trades. One of the things we have in Manitoba is that students are able to choose vocational training during high school, whereby they can get what they need to pursue an academic path or a vocational path. Do you think that we need to support more programs like that?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: Yes, I believe we do. We also need more awareness. We need to speak to educators more about talking about these pathways to students. We also need to talk to parents and educate parents that these are very good pathways as well.

I just want to touch on what you were talking about earlier with regard to early childhood education. I believe that early childhood education and people in the homeless community are building people. I get paid a lot of money to build structures, and it really upsets me to see that people who are building people don't have that same funding and support.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to pass it over for our second round.

Anna, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome back, Karen. It's nice to have you back.

Jamie, thank you so much for sharing your background and being so open about it. I think more and more people have to realize that we might have disabilities or issues, but they can be overcome with strength. You've obviously proven that. Congrats.

I remember that, in junior high, we had what was called a home economics department and an industrial arts department. In the middle of the year, we switched. The home economics classes, which were 100% female, and the industrial arts classes, which were 100% male, switched. We learned the basics while the guys learned the basics, as well. Let's be honest. When you move out and go to university, you have to learn how to cook for yourself.

One thing I found very interesting was this: At the end of that semester—this was in grade 8, so we were still quite young—there was a project assigned to us. At the end of the year, everybody was graded on who did the best. It may have been for a clock—I can't remember—but a girl won it. She won the contest over the guys. The interesting part was that a boy won the cooking competition. We were, like, "Oh, my God."

How do we as a society stop that stigmatizing? I'll be honest with you. My brother and I cook a lot together, and he's a much better cook than I am. How do we stop this? I don't think the provinces have incorporated that old system. They say, "We have to move on." Yes, we have to move on, but it's something that worked way back then.

Would you advise the provinces to say, "Hey, we should start this program again, to incentivize not just women but also men"?

• (1145)

Ms. Jamie McMillan: Yes. I think the curriculum system needs to change, and there are compulsory credits that should be looked at. Everybody should do home ec. Everybody should have some understanding of psychology, healthy boundaries and empathy. I also believe everybody should know the basics of fixing their own vehicle and maintaining their own home. Construction and automotive should be compulsory credits.

I believe these credits should be integrated with people, no matter how they identify, because, at the end of the day, careers don't have genders. We're the ones who do that. We're the ones who make the genders.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I know our party is pushing for a blue seal program for professionals.

I live in an area where there's a lack of construction employees, and they are retiring. You're right. They're retiring because, depending on their job type, their retirement age is much younger than 65. Obviously, it takes a toll on your body, which I'm sure you can explain to us. I also know that, for example, a lot of roofers from other provinces come to Ontario to work during the summer months—from Newfoundland or wherever—because we have a lack of them.

How is it that, with all the outflow of retirees...? Do you think we're at a point at which it is crucial we get working on this ASAP?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: Absolutely. There is a serious lack of people to fill the labour shortage gap right now. There is a lot of opportunity. We have failing infrastructure that needs to be strengthened. We have factories that need to be built. We have an increasing population and not enough people to build these homes. Yes, construction should be at the forefront of everything we're talking about right now. Getting people into construction careers should be promoted, the same way we promote college and university.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: One of the things I like is the co-op program. This is a stupid idea, maybe, but I'm going to throw it out there. If we had a co-op program in high schools, whereby—and I know there are insurance issues or whatever—even in high school, individuals who are interested in the trades could do a co-op program now, instead of waiting until they go into construction courses and colleges, do you not think that would entice more young people to take advantage of it?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: We do have those programs. Through the Ontario youth apprenticeship program—and I'm pretty sure they have programs like this across Canada—students can enter skilled trades as soon as grades 11 and 12. It's up to 400 co-op hours towards their apprenticeship. Some of those are paid co-ops.

The problem is that we don't have enough co-op opportunities for students. I also think employers need more incentive to give co-op opportunities.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going online to Sonia Sidhu.

Sonia, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's great to see you back.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

My first question is for Ms. Campbell. It's about the women entrepreneurship strategy ecosystem fund and the work of your organization helping first-time women and gender-diverse entrepreneurs.

What recommendation can you give this committee about helping first-time women entrepreneurs when they are starting their very first business or company?

Ms. Karen Campbell: The women entrepreneurship strategy is really incredible. It has supported a number of women and gender-diverse people on their trajectories to starting, scaling and growing their own businesses.

For those who are just getting started as entrepreneurs, one of the biggest issues is access to financing, access to capital. If they are uninitiated in financial jargon, it is very intimidating to approach a bank with their business idea and then be met with the notion that their business idea is too risky or that they don't have enough collateral to be able to pursue their business idea without any kinds of extra supports in place to help them be ready to access that kind of financing. That's really discouraging.

A lot of women and gender-diverse folks who are self-employed are doing this as sort of microenterprises. They are solopreneurs. They are working on the thing that drives them and is their passion.

They're trying to sell these things. It's not necessarily able to sustain them and their families, but there is growth potential there, so it needs to be nurtured and supported and incubated. That's what the women entrepreneurship strategy is helping to provide, that holistic approach to supporting these people in getting their businesses going and accessing the capital they need.

● (1150)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you. My next question is for Ms. McMillan.

Last month I had the chance to announce more than \$2 million on behalf of the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages towards a network of colleges, including Sheridan College in my riding, together with Unifor's \$300,000 contribution for women in Red Seal trades programs. It was exciting to see many like-minded leaders working towards increasing women's participation and retention, which you were talking about earlier.

Can you speak to this committee about the importance of working side by side with unions and educational institutions to increase women's participation in the skilled trades?

Ms. Jamie McMillan: That's a loaded question. I can say a lot on the subject, and I'm trying to think how to approach this.

With unions and colleges, they have two different paths. When someone goes through a college career, they're paying to go to school, usually up front, and they're continuing their apprenticeship after, so they're looking for an employer to sponsor them for their apprenticeship once they've completed college. I always think that college is a good pathway for people who are academic. It will help them learn and climb up the corporate ladder quickly, and that is a good way to approach it.

For somebody who goes directly out of school into a unionized apprenticeship, they are not getting as much of the theory side, but they're getting hands on. That's where you get a lot of people in skilled trades that are very similar to people like me, who are hands-on learners. We struggle academically. Those are the people you would probably want to recruit and recognize would be good candidates to be in those skilled trades apprenticeship pathways.

For women, or for any under-represented group or any group at all, it's crucial that we promote these pathways more and let people understand the difference between the college pathway and the union pathway.

I think it's important we all get along and understand that these are all the choice of the person and that people have the right to choose what they want to do. Whether we want to go to college or work union or non-union, we're all entitled to work in a career that makes us happy and take it the way we want it to take it.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Ms. Campbell, my next question is for you, on the women entrepreneurship knowledge hub.

Can you share your best practices with this committee, what you have learned from running this program to support women and gender-diverse entrepreneurs? My question has a data perspective too—how to collect data.

Ms. Karen Campbell: I'll just clarify that the women entrepreneurship knowledge hub is not our initiative. It is under the women entrepreneurship strategy, but it is an amazing hub for data and knowledge generation. If you're looking for thought leadership on what's happening for Black, indigenous and racialized entrepreneurs in Canada who are women and gender-diverse, that's the place to look.

We have our own research that will be disseminated there as well.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going on to our two and a half minutes. I'll pass the floor over to Andréanne Larouche.

You have two and a half minutes, Andréanne.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Morrison, I'll focus on what struck a chord with me in your presentation. You spoke of a worrying trend involving the decline in the number of women in positions of influence.

You said that burnout, but also mental load, could be contributing to the decline in the number of women in the workforce.

How could the federal government help ease this mental load for women? I'm thinking of a day for invisible work, for example. How can we collectively take steps to better recognize invisible work? How could this affect the number of women in positions of influence?

• (1155)

[*English*]

Ms. Caitlin Morrison: I think, once again, that child care is central to this issue. Ensuring that women are able to care for their families and have a professional career is very important.

I also think the government has a role to play in setting the example for other sectors in the economy. Women have reported—and this comes out in our “Canadian Households' Perspectives” report—that they feel supported with hybrid work environments with some flexibility and deliverables-based performance evaluations. Implementing those sorts of initiatives within the public sector and the government would set an example. It would show how well women react to those sorts of things. It would allow for the demonstration of increased retention rates and increased job satisfaction.

There is a lot to play in terms of being a trendsetter, I think.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Can you tell us a bit more about hybrid work?

[*English*]

Ms. Caitlin Morrison: The outright return to the workplace, I think, is a bit too heavy-handed. It should be considered more logically and more with a view to when it actually benefits the workplace to be in the workplace, as opposed to times when it might be more beneficial to all to do things in a remote way.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move over for our last questions from Leah Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

Thanks to the great witnesses today. I've really enjoyed this committee.

I want to go back to inclusive environments and women feeling a sense of belonging. I see a really concerning trend in this country. There's a direct attack on bodily autonomy, whether it's reproductive rights or gender diversity, in real time now being filtered in the House of Commons.

It's concerning for me how it could potentially move us backward in supporting inclusive work environments and things that women—my mother and gender-diverse folks—have certainly fought for.

What do we need to do as parliamentarians—you spoke about modelling—in our own work environment to support inclusive work environments on the ground?

I'll ask you, Caitlin Morrison. Thank you.

Ms. Caitlin Morrison: Sure. That's a wonderful question.

I think that often, when we see a movement toward beneficial societal change, when we see a move toward DEI initiatives like we saw in 2020 and the years thereafter, there can sometimes be a backlash from that, a sort of move to undo the change that has been done. I think that we're seeing that in a lot of ways in conversations about DEI and the effectiveness of DEI.

Ms. Leah Gazan: What is DEI?

Ms. Caitlin Morrison: I'm sorry. It's diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

We, as an organization, think that there's evidence to suggest that these initiatives are actually working. Rather than pull back from these initiatives, talk about their failures and demonize anybody who has benefited from them, we believe that now is the time to assess what has been done correctly where inclusion has been well established in organizations, in the government and in the private sector, and to move to improve what we're doing—to double down on diversity, equity and inclusion, if you will, and improve its capacity to make Canada a more inclusive country.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank Caitlin, Jamie and Karen, who have come for our first panel.

We are going to suspend. We have some audio checks to do, so we'll get back as soon as the audio checks are done.

Thank you very much. We are suspended.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Chair: We are now on to panel two.

On panel two, I would like to welcome Catherine Miller, mayor of the Township of Pelee, who is here via video conference. Also by video conference, we have Andrea Hannen, executive director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario. Then we have Peter Maddox, president of the Direct Sellers Association of Canada.

We'll provide you each with five minutes for opening remarks. When you see my hand start going like this, it means that you need to wind it up.

We're going to begin with Catherine Miller for five minutes.

You have the floor, Catherine.

Ms. Catherine Miller (Mayor, Township of Pelee, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable members, for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I'll be presenting a bit of a different perspective today, I think. I am from the ninth-smallest municipality in Ontario, the Township of Pelee. I am honoured to serve as the township's first elected woman mayor alongside a majority female council, supported by our township's entirely female senior leadership team.

Our small and isolated island community is neighbour to Essex County, which is led by a female warden for the first time. Our provincial police services of the west region is led by a woman. The CEO of the health care network that supports our island is a woman. The director of the Crown corporation that provides ferry services to our island is a woman and happens to be a captain. The only general store and gas station on our island is run by women. The largest farming and privately owned estate winery operation on our island, and in fact across Canada, is led by a woman.

Women in leadership is just a first step. Imagine the landscape if that were the case for the next 100 years, or if it had been for the past 100. When women feel supported, healthy and able, they can stop focusing on keeping themselves safe, or fighting for a voice, and advance the work of creating prosperous environments for us all.

Women on our island and who support our island are not afraid of work. They work hard at their day-to-day jobs. In our rural municipality, generally they remain the caregivers at home. With no day care services, senior living supports or personal care workers on the island, many of Pelee Island's women are going home at the end of the day and caring for their families and their neighbours, young and old. Women in my community are not only contributing

economically; they are the backbone of caring in the community. They could use some help, though.

I am obligated to recognize some friends and neighbours who raise money on our island through an annual Hell on Heels walk in mid-October. About 20 of us walk in high heels—for most of us, it is the only time all year that we will walk in high heels—along a weather-beaten road the weekend prior to Pelee Island's annual fall pheasant hunt. The weekend before a much-loved, historically fraternal tradition, which is now in its 93rd year, was chosen for a reason.

In 2021 we raised money to provide free period products in all public bathrooms. In 2022 we raised money to bring mental health care workshops and services to the island. In 2023 we raised money to start a potable water fund to help island families offset the very high cost of bringing potable drinking water into their homes. These socio-economic issues were selected to raise awareness around some of the well-being safety nets that are lacking and to raise that awareness with our neighbouring communities and some of our well-resourced vacation homeowners on the island, who may be able to help.

As well, our council has turned its attention to policies that support families and well-being. I am pleased that our council has supported a key family leave policy and passed an anti-harassment policy meant to protect our staff from the public harassment and bullying that seem to be on the rise.

Further, in partnership with the provincial ICON fund and the universal broadband fund, council is supporting administration in bringing a submarine cable to connect Pelee Island to high-speed Internet services by 2025, unlocking more potential, convenience and support for the women of Pelee Island in new ways that we are all excited to realize.

If women in my community can't source day care, can't enrol their children in school close to home, can't find support for their aging parents, don't feel safe from an abusive partner or neighbour and can't see a doctor without a full day trip to the mainland, their economic empowerment is not possible. It's out of reach. I'm here to broadly highlight that primary education, senior care, health care, day care and policing are matters of economic equality for women. The Township of Pelee has little to no access to many of the agencies that are meant to support women. There are no mentoring programs. There are no skills training programs. There isn't even a bank on our island. There are no women's shelters or networking groups.

Unless these agencies are mandated and in fact funded to support our community, they can't and they won't. Pursuing women's economic empowerment isn't purely a financial matter within my community. The women of Pelee Island need support where they live in order to thrive and move beyond traditional roles of working in the home.

Island women help each other. They bring meals to seniors. They billet their neighbours' children while away at high school. They keep an eye on kids on the ferry ride across the lake if their parents can't go. They volunteer, they give back and they keep going. I am proud to attempt to be helpful here also today—to be their voice.

Thank you for having me.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now move it over to Andrea Hannen.

Andrea, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Andrea Hannen (Executive Director, Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario): Hi. Thanks for having me here, and thank you for having such a lovely, constructive and good-natured committee.

I'm with the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario, which represents independent, licensed child care programs, both commercial and not-for-profit programs. I've been working with child care organizations since 1993, so the aspect of women's economic empowerment that I know best is child care and, more specifically, child care entrepreneurship.

It's to the detriment of all women that child care entrepreneurs are being targeted for extinction through the nationalization of Canada's child care sector. I'm here today to ask for your help in ensuring that child care entrepreneurs have a future in Canada for generations to come.

There are a few reasons it's important. The vast majority of child care entrepreneurs are women; child care is one of the only sectors of the economy in which women have always been fairly represented in terms of business ownership and management; and child care entrepreneurs not only provide a vital service for families but also serve as role models and mentors for other women and for the children in their care.

Let me tell you a bit about child care entrepreneurs.

They don't all run licensed child care centres. Many start out as unlicensed home-based child care providers, and they're often home with their own young children at the time. Some have their ECE credentials already, and some get them later on.

Second, child care entrepreneurs rarely go into business with the goal of making a lot of money. It's not surprising, because whether you're running a licensed child care centre or a microenterprise in your own home, taking care of children is an awful lot of work.

Often, the primary motivator for child care entrepreneurs is that they want to offer the kind of care they wish they could have found for their own children. A lot of them also say that they had a light-bulb moment when they witnessed the difficulties that large institu-

tional providers have in supporting children facing challenges. They thought, wow, there has to be a better way.

Not all child care entrepreneurs start businesses, though: Some create independent not-for-profits. Entrepreneurs might be a group of parents from a faith-based, cultural or linguistic community who want their children's early years education to reinforce certain traditions.

My final point about child care entrepreneurs is that they not only laid the foundation upon which almost all of Canada's existing child care services are based, but they continue to lead the way in terms of innovation and flexibility. They're not preoccupied with creating a national system. They're just engaged in meeting an ever-changing array of family needs each and every day.

Right now, the question many of Canada's child care entrepreneurs are asking is whether they have a place in Canada's national child care program or a future in child care at all.

They're pleased to see the government recognize the important role child care plays in ensuring equal workforce opportunities for women, and they're pleased to see a commitment to consistent funding for families who might otherwise struggle to pay for care, but Canada's child care entrepreneurs have spent much of the last three years listening to their government characterize their life's work as having so little value that the government wants to limit the expansion of their services.

Bill C-35 expressed this, albeit in softer language, but most of the federal-provincial agreements spell it out very specifically. Further, the report filed by the Senate committee that examined Bill C-35 concluded with the recommendation that the government "focus on providing funding to create a high quality public early learning and child care system".

Just to sum up, we have a sector of the economy that was largely created by women. It's essential to women's equality in the workforce. It's one of the only economic sectors in the country where women are fairly represented as owners and managers, and it's being not only undervalued by government but targeted for replacement by a government-run system.

Child care entrepreneurs know from experience how expensive and slow to build this new system will be, that it will require higher taxes to sustain and that there's no guarantee of a better result. When we look at Quebec, 25 years in, the province is still struggling with wait-lists, staffing and quality challenges, which are supposedly the reason the growth of private licensed child care in Canada has to be stopped. In the meantime, the demand for licensed child care across the country is skyrocketing.

I come to you today in all sincerity and with respect to say that there has to be a better way, and I'm asking the committee to help us find it.

Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We greatly appreciate that.

We're now going to move over to Peter Maddox from the Direct Sellers Association.

Peter, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Maddox (President, Direct Sellers Association of Canada): My name is Peter Maddox, and I'm the president of the Direct Sellers Association of Canada.

Thank you to the chair and to the committee for giving me this opportunity to speak today.

DSA Canada is a national association founded in 1954. We have over 65 members across Canada, which include well-known and respected brands such as Mary Kay Cosmetics, Pampered Chef cookware, Avon cosmetics and Cutco knives.

Every year, the direct selling sales channel accounts for an estimated \$3.4 billion in Canadian retail sales, creates \$1.4 billion in tax contributions and contributes \$1.5 billion in personal revenue to the over one million Canadians who participate as independent sales consultants, 84% of whom are women.

Similarly, many of our member companies have strong women leading their corporate executive teams in Canada. For many decades, direct selling has empowered women by offering business training and opportunities to build new skills and independence.

First, as an introduction to entrepreneurship and business ownership, direct selling is an inclusive avenue for Canadians to develop important transferable business and life skills, including sales and marketing, leadership, networking and financial management. Our member companies commit millions of dollars every year to training women in competencies that benefit their careers in direct selling and in their broader working life.

Second, ethics and trust are central to everything that DSA Canada stands for, and our members and their salespeople learn about and commit to our code of ethics annually.

Finally, direct selling helps to build and maintain strong social networks, connecting people in local communities, particularly women and seniors, and proving healthy for mental and social well-being.

Annually, DSA Canada and our members celebrate "Direct Sellers Day" to recognize positive stories and inspiring people from our industry. I would like to briefly recognize a couple of last year's award winners.

Wendy Castillo Varela of MONAT Global is a single mom who immigrated to Canada and speaks Spanish as her first language. She successfully started a construction business, but when COVID hit she was forced to be at home with limited income. When she was introduced to MONAT products, she found great success with

them by sharing them with her Spanish-speaking community. In 2023, she won DSA Canada's direct seller of the year award.

Camilla Eves of Arbonne Canada is an actress who started her direct selling career 15 years ago to fill income gaps. It didn't take long for her to fall in love with direct selling and to help others to achieve their potential. In 2023, Camilla won our mark of distinction award for lifetime achievement.

These two stories hopefully provide a glimpse of how empowering our industry can be.

To assist women to overcome barriers and find empowerment via business, DSA Canada submits the following recommendations for this committee.

First, we ask that government continue to support independent contractor status. Our consultants are classified as independent contractors and have the freedom to commit varying levels of time and effort to their roles. It is important that government policy discussions related to the gig economy and the evolving reality of working Canadians carefully consider the impact any legislative or regulatory changes could have on true independent opportunity.

Second, broadband Internet access is vital. Without universal access to high-speed communication technology, both direct selling businesses and other entrepreneurial opportunities for women are negatively impacted. This in turn impacts the general economic well-being of Canadian communities. Government must continue to invest in this tool that democratizes opportunity. We applaud existing efforts, but more dollars and determination are needed now to rapidly connect Canadians.

Third, federal regulation must not hinder the ability of entrepreneurs to operate successfully. As an example, Health Canada is currently proposing to institute significant fees on natural health products of the type sold by many of our members companies. Not only do these fees appear excessive, but they will likely lead to a reduction in products marketed in Canada, reducing choice for consumers and entrepreneurial opportunities for Canadian women.

As the government endeavours to empower women and create economic activity, they must consider the impact of fees and bureaucracy on opportunity and participation.

The direct selling industry plays an important but often unsung role in the growth of the Canadian economy and the success of women. We look forward to continuing to work with the federal government to ensure that this mutually beneficial relationship continues.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Peter.

We're now going to start our first round of questioning, which is going to be for six minutes. We'll start off with Michelle Ferreri.

Michelle, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today. It's great testimony to hear from you as we study economic empowerment of women in the status of women committee.

My first question goes to Ms. Hannen.

It is very thoughtful, constructive testimony you have on child care. You said some powerful words: that child care entrepreneurs are being targeted for extinction through the nationalization of Canada's child care sector. That's a pretty big statement, and we've seen in the news in the last few months some appalling headlines of what is happening because of the failed program.

My question to you to start is this: How has the Liberal child care program hurt women's economic empowerment?

Ms. Andrea Hannen: I would say a few things.

First of all, there are many licensed child care centres owned and operated by women. In the way the program was implemented... It was done without a whole lot of consultation and doesn't take into account that there are all of these small businesses. Also—in Ontario, anyway—there's a hard cap on the expansion of child care centres that are independently owned as licensed businesses. Therefore, even if you want to expand, you may not be able to.

In terms of business start-ups, a lot of newer programs in Ontario are unable to join the national system, because you have to establish that you are financially viable. If it's a new program, how do you establish that it's financially viable?

There are so many barriers to participation for women. In the way the system has been rolled out, there's not really any opportunity for entrepreneurship. There aren't on-ramps and off-ramps to the program. It's all or nothing. It's very challenging.

• (1220)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

My second question is an expansion on what you just said.

How has the Liberal child care program prevented the empowerment of businesses owned or operated by women? I think it's hard for people to understand how this program would do that.

One of the things that have been said to me as the critic for this file is this: The program has set women further back because they don't have the choice to go to work. They can't go to work. I have women in my office who are expecting a child and they can't find child care, so they actually can't go to work.

Go ahead.

Ms. Andrea Hannen: There's a preference in Bill C-35. It was also expressed in the agreements that provinces signed prior to the passage of Bill C-35. All expansion should primarily be in the not-

for-profit and public sectors. Right there, when you put a hard cap on the expansion of the sector, what you're doing is telling every supplier this sector relies on—financial institutions, insurance companies, landlords and equipment suppliers—that there's no growth potential for this group of clients. We shouldn't be surprised when we see independent child care centres finding every other aspect of their operation made more difficult.

We heard, back in November, previous witnesses at the committee saying how hard it is for enterprises owned by women to gain access to capital. Imagine what's happening now. If you're a female entrepreneur who needs access to capital to expand your business, the government doesn't want you to and may not let you participate in the program. Think about what the government's statements are. By expressing this very clear preference for a public sector system, they're saying these independent sectors don't have a future.

Also, the funding formula is a whole thing. That varies by province a bit, based on their agreements, but the funding formula is also an issue.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

If you have this data, can you share what the economic impact would be on Canada if we phased out these women entrepreneurs?

We saw yesterday, I think in the Financial Post, that Canada has one of the highest small business insolvencies in the world. It's increased by 34%. Small businesses in my community are literally dropping like flies. They can't sustain, and they're falling apart.

What does that look like for our country, GDP and economy when women-owned businesses...? This ties in with our other witness Mr. Maddox, who was talking about direct sellers. What does that look like?

Do either of you have that data, if you want to speak up? If you don't, could you put it forward to the committee?

Ms. Andrea Hannen: The one thing I will say is this: Here in Ontario, if we look at independent licensed child care programs and the portion of those run as businesses, most are small businesses that are independently owned and operated by women. Independent licensed child care programs make up between 25% and 30%. You could stand to lose 25% of your licensed child care spaces in the province of Ontario. That's a big deal. If you think it's hard to get child care now, imagine losing a quarter of the spaces.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: What do you say to the folks who say, "It has to work out the kinks. It's new and just rolling out, so that's why we're having all these problems"?

Ms. Andrea Hannen: If there is a plan to fix these kinks, we haven't seen it yet. There's no evidence that there are steps being taken to create that kind of plan.

I'd also say there are a lot of smart, dedicated people in Quebec who have invested decades of their lives into trying to deal with the access, staffing and quality challenges inherent in their program, and they haven't fixed it yet.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move over to Marc Serré.

Marc, you have the floor for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for their testimonies. They will help expand the committee's knowledge.

My first question is for Ms. Miller, the mayor of the Township of Pelee.

In its studies, the committee focuses on the economic angle, for example. In the past, we've also conducted studies on women's participation in politics. In your opinion, how could the federal government encourage more women to enter politics? There's also a rural factor.

I also want to congratulate you on your election in 2022. A number of newspaper articles noted that many women left municipal politics in the last Ontario provincial election, in particular because of the toxic environment.

I would like to hear your recommendations for encouraging more women to enter politics.

• (1225)

[English]

Ms. Catherine Miller: Thank you.

I will broadly state that I was able to run to be mayor of this small municipality because I don't have children to care for at home on Pelee Island, and I don't have parents to care for. I'm able to dedicate my time to this.

You asked what the federal government can do to encourage more women to get into politics, whether it's rural politics or in larger cities. My response is largely anecdotal and just from what I see. I can tell you that extremely partisan or personal attacks that might start at the federal level and might happen in large politics trickle down to small politics. The things people see in headlines that are aggressive or toxic, or aren't about the issues, tend to trickle down and affect women in different ways. Those personal attacks that people see in the news and headlines among their federal members or their provincial members end up coming to the public for our small, municipal members.

We're not immune. The women in my municipality have dealt with some defamatory comments and bullying from the public, as have some of our staff, which is why we developed those policies. Broadly speaking, leadership by example is extremely important in this regard because it trickles down to women in rural municipalities.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Ms. Miller.

I'll now turn to Andrea Hannen from the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario.

You spoke about major issues with the Quebec program. The federal government drew inspiration from this program. I would like to point out that Quebec has a high rate of women's participation in the workforce compared to the rest of Canada. Of course, some things could be improved. However, many people consider the Quebec program a success.

For the federal program, the participation rate is higher at over 2.4%. More and more women are entering the workforce, and the program was introduced only a few years ago. By 2027, the participation rate of women should be close to 86% or 87%. A number of factors should be considered.

I understand that the private sector must be taken into account. We heard earlier from representatives of the Canadian Women's Foundation and The Prosperity Project. They spoke about the quality of services and the proper salary for women and men who take care of children.

In your opinion, why should there be a purely private sector system instead of a public system? I'll give you a chance to explain, once again, the difference between the two. Let me point out that various data shows that we're on the right track.

[English]

Ms. Andrea Hannen: I think, first of all, we have to understand that the rollout of the program is quite different depending on what province you're in. Each province and territory for the most part had a well-established system of child care before the implementation of the Canada-wide early learning and child care program. Certainly, Quebec's system was developed in the culturally distinct province of Quebec. If it's working for Quebec, that's great. Fantastic. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's appropriate for every province and territory to follow the same model.

The other thing, too, is that I wasn't advocating for a purely private sector system of child care. What I was saying is that there has to be a level playing field for all child care. Whether it comes from the public sector, the independent licence sector, not-for-profits or small businesses, increasing access to regulated care is really key.

• (1230)

Mr. Marc Serré: You might want to make sure you bring those concerns to the Ford government, because they did sign the agreement with the federal government. I'm hoping you'll share those concerns with them too, please.

Thank you for your work.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We're going to move it over to Andréanne Larouche.

You have six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll start by thanking the witnesses for participating in this important study.

Regarding Mr. Serr 's last question, the positive impact of a day care program is well established. I'm not the only one saying this. Economists in Quebec are also saying it. I'm thinking of Luc Godbout, from the Universit  de Sherbrooke, who proved that we needed this program to give women the chance to return to the workforce. I won't ask a question about this matter.

I'll continue along the same lines as Mr. Serr . In Quebec, the figures aren't very encouraging. Since 2021, 741 municipal officials have resigned.

Ms. Miller, you understand that we're conducting a study on women's economic empowerment. In my opinion, encouraging women to choose non-traditional jobs, such as the still male-dominated world of politics, is one way to empower women economically. Women must be able to pursue the jobs that they want to do. Right now, the situation is rather discouraging. Of course, these 741 elected officials aren't all women. I don't want to generalize. In my constituency, one of the male municipal officials told me that bullying contributed to his decision to resign as mayor. However, women have also cited bullying and harassment as reasons for resigning.

Ms. Miller, my colleague asked how we could lower the number of resignations. I would like to point you towards one possible solution, but you can suggest others. How can we combat hateful comments online?

In my opinion, as long as we fail to address this violence, we'll be helping to discourage women from entering politics. They won't want to expose themselves to this violence in politics.

I'm a woman in politics. I'm from the sandwich generation. I have a two-year-old daughter whom I don't want to expose to hateful comments. I'll also need to take care of aging parents. All this creates a mental load.

How does this contribute to a decline in women's participation in politics or their access to significant positions? We were talking earlier about the declining proportion of women in corporate management positions, for the same reasons.

[English]

Ms. Catherine Miller: What can we do to combat the bullying or the hate that we see in social media or online that is directed at elected officials, specifically women? I will tell you that in my term I have a councillor on our council who has indicated that they are surprised by the amount of exposure they've received. There's a councillor in a neighbouring community who was targeted for bullying because they wanted to review a certain bylaw and that raised questions around gun legislation.

Again, women in leadership I think is the first start because we support each other, but in terms of combatting the negativity on social media, all I can tell you is what we've done in our small community, which is to ignore it. It's very hard. It's not fair. As elected officials, we're bound to a code of conduct in terms of engaging

with the public in this regard. As for defending ourselves or trying to set the record straight, it seems that maybe you bring on an onslaught. I'm sure some elected officials at the provincial and the federal level are dealing with this type of online negativity and violence and even defamatory comments from other members.

For us, I think there's a policy or there's a legislative mechanism that can be made. The public has a lot of resources to report on the bad actions of elected officials, certainly, but I feel that, as an elected official, I have very little recourse to deal with the bad actions of the public. I've had the public at my doorstep. I've had to....

We've instituted those anti-harassment policies for a reason, because the only way we could figure out how to deal with that was to attempt to legally acknowledge that people's behaviour isn't acceptable, but it does fail on social media. Your personal life and your family are exposed in a way that is absolutely unpleasant.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you for your comments.

You spoke of a walk in high heels in Essex. Last year, an event was held where male members of Parliament walked in heels. It was quite interesting. The goal was to show them what women can go through and to make people understand that women's economic empowerment isn't just about women, but men too. It's also about the place that they give to women in the workforce. There are women mentors, but there are men too. Both men and women must help ensure that there are more women in the workforce.

[English]

The Chair: Would you like to respond?

Ms. Catherine Miller: If the question for me is on having men participate in the walk or as allies, yes. In order to make sure we're inclusive, even of people who are not able to walk in high heels—because it's legitimately a challenge—you can carry them, you can ride a bike with them and you can put them over your shoulder, but we do have men that come out and they do certainly donate. Then they hear the conversations we're having and they become allies one way or the other, whether they walk with us or whether they provide financial support. Allies are important.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I know that I've seen a lot of men with size 15 feet walking around in red heels, so I really do appreciate that. Size 15 feet with heels on is awesome.

Leah, we'll pass it over to you for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

My first question is for Peter Maddox.

In terms of the leadership, because we're talking a lot about leadership, I'm wondering if you can let me know how many folks in senior leadership—like your level of leadership—are women and, out of those, how many are Black, indigenous, people of colour or from the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Mr. Peter Maddox: That's a great question.

Certainly, in terms of our membership in Canada for the company, just to give you a sense of the company—

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm sorry, but just because I have limited time, I mean in terms of upper management. I'm not talking about independent business owners. I'm talking about—

Mr. Peter Maddox: With regard to upper management in Canada, I would say that of our members, about 80% are led by women. It's to the point that we are actually consciously trying to get some men onto our board, because it's female-dominated.

As for the breakdown in terms of different ethnic backgrounds, I don't have that information. I can tell you that it's fairly limited. I think we've made one great step in terms of the women being strong on the board. The next step, obviously, is to try to spread that diversity into various aspects of our community.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Would you be able to send that in to the committee?

Mr. Peter Maddox: Absolutely.

Ms. Leah Gazan: That's perfect. Thanks so much.

I want to direct my next questions to Mayor Miller.

When you did your introduction, I felt like I was listening to a sci-fi novel describing a utopian world. One of the things you said that struck me—and I agree with you because it's something that I struggle with as an elected official—was that you spoke about leading by example.

You know, I have taken it upon myself in the House of Commons as of late to call out toxic masculinity, particularly because I feel it contributes to the normalization of violence against women, particularly against me as an indigenous woman. I feel that I have a moral obligation to stop violence and certainly the normalization of violence towards indigenous women.

I'm wondering if you could share your thoughts on that. You said that you see a lot of things even federally that would discourage women from entering politics. Can you expand on that?

● (1240)

Ms. Catherine Miller: I think it's my experience.... I need to be clear, again, that I'm a mayor of a very small municipality with no aspirations to move beyond municipal politics into provincial or federal politics. It's all a very new world to me. I think that my focus, and that of a lot of women who might enter into municipal politics, is policy and the administration of policy that supports our communities. We want to do the work. What gets in the way of work is a toxic environment in which, if you stand for something on a municipal level, you get attacked personally for it. They're not attacking your policy or your position but you personally. That is broadly what I mean by that. It feels very much that way to me in a very small municipality. I have to focus on policy and procedure. I can't give my attention to personal attacks. It's very challenging.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

You spoke a lot about care work in terms of how we want to support economic empowerment. It's more than money. It's about providing child care. It's about assisting individuals who are in the sandwich generation—I was, at one time, in the sandwich generation—caring for aging parents, for example.

What can the federal government do better to lift up and dignify care work, including unpaid care work?

Ms. Catherine Miller: Speaking with a rural mindset and with regard to the fact that our rural municipality doesn't have access to public or private day care options or to public or private senior care options, I would say that there needs to be some recognition of the fact that there is a separation, perhaps, between what is supported in cities and what is supported for municipalities with rural or isolated designations. I would say, particularly, that funding those public programs becomes more standardized and not with a cost share, that they become fully funded in rural situations—day care or senior care work—and that those positions are actually funded through the networks that would support rural communities—that they be afforded positions to support those communities.

Ms. Leah Gazan: One of the things that I put forward in this Parliament is Bill C-223 to implement a guaranteed livable basic income. I'll give you a couple of examples why.

Many seniors are women who worked in unpaid care work for their lives. Their kids grew up, and these senior women have no pension to benefit from. A guaranteed livable basic income.... We know that the current GIS system is not livable for seniors in this country.

Would a guaranteed livable basic income assist, particularly in rural and remote areas, in offsetting the issues around child care and other care?

Ms. Catherine Miller: It is my perception that it would.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going on to our second round. We will begin with five minutes for Michelle Ferreri.

Go ahead, Michelle.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I want to loop back, because I think this is the committee at which we might be able to fix some stuff. I think what we want to talk about here is that we're studying the economic empowerment of women.

Ms. Hannen, you have talked about female entrepreneurs in child care and the critical role they play. You have said on record that you weren't talking about big-box child care; you were talking about the woman who said there must be a better way to care for her child, that there must be something else. That is every entrepreneur's story, isn't it? It is that they had to solve a problem.

We're not asking for a purely private system, which is sometimes the narrative from a Conservative perspective. We're asking for equity, so that these women in particular have equal opportunity to what the not-for-profits have.

We know that the government said and even the Senate is on record as saying that the focus should be on providing funding to create a high-quality public system, so they have intentionally left out these women entrepreneurs.

What could have been done differently to make the national child care program work better for women, both as parents and as operators and entrepreneurs?

• (1245)

Ms. Andrea Hannen: I guess the first thing would have been to approach it with a spirit of humility and an understanding that most of the subject matter expertise wasn't going to reside in government. It wasn't going to reside with academics or economists. It was going to reside with the child care entrepreneurs who had actually built the infrastructure and were delivering the services. It would also reside with parents, because, obviously, we needed more consultation to understand what parents need, what kinds of child care they were using.

Had the federal government tapped into that expertise, we could have worked on the important things such as increasing the number of qualified educators and making sure the child care system we had was running at full capacity first. Then we could have helped more women get back into the workforce after the pandemic.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Ms. Hannen, you have brought up something today that I think is really vital. I'm going to ask you your thoughts on this. Then I'm going to put it to the committee as something we could possibly have a friendly agreement on.

Do you think it would be valuable for this committee to hear from the chair of the national council? It has been in operation now for two years. You said there wasn't enough consultation, but I would assume it would be beneficial for us to hear directly from the council about the meetings they have had and what's happening.

These are the articles from just 12 hours about parents who cannot access child care. We are the status of women committee. Women are struggling. They are stressed out of their minds according to the emails and the messages I have.

I think there's a real opportunity here for us to hear and to put concrete solutions on the table of consultation to bridge this gap and ensure that the economic empowerment of women is secure.

Do you think it would be beneficial to hear from the national chair?

Ms. Andrea Hannen: Part of the challenge is the lack of transparency in this program. There's a lack of transparency federally. There's a lack of transparency at some of the provincial levels with

respect to how things are rolling out and what's intended versus what's happening.

If you think that would add some clarity, then of course it would.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I can put forward a formal motion, but in the spirit of agreement of the committee, would you guys be open to that?

I have spoken with my NDP colleagues in other committees about this. It would be to bring forth the minister and the chair so we could hear more. This is obviously something we could look at extending into a motion.

I can put forward a formal motion. I just thought we could get the agreement of the committee on this, as it ties in very well with what we're studying.

The Chair: I'm going to pause—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I have never done it this way.

The Chair: I'm going to pause the clock for a second, because what I hear Michelle asking is for the opportunity to have the director. Is that what you said?

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: It's the chair of the national advisory council on early learning and child care, as well as the minister. Ideally we would have the minister as well.

The Chair: Just hold on for one moment.

I absolutely appreciate this. We could put that into writing, but we could also address it in committee business, which I have scheduled for Thursday, when we're doing the human trafficking report, version two.

Let's ensure that we bring that back, because I think it's a very important point and we will be able to have a really good discussion.

I'm going to turn the clock back on. You have 40 seconds left. Go for it, lady.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you.

Thanks for your input on that. I know you've worked very hard on that, Ms. Hannen.

I want to wrap up with Mr. Maddox.

Mr. Maddox, how would the Liberal policy on natural supplements, pulling them back and regulating them, impact your industry—women in particular and economic empowerment for women?

Mr. Peter Maddox: It's expected to have a significant impact. The fact is that if it costs a lot more to launch a product in Canada and to market a product in Canada, then fewer of those products will become available. Either companies will stop selling certain products or they'll completely withdraw from the Canadian market.

As I mentioned in my talk, it takes away—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Just because I have such a short time, do you have an actual number that you could table to the committee of what that would look like economically?

• (1250)

Mr. Peter Maddox: I do not have a number with me now. I work with some other associations, and they've done research on that, so I can supply that.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to move it over to Emmanuella, and there might be some time split.

Emmanuella, you have five minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and I will be splitting my time with Ms. Vandenberg.

My question is for Ms. Miller.

I really liked your testimony, and I actually looked up the Township of Pelee, because it's somewhere I'd consider moving, given the description I heard.

I do not represent a rural riding, so when you speak about child care and day care and you say that there are no public or private day care or senior care facilities, I am wondering what exactly the barriers are specifically and why these facilities are not present in the community.

Can you clarify what specific barriers are in place? What do you find is most difficult in being able to have people open a day care or to...? What is the actual barrier in place that you think is the most important?

Ms. Catherine Miller: Sure. I can tell you that it is very hard to attract young families and young women to Pelee Island for these reasons. Further to that, it's extremely challenging to even be able to attract maybe a small business entrepreneur who would want to run a day care for four to eight children. The women who are on the island work at home. Many of them work at home. There are many of us who work outside the home and who don't have kids at home, but many of the women who have children are not starting these businesses outside their home, because they are in the home.

There are barriers in the way of how we can attract people. There are barriers in infrastructure. We don't have suitable spaces. It's a challenge to build. In addition to the things I have indicated, infrastructure is lacking. We have to rely on the existing infrastructure that's there.

The barrier, I think, to truly enabling women to have access to a day care is that it very likely would not be a profitable model or one that women on Pelee Island could afford. The cost of living is already about 30% higher than it would be on the mainland.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: What specifically do you think the government would be able to help with? Is it a program catered specifically to rural communities such as yours that would be eligible for, let's say, building a centre such as this? What exactly is it that you think would help your community and other communities like Pelee?

Ms. Catherine Miller: It would be specialized funding that would be distinct, I think. Supporting those independent operators who may want to start a business on Pelee Island with different grants or different subsidies at a greater level would enable them to move to a place like Pelee and start a business. Further, if there's a public option, there should be something considered for the existing school system, although I understand that is provincial.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

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

I would like to pick up on something you said. It struck me when you were talking about the number of women in leadership in your community. You said something like, imagine if it had been for the last 100 years. Obviously, you're saying that despite the fact that women are there, in the last 100 years it hasn't been women. This means there are structures in place, practices and procedures that have been very masculine and are obviously limiting.

I wonder if you could talk a bit about these structural barriers.

Ms. Catherine Miller: I can speak specifically to the fact that, for example, our senior leadership team is female. Currently our township administrator, referred to in many other municipalities as their CAO, is out on family leave. We reached across to all our neighbouring municipalities to understand what family leave might look like for a senior administrator, but no one could help us. There's never been a CAO in our region who's left with a child.

Those types of things, even though they sound small, are impactful. When that person, who is very much needed, wants to return to the workplace, we have to think about the types of flexible policies we need to make sure are in place to support them. We realize that on our level, it's those types of things, but they've just never been discussed. There hasn't been a need. We don't have access to that multi-generational network of experienced women in leadership on those issues that continue to come up. We see it plainly.

Some other types of structures that exist, I would say, are.... Truthfully, it's just the traditional gender roles that we all know, that many of us in this room know, are challenging.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now move over to Andréanne Larouche.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Once again, I want to thank the three witnesses who are with us for this second hour.

I'll now turn to Mr. Maddox.

In your opening remarks, you spoke about the impact of bureaucracy fees on women who own a direct sales business.

Could you elaborate on the flexibility in the bureaucracy, or specifically the lack of flexibility of certain programs, which don't take women's entrepreneurship into account, for example?

I'm thinking of the emergency account, where people asked for flexibility when it came to repayment. This affects many small businesses.

Could you elaborate on the importance of making certain programs more flexible to help women go into business?

[English]

Mr. Peter Maddox: I believe government still largely looks at the question of labour and employment as people going into an office and working nine to five. They build their programs around that sort of relationship. For a lot of people now, that's not how they make their living. That's not how they make an income. I think there definitely needs to be some work done in terms of looking at the new structure of the workplace. Many people now don't do one job. They do four or five different things. They might do direct selling for one of our companies. They might drive for Uber. They might work in a bar. They might teach piano and all those sorts of things. How do things like EI and those sorts of mechanisms work with that evolving workforce?

Whether you think that evolving workforce is ideal or not, there definitely needs to be some change to look at the ways in which we can encourage people to be entrepreneurial and get into the workforce. For women in particular, if they're worried about child care or about looking after their parents, the Canadian economy suffers. The more people who can, by their choice, get involved in entrepreneurship and the economy, the better it is for all Canadians.

That's a very general answer, but I think it covers a lot of what we've talked about today.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you for addressing the employment insurance issue.

To help women in the workforce, the employment insurance system must be reviewed to take into account the specific nature of women's jobs. These jobs may be a bit more precarious or may require non-standard schedules.

[English]

The Chair: I don't think there was a question there—or was there?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: No.

[English]

The Chair: We were out of time, but if any of you have anything you'd like to share on that, I would ask you to send it in. That would be wonderful.

I'll now pass it over for the last two and a half minutes to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have the floor.

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

I'll go back to you, Mayor Miller. You spoke about issues around gender-based violence. You said that if we want to talk about economic empowerment, then one area we need to address is gender-based violence. I'm concerned about the fact that we know that rates of violence have increased since the pandemic. Funding that was provided during the pandemic, particularly for shelters, has been pulled back—\$150 million. It's something that I've been pushing. The pandemic is over, but the gender-based violence crisis continues.

How is the lack of funding to address gender-based violence, which many places have called an epidemic in their areas, impacting economic empowerment?

Ms. Catherine Miller: I can tell you that it's an even more basic or even more root-level issue on our island, when I speak about women not feeling safe perhaps in their own homes or in their communities. Because we're an isolated community, we do not have policing on the island. Police officers come as called, maybe through our provincial marine unit. They are on the island during certain parts of the year and certain parts of the week, but it isn't 24-7.

They are able to respond, but, you know, not in bad weather or in different circumstances. When we don't have access to even a room for someone to go to be safe, or to be supported—something that could be delivered potentially through funding directly to the municipality, or something that could be funded through our health care providers—it puts women in a space where I don't need to explain that they probably simply won't call the police. They might just carry on and hope for the best.

Personally, I feel that this is a gap in a rural community. Specific funding to municipalities to support programs or bring in programs through health care providers that would create a safe space for women in crisis and high need would be appropriate.

● (1300)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This brings us to the end of our time. On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank the three of you for bringing forward such fantastic testimony today. Thank you very much.

A reminder to the committee that starting on Thursday we will be doing version two of the human trafficking study. Please ensure you bring your report. It was just updated. It should have been received in your office on Thursday.

If you have not done so, make sure you send in for the red dress study that's coming up. Our deadline is Friday, February 16, for witnesses for red dress alert.

Seeing no further questions or comments, today's meeting is adjourned.

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