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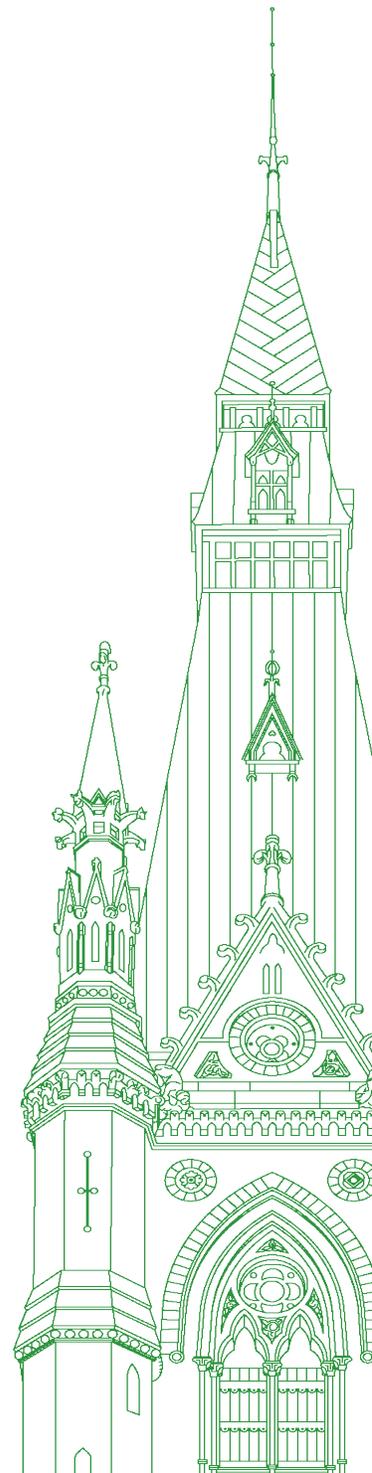
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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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

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• (1635)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 42 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person and remotely by using the Zoom application.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would ask you to please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating virtually, please use the “raise hand” function. Before speaking, click on the microphone icon to activate your own mike. When you are done speaking, please put your mike on mute to minimize interference.

For those in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. Your microphone will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officer. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order. We appreciate your patience and understanding.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available by choosing either English or French if you're attending remotely. I would also advise that unless there are exceptional circumstances, I will recognize those appearing virtually only if they have an approved House of Commons headset.

I would also remind you that screenshots are prohibited when the meeting is in session. Should any technical issues arise, please advise me and we'll suspend for a few minutes to ensure that everyone may participate fully.

Pursuant to order of reference of Tuesday, October 18, 2022, the committee will resume its study of Bill C-22, an act to reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making a consequential amendment to the Income Tax Act.

I would like to take a moment to remind those participating in today's meeting as well as those observing the proceedings in person on video that the committee adopted a motion on Monday, October 24, 2022, that included instructions for the clerk to explore options to allow for the participation of all witnesses and members of the public in the context of the consideration of Bill C-22. In planning inclusive and accessible meetings, the committee has made arrangements for sign language interpretation in both American Sign

Language and Quebec sign language for those witnesses appearing in person, and by Zoom for those individuals in our audience.

The sign language interpreters are being video recorded to be incorporated into a video recording of the proceedings today. That would be made available at a later date on ParlVU via the committee's website. To assist the interpreters in their work, I kindly ask all members and witnesses appearing today to introduce themselves when speaking. When I recognize you, before you begin, introduce yourself and speak slowly.

Finally, if a member of the audience requires assistance at any time, please notify a member of the staff or the committee clerk.

I would like to inform all members that the witnesses appearing virtually today have completed the technical test to check their connectivity and equipment.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin our discussions with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by questions.

We will begin with Indwell Community Homes and Jeffrey Neven, chief executive officer.

From Reena, we have Gary Gladstone, head of stakeholder relations.

We have Vincent Calderhead, legal counsel, appearing as an individual, but we have not been able to connect with him at this time.

I will start with five minutes for Jeffrey Neven, chief executive officer of Indwell Community Homes.

Mr. Neven, you have the floor.

Mr. Jeffrey Neven (Chief Executive Officer, Indwell Community Homes): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you mentioned, my name is Jeff Neven and I am the CEO at Indwell.

Indwell is a Christian charity that creates affordable housing communities that support people seeking health, wellness and belonging. Our three core values are dignity, love and hope.

We serve more than 1,200 people with housing and support programs in southwestern and southern Ontario. These include places like Hamilton, London and Kitchener-Waterloo, and smaller communities like Woodstock, Norfolk County and St. Thomas.

One in five people in Canada lives with a disability, and over one million Canadians with disabilities live in poverty. As a leading provider of supportive affordable housing for people with disabilities, Indwell walks alongside many vulnerable Canadians whose income bears no resemblance to the actual costs of living.

In Ontario, for example, the current housing allowance for a person receiving the Ontario disability support benefit is \$522 per month. The complete disconnection between the provided housing allowance and the actual cost of housing has produced homelessness, an impossible demand for specialized housing and an over-subscription of every housing subsidy program.

Indwell supports the immediate introduction of the Canada disability benefit act as a vital tool to promote the choice and dignity of Canadians with disabilities. We firmly believe that every Canadian deserves the opportunity to access quality housing of their choice. When Canadians have enough income to access the necessities of living, it creates a pathway for recovery and independence. Adequate income support that matches the cost of living increases opportunities for people with disabilities to make real choices about where they live.

As a supportive housing provider, we also recognize that chronically low disability benefits contribute to the increased cost of providing quality and deeply affordable housing and supports. Currently in Ontario, people with disabilities can cover only a small portion of the actual cost of their housing, requiring reliance on limited subsidy programs and resources. In terms of housing development, this severely impacts the ability of any developer to create a suitable and sustainable business case for housing geared to people with disabilities. When people have the opportunity to purchase their housing from the market, it will fuel the construction of new affordable housing stock by both the non-profit and for-profit sectors.

We strongly support the Canada disability benefit act as a high-impact opportunity to change the lives of people with disabilities in Canada. We strongly encourage the government and all members of Parliament to act and to implement this program.

We believe the impact of this program will be significant if the benefit amount is in keeping with the actual costs of the necessities of life, if the program functions as a direct increase in income with no provisions for clawbacks from any provincial income programs, if housing allowance programs are indexed to current available market rents, if individuals receiving the benefit are empowered to use their income freely and if implementation of the program does not replace existing housing subsidy programs.

In conclusion, the Canada disability benefit act has the potential to transform the lives of those living with disabilities by pulling thousands out of poverty and affirming their human dignity. In addition, it will bring the for-profit housing sector back into providing housing solutions for thousands of Canadians.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this important bill.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Neven.

Now we'll go to Mr. Gladstone for up to five minutes.

Mr. Gary Gladstone (Head of Stakeholder Relations, Reena):
Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

My name is Gary Gladstone. I am the lead of stakeholder relations at Reena as well as the convener of the Intentional Community Consortium.

Reena, celebrating our 50th anniversary next year, promotes dignity, individuality, independence, personal growth and community inclusion for people with diverse abilities within a framework of Jewish culture and values. Open to all, Reena provides supportive housing, programming and employment services to over 1,000 individuals with developmental disabilities, including autism and those with mental health challenges.

The Intentional Community Consortium represents 26 agencies that are advocating and building not-for-profit, deeply affordable housing for the most vulnerable in society: those with developmental disabilities.

Reena is the fourth-largest developmental service provider in Ontario, currently operating 32 group homes and supporting an additional 140 individuals in supported independent living units. There are 252 community participants in our daily programming, with over 700 full- and part-time employees. Reena has an overall budget of \$75 million.

On behalf of those we support with varied abilities and specifically those with developmental disabilities and severe mental health challenges, I am pleased to be present to support Bill C-22, an act to reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making a consequential amendment to the Income Tax Act. I request that this legislation be passed as soon as possible, with a tight timeline of six months to complete regulations.

As I thank Minister Carla Qualtrough for bringing this important legislation forward, I would also like to thank all members and parties in the House for expediting this bill through the House to committee to have a full discussion.

About 100,000 Ontario adults have a developmental disability. Eighteen per cent to 30% of people in homeless shelters have a developmental disability. Fifty per cent of those with developmental disabilities live with significant medical issues. Ninety per cent of those with developmental disabilities live below the poverty line and require deeply affordable rent for adequate housing, with supports that amount to about \$522 in Ontario. Women with a developmental disability are 65% more likely to experience abuse than a typical female.

Honourable members of the committee, as I have said to you before, there is a waiting list of over 40 years for housing with supports for those with developmental disabilities, although things are getting a bit better, thanks to the targeted carve-out of the national housing strategy for this targeted vulnerable community.

Bill C-22 is a vital piece of legislation that will impact the lives of those we support and those with disabilities from coast to coast. We need to pass this legislation as soon as possible with all-party support so that we can immediately get working on the regulations that will address critical issues about the design and structure of the benefit.

I would urge that the following be in the regulations. Number one is a safeguard against provincial and territorial government clawbacks, as we want to ensure that there is a net benefit and that there will not be a clawback from the provinces of any additional funds provided by the federal government.

Number two is indexing for inflation. As inflation and the increased cost of living are on everyone's mind now, it's imperative that any benefit be indexed to the rate of inflation.

Number three is that we would also like to see representatives from the disabled community at the table when decisions are made with respect to Bill C-22, as well as all disability acts and regulations.

It's imperative that we enact the bill and work on the regulations immediately so that we can get the benefits out to the most vulnerable, those who need them now, as soon as possible. Reena and the Intentional Community Consortium recommend that a deadline for the recommendations and actionable items be no more than six months.

In preparation for this presentation, I have read briefs from many outstanding organizations in the disability sector. I would like it noted that Reena and the Intentional Community Consortium share some of the concerns of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance. We would like them addressed—without slowing down the passage of this legislation, when possible—within six months, to ensure that the benefit gets out the door as soon as possible.

“A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members” is a quote attributed to Mahatma Gandhi. Through the proposed act, you can ensure that Canada takes care of those who cannot advocate for themselves. With your support, we need to ensure that those with developmental disabilities are never left behind again.

• (1645)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-22 with the request that it be quickly passed into law, with unanimous all-party support, with regulations brought forth within six months.

For further information on Reena and the consortium, please visit our website, www.reena.org. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gladstone.

We will now open the floor to questions from committee members. We will begin with Ms. Gray.

Ms. Gray, you have six minutes, please.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

I'll start with you, Mr. Gladstone. You made a comment about a timeline. I'm not sure if you saw the testimony on Monday, when we had the minister here and the timeline was laid out. It was stated by both the minister and the officials that it will likely take around 12 months to do regulations. Then, of course, there will be implementation after that, so we could very well be into 2024.

I'm wondering if you have thoughts on that and what difficulties you see with that type of timeline.

Mr. Gary Gladstone: Thank you.

The first comment I would make is that I would encourage all members of the House, across all parties, to be as co-operative as possible to ensure that those with disabilities get the results they need as soon as possible.

We've indicated six months; I understand that some things move quickly and some things don't move as quickly. Whatever can be done to expedite the process would be most appreciated.

As I was joking this morning, we've just got to get 'er done and make sure that those who require the funds have the funds.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

The other thing I want to ask you about is clawbacks. We know that in the legislation there is no guarantee that clawbacks couldn't potentially happen. I'm wondering if you're concerned about potential clawbacks.

Mr. Gary Gladstone: I am concerned, as I indicated. I'm certainly hoping that in the regulations there will be a mention and that this will be enough to ensure that this will be the case—and in the negotiations and the agreements with the provinces and territories.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I know that the government has mentioned that they have been doing consultations on this benefit. We know that this legislation was tabled in the last Parliament. Then, of course, with the election, it died, and then it was brought forth again. I'm wondering if you could tell us what level of participation you've had on consultations to this point.

● (1650)

Mr. Gary Gladstone: We have had many meetings with various ministers and MPs of all parties since this and previous governments were elected, indicating that there is a tremendous need for additional funds for those with disabilities, and in our case particularly for those with developmental disabilities. We have been speaking with many on this topic over the years, across all party lines, with a very positive reception.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great. Thank you.

Another concern we've heard from organizations and through various media stories, as well as persons with disabilities with financial situations, is about the really unfortunate decision to opt for medical assistance in dying. We had some testimony on this on Monday. These situations highlight further the need to get this type of support to individuals quickly and to do it right.

Have you heard those types of concerns as well?

Mr. Gary Gladstone: I've heard those types of concerns from many, and it's imperative.... This is Canada. It's time we take care of all our citizens, especially and particularly those with disabilities.

This is an excellent vehicle to take that step. I'm hoping, as I've indicated, that we can take that step and that financial concerns will no longer be an issue.

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

I'd like to ask similar questions of Mr. Neven as well.

I'll start off the top with the timeline. We've heard the timeline of how long this could take and when this would actually be implemented. I'm wondering if you could speak to that, on what concerns you have and what you think the gaps might mean to people you work with.

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: I would concur that we need to move this legislation forward. It's much needed. I would really encourage all members of Parliament to do whatever they can to move it forward.

The reality is that I was in a conversation just this week with a close friend who is on the edge of becoming homeless because he can't afford his rent due to his disability. Unfortunately, that's happening to thousands of people across our country.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

I'll ask you as well about the consultation that you've had with the government up to this point.

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: We have reached out to members of Parliament, as well as all levels of government, to raise the issue that

people living with permanent disabilities do not have adequate means to cover the basic necessities of life.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: As part of that, when we're talking about outreach, whether or not it's sending some information in, has there been any format that you've been involved in, such as a round table, or anything from a consultative point of view that was looking for really specific recommendations and ideas?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Most of our consultation has been through the housing side of things. In the housing conversation, that directly is about people's income.

I have a deep appreciation for Minister Hussen, who's had multiple roundtables in communities where we've been. He continues to reach out—in my case, as recently as yesterday—to hear about the implications of the lack of housing and the lack of income associated with that.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Right. Was that on Bill C-22, though, or was that on a separate housing initiative?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: As I mentioned, our approach has been through a housing lens. As a part of that conversation, income is a key driver in the cause of the housing side of things.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Mr. Collins, you have six minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of the witnesses for their attendance today and for providing testimony.

First, can I start with Mr. Neven?

Jeff, welcome to the committee. As a former city councillor and past president of CityHousing Hamilton, I know that many of our tenants who are on ODSP and receive it as a support payment struggled over the years to just cope and to purchase the necessities of life.

Can you briefly share with the committee what challenges your tenants would face currently with the disability support payment that they receive from the Province of Ontario? Can you expand upon the housing component, as you referenced in your opening?

● (1655)

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Yes. Thank you, MP Collins.

It is actually dire.

As I mentioned, our organization is focused on the approximately seven million people who live south and southwest of Toronto in that area from Mississauga all the way down to Chatham. Across that region, a windowless basement apartment is \$1,500. Folks currently living with disabilities have a housing allowance of \$522. We have a gap of approximately \$1,000 to hit the bottom, the cheapest of the market units available. This is having an impact on people's health, mental health and substance use. In addition to the human impact, the lack of adequate income that folks with disabilities are living with means that they can't purchase what they need from the market.

We're also seeing, as a housing developer and health care provider, that it's limiting the options of the private sector. When I started in this role 20 years ago, our folks were able to find housing at the bottom end of the market in the for-profit sector. There's now a \$1,000 gap to hit the bottom of that.

The implications are homelessness and poor health, as has been mentioned today. In some cases, it's leading to death.

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks, Jeff, for that information.

Mr. Gladstone referenced the percentage of those people who are disabled who find themselves in a shelter. I think the stat that he gave was between 18% and 30%. I know a lot of your clients at one point in time, unfortunately, would find themselves living in an emergency shelter in Hamilton or other communities where you have units.

Can you share with us the situation as it relates to the disabled? You referenced your friend. With regard to those people living with a disability who receive ODSP and can't find accommodation—like that basement apartment, even, which is the cheapest one on the market—can you share with us some of the stories for those individuals, some Indwell tenants who may have found their way through the shelter system because they're not receiving the appropriate income support today?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: This is a daily story for us.

Literally, in any given year, we have thousands of folks calling us in desperate situations. In our case, our primary area of expertise, when it comes to supports, is with those experiencing mental illness and addictions. The impact of struggling with mental health and having inadequate financial supports means that people calling us are in desperate situations. They are homeless.

Mr. Gladstone referenced how many folks in homeless shelters are dealing with a developmental challenge. There are stats as high as 80% out there for acquired brain injury. There are other stats around mental health.

What we're finding is that nearly everyone applying for our housing because of homelessness is experiencing mental health concerns, whether those are diagnosed or undiagnosed.

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks, Jeff.

I have one last question. I think I probably have about a minute left.

The minister was here earlier this week, and she was very clear that there would be no clawbacks with this. She also talked about

not substituting the benefit for existing payments the provinces and territories might currently offer.

You were very clear in your recommendations. How important is it for your community that this be a supplemental payment—an increase to what they receive today—and that it doesn't substitute for, in our case, the ODSP payments the province currently provides?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: It's essential that this benefit be in addition to what folks are currently receiving as income, whether that be from the province or other subsidy programs. If there's a clawback, it goes against the very intent of helping people have more income in order to purchase the basic necessities they need.

• (1700)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Chad Collins: I'm good, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Collins.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us and for their work with people with disabilities.

My first question will be for Mr. Neven.

A few times in your speech, you stressed the need to have an income that matches the actual cost of living. Do you have any idea what that income would be?

I'm asking you this question because the bill indicates that it will be decided by regulation. It's important for us, as parliamentarians, to have a sense of what witnesses mean by a benefit that is sufficient to meet the needs.

[*English*]

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Thank you for that clarifying question.

As I mentioned, in our geography—the area of southwestern Ontario—that gap on the housing piece alone is about \$1,000 currently. The biggest factor that forces people into homelessness is that they can't pay for their housing.

I suggest that the income benefit required would need to be in the area of \$1,000 per person per month, at a minimum.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Gladstone.

As we understand it, you provide employment assistance for people with disabilities. As you know, the Canadian disability benefit is intended to be a supplement to employment income. However, once again, the bill doesn't provide any details on the mechanics behind this supplement.

Do you have an opinion on what this mechanism should be?

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Gladstone: Thank you very much for recognizing the work that Reena does with its employment programs, which have very good success rates for those it is able to assist.

Building on Mr. Neven's comments, it's important that this must be in addition to and not instead of. I would look to it to encourage individuals to work where it's appropriate and for the hours that are appropriate for them to be working for an income. With that, together with the Canada disability benefit, they should be in a position to get even further ahead and get out of poverty, which is severe.

With 90% of those with developmental disabilities living below the poverty line, it's real and chronic. The supports from the disability benefit and the wages that they would be earning for the hours at the jobs that they are able to work at would make a difference.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: If I understand you correctly, you're saying that it must be complementary. So we have to take into account the amount of employment income that will have to be preserved, because employment is important. The benefit will have to be an addition. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Gladstone: I think it's important that an individual with disabilities—in this case, I will mention specifically developmental disabilities—has the ability to both earn and have a benefit to ensure that they are not below but are actually above the poverty line and are able to live a decent life in a decent home with a decent future. The government is in a position to assist through the Canada disability benefit as well as through the supports from the employment programs.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: The next question is for you two, Mr. Neven and Mr. Gladstone.

As parliamentarians, we will have to do a clause-by-clause consideration of this bill. Do you already have any suggestions for amendments to the current bill? I'm thinking in particular of amendments to the timeline, the amount or the mechanism. Do you have any recommendations in this regard?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: I think it is important that we clarify the minimum amount. That's going to really impact the potential benefits of this program.

I would concur with Mr. Gladstone's testimony relating to the urgency and the timelines required. If an amendment could be made to improve the timeline to implement the bill, that would be important as well.

Mr. Gary Gladstone: From my perspective again, it is important that the money get into the hands that of those who require it as soon as possible, with all-party support. I will stress that a million times to make sure it does, in fact, happen.

If it doesn't delay, I would like to see the minimum, as Mr. Neven indicated, as well as the safeguard against clawbacks and the index for inflation. It's not related directly to the bill itself, but we'd like to ensure that as discussions are taking place, representatives from the disabled community are present at the discussions.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Committee members, before I go to Ms. Zarrillo, you will see that Mr. Calderhead is now available. If you agree, we need to do a quick sound check with him and allow him to do his statement, because he is a witness who has been asked to be here.

Could we suspend for a couple of minutes while we do the sound check and bring him in before we go to Ms. Zarrillo?

Ms. Zarrillo, are you okay with that as well?

Okay. We'll suspend for a couple of moments. Then he'll make his opening statement and we'll resume with Ms. Zarrillo.

● (1705)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1710)

The Chair: The committee will resume at this time.

Madam Zarrillo, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses and to Mr. Calderhead for coming in today.

I'm going to reiterate what I've heard today. Both of the witnesses mentioned the adequacy of this benefit to ensure that it secures the necessity of life for folks and is not clawed back. As I'm sure you know, the majority of this disability benefit is being designed by regulation rather than in the bill.

I'm going to ask you first, Mr. Neven, and then Mr. Gladstone: What do you feel the pros and cons are of putting this into regulation rather than securing it into the bill to have the adequacy and to have no clawbacks? I think you also mentioned a timeline secured in the bill. What do you think the risks or the pros and cons might be on that design choice?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: We're moving into an area that's not necessarily my area of expertise, but I'll just say that from my perspective, it seems that putting it in the bill legislates these details and ensures the minimum standards and such; however, if that were to slow down the process, then it's a balancing act of finding the best way forward while ensuring the inclusion of these particular pieces that have come up here today. Those include the minimum amount, ensuring there's no clawback, ensuring that it's not impacted by inflation and ensuring that the amount provided is indexed to the cost of living. I'm somewhat pragmatic on those things. If the best way to get them is through legislation, let's do that. If the best way is through regulation, then let's do that.

Mr. Gary Gladstone: As well, I'm not an expert, but perhaps I know a bit more.

The first comment I would make is that if it's in regulation or if it's in legislation, another government still has the opportunity to change it however they want, when they want and how they want.

At this point, as I indicated and stressed, and to add to Mr. Neven's comments, we need to get it done. We need to get this out into the hands of the individuals that we and others support in the disability community as soon as possible. From what I understand, regulation at this point would be faster in making any changes that I've indicated would need to be made, and the bottom line is that if they can be done appropriately and quickly, that's most important.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Neven.

Mr. Gladstone, I want to touch on gender lines, which you did approach in speaking about the impact that this has on women. We know that the pay gap in general disproportionately affects women, and there are many implications of income insecurity for women.

If you don't mind, Mr. Gladstone, just expand a little on why it is so important for women to have this financial gap fixed and how it could be transformational for women's lives and women living with a disability.

• (1715)

Mr. Gary Gladstone: Well, thank you.

Safety, security and appropriate and safe housing are essential. They are at the core of everything that we do and that the majority of disability agencies do. It is vital to have good, secure, safe housing in which you are not dependent on somebody else, you can cover your own expenses and you can live.

I'll just reiterate "a safe place" a thousand times over, because if you're not in a safe place, you can be taken advantage of in many ways. As I indicated in my initial stats that you commented on—thank you—women with developmental disabilities are 65% more likely to suffer abuse, and that's because of improper and inappropriate housing in the shelters, etc.

If people, through the benefit, are able to afford a place to live—again I'll just reiterate, as those on the committee have heard me say time and time again—through more money for housing, and thank you very much, it gives them a much better opportunity to have a full and fulfilling life without having to worry.

I thank you.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

I've heard from a number of women and women living with a disability that they're concerned that it will be a household measurement or that they won't have the autonomy that they deserve in Bill C-22. Do you see any space in Bill C-22 where their autonomy would be at risk because it's not really written into the bill at this point in time?

Mr. Gary Gladstone: Well, I would go back to the comment I made that individuals with disabilities and representing those with disabilities should be around the table when all the regulations are being set to ensure things like that are in fact covered in the regulations and that there won't be those issues. It's important for the right individuals to be sitting around the table. Then the appropriate results that we all want will be there.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: That's great.

This idea of co-creation has come up before in testimony here. Again, in Bill C-22, we don't see it actually written into regulation that there needs to be a co-creation piece.

Mr. Gladstone, would you support an amendment that explicitly says this needs to be jointly fashioned with the disability community?

Mr. Neven, I would ask you that same question.

Mr. Gary Gladstone: In terms of the phrase "amendment", I'd be a little afraid of the timeline to both get that done right and get it done quickly. I'm not sure if an amendment is necessary, or just instructions back to drafters. Again, that's not my area of expertise, but I really think it's important that those with disabilities and those representing them be around the table as the regulations are being drawn up and drafted.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Zarrillo. You were a bit over.

Mr. Aitchison, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have a question. I'm going to start with Mr. Neven.

I want to focus more on the actual supply of housing. Both your organizations obviously don't just operate facilities; you offer homes and you build them as well. Can you quantify for us the need, the waiting list—maybe locally, regionally and even nationally—for homes?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Yes. Thank you for that question.

The need is tremendous. It's similar to the number of folks who are living in poverty due to a disability. It comes as no shocker that when people have only a little over \$500 to purchase housing that costs \$1,500, it leads to homelessness.

I can speak to it city by city just to give you a couple of anecdotes. In the city of Hamilton, where I reside, there are about a thousand people living on the streets. It's a similar number in London, which is a slightly smaller city. That's for just two cities here in our country.

What we're looking at, if you look at the ratios on this, is that somewhere between one in 250 and one in 500 in those cities are looking at homelessness. Much of it is due to inadequate incomes to be able to purchase the housing required.

• (1720)

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Quickly, then, if I can follow up on that, in terms of getting new units built, I am assuming that organizations like yours have to engage the assistance of something like the CMHC to make the numbers work. Is that true?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: That is correct. It's incredibly difficult, even with the current programs that exist, because the ability of individuals to purchase their housing is so very low. Even with those capital support programs, currently it's nearly impossible to create deeply affordable housing in the range of \$500 a month for rent, which is the current housing benefit that people in Ontario receive, so—

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Can I give you an example of a situation that exists in Muskoka?

Community Living South Muskoka is obviously a pretty important organization in our community. They actually owned a piece of land and got all the municipal approvals done. Everything was ready to go. When they finally got through all of that painful process—having been a former mayor, I know how painful municipalities can be—and they started dealing with the CMHC, that's when they gave up. They sold the land. It was like a straitjacket.

If you've had enough experience in dealing with CMHC, I'm wondering if you could speak to whether there is anything we should be focusing on here to improve the process. I know that they're all well-meaning and want to help, but it sounds like there have been an awful lot of circumstances in which they couldn't get the money out the door because we couldn't tick every box. Would you suggest any things that we could do to make the CMHC work better and faster?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: I think that's for another committee, perhaps, but what I will say is that this benefit, if implemented, would work hand in hand with the national housing strategy and actually make that strategy much more effective.

For those like the community living folks you mentioned, the numbers would work. I spoke to that in my remarks. Currently the cost of construction, the cost of land and the various challenges that are in front of us in order to create deeply affordable housing are large. They're too big. The challenge that comes back consistently is that it's nearly impossible to find enough programs at the federal, provincial and municipal levels to actually make it work when people's incomes are so inadequate for purchasing their housing, so I think with this benefit, groups like the ones you mentioned will actually find success when they're working out the numbers with groups like CMHC. As the—

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Mr. Neven, I'm running out of time. Let me just quickly follow up and say to you that I think you're right: They do have to work hand in hand.

I think this is actually a conversation that we need to have. If possible, I'd like to follow up with you.

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Absolutely.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: We're looking for ways to make it work better, so perhaps off-line we can talk about it some more.

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Absolutely.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: They do have to work together, and it sounds like they're not right now. I think everyone around this committee and in Parliament does agree that this benefit is important. We need to get it done, and we need to get it done as quickly as possible, but we have a lot of work to do on the other side to get supply up. That's one of the areas where we could use your help.

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Let me tell you this: We created 330 deeply affordable units this year. If this benefit comes into being, we can up that by at least double, and in subsequent years maybe even triple it, because the sustainability will work.

Mr. Gary Gladstone: Then in terms of your question of the need, as you're well aware, the—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Gladstone. You may want to interject that with another questioner later.

Thank you, Mr. Aitchison.

Mr. Coteau, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Gary, do you want to finish what you were saying?

Mr. Gary Gladstone: Thank you very much.

I was just going to indicate that housing for those with developmental disabilities has an approximately 40-year waiting list. In York region alone, there are currently 640 individuals in residential service with supports, and in need are another 1,914. In the city of Toronto there are approximately 1,816 in residential service, and in need are another 5,616. There were 4,825 unique individuals waiting for permanent support living in Toronto. As of March 31, some were waiting for multiple different resources.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Gladstone.

I want to thank both of you for being here today and for providing us with so much information.

Mr. Neven, you said something very interesting at the very beginning. You talked about “choice and dignity” and “recovery and independence”. We often forget about the recovery and independence piece. This is about building someone up so that they can be independent and they can chart their own course. I just want to say thank you for bringing that message here to this committee.

The world has changed. Over the last few years, we've seen the impact of the pandemic physically, and in many cases it has impacted many Canadians from a mental health standpoint. We see the economy changing rapidly and people facing more and more challenges.

The message we keep hearing, not only from the two of you today but also from other witnesses, is that we need to do this as quickly as possible. Is that because the challenges people are presenting will bring more pressure? Is it because of the long-term piece or the long-term history of this specific file? Do you believe that if we can, as the minister suggested, take that framework and by putting in regulations get this done, with people from the community involved in the process and doing it together, this is the best route possible to get it done and to take on some of those challenges we're facing?

Either of you can answer.

• (1725)

Mr. Gary Gladstone: I would say it's absolutely the right way. We need to move it forward. Individuals need the benefit in order to have dignity, in order to make the right choices and in order to lead proper and fulfilling lives. I mean those with all disabilities, and, again, speaking on behalf of those with developmental disabilities, it's absolutely the right way.

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Let me just humanize this conversation with a conversation from yesterday with my friend. He realizes that this month he wasn't able to pay insurance on his car that he needs to use to get to work, which he's currently on a leave from. He recognizes that having his car parked on the street uninsured will likely get it towed, and then he will lose the use of his car and the likelihood of being able to return to work becomes smaller and smaller. He's about to lose his housing, and the lack of basic income support to help him through this hopefully short episode in his life, an episode arising from mental health issues, is going to have long-term impacts on his life.

I think it's the right thing to do. It's dignified to give an adequate income to people who have permanent long-term disabilities so that they can have choice. We talked about a gendered lens here. When people have choice, when money is in their name, they can choose and seek out safe, adequate housing that suits their needs, and it will ensure that we not only help people to move out of homelessness but also prevent others like my friend from moving into it.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

I was watching the news a few days ago. They were talking about Bill C-22, and someone used the word "lifesaver" in many ways. When you talk about choice and dignity, recovering independence and real choices, it just says to me as a parliamentarian that we have to ensure that this is a non-partisan issue with a non-partisan approach and that we work together on this committee to get it done as quickly as possible and support that framework that the minister believes can take us there quickest.

I want to say thank you for your time for being here today and for the work both of your organizations do and you do individually.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to continue on the issue of the urgent need for action and the call for parliamentarians to pass Bill C-22 as quickly as possible.

We hear and understand the call, because what is being sought is in the title of the bill: reducing poverty and supporting the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit.

However, I would like you to give me your opinion, because this bill is a framework bill that talks about what you are talking about, which is having an adequate income, applying the principle of complementarity with the provinces and having a benefit that does not deprive recipients who are already receiving support for their disability. None of that is provided for in the bill. For us, as parliamentarians, this part of the bill is a blank page. What's more, the bill provides that anything you want will be done by regulation. We asked Minister Qualtrough how long it might take to implement this bill, and we haven't received any indication.

Why is it important that the regulations be implemented with the participation of all the organizations representing people with disabilities? It means that there will be delays.

Do you think we'll be able to act on it with a deadline that is perhaps very tight?

• (1730)

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Gladstone: In my comments, I indicated six months. I recall one of the other parliamentarians indicated 12 months. Either one would be fine. I think it would be almost impossible to consult with "all" organizations because, as you indicated, it is important to relieve poverty for those with disabilities and get the act and regulations in place. Based on the work that this committee does and that I've been involved with in the past, I think that you're able to get a very good cross-section to start the process well. With the committee that the minister will strike, I believe that we'll be in a good position relatively quickly to have a bill with regulations that will make a huge and life-changing difference in the lives of those with disabilities.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Madame Zarrillo has two and a half minutes to conclude the first hour.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to revisit this idea of the necessities of life because of what we heard in some testimony.

Mr. Gladstone, I will ask you to answer first, and then Mr. Neven.

What we heard in some testimony was that it costs more to have a disability. It costs more than the average necessities of life, even with our Poverty Reduction Act, which talks about a poverty level or a poverty line. Mr. Neven, you talked about a \$1,000 gap in housing alone.

Mr. Gladstone, do you have any suggestions for what financial security needs to look like in the way of a minimum benefit, and what kinds of things it needs to cover?

Mr. Gary Gladstone: I can only speak to Ontario.

I will take the number of \$1,000 from Mr. Neven, because it's about the number I would use as well, but the extra expenses are large. Never mind the supports that are generally provided by the government; there are the extra supplies for everyday living, from clothing that is more expensive to diapers. Obviously that does not apply for everybody, but for some. There are the wheelchairs for the mobility challenged. It's all expensive. Some is covered; some is not, at various levels. The increase is absolutely needed.

For Ontario, if we're in a position to get an extra \$1,000 a month, I think that would be life-changing and life-altering.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

Mr. Neven, do you have any comments?

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: I would concur with Mr. Gladstone that assistive devices are expensive and that there are additional limitations around transportation. You're not going to those big-box stores out in the suburbs to get those low-cost items.

The provision of food is expensive. It's hard to come by, which we're hearing from many folks, particularly if you have limited means for transportation or have mobility challenges. Those are certainly some things to consider.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: All right. Thank you.

For my last point, I have a couple of minutes or maybe a minute on eligibility. Do you have—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Okay.

Mr. Neven, do you have any comments on eligibility and who should be included on the eligibility side?

Mr. Gladstone can answer as well, if there's any time, or maybe you could send in a written response.

Mr. Jeffrey Neven: Again, very pragmatically, we want to expedite this measure and see that it happens quickly. If there's a way in the regulations to work with the provinces to extend provincial disability programs, it might be the quickest way to implement this.

However, there are some challenges for folks who might be disqualified from those programs for some reason, and who may need to be included in the federal program.

• (1735)

The Chair: Give a short answer, Mr. Gladstone.

Mr. Gary Gladstone: I would mention that the federal government currently has programs like the disability tax credit. The provincial governments have, in Ontario's case, the ODSP. To Mr. Neven's comment, it could be used with the ability to appeal if one is not eligible for a program for whatever reason, so that the eligibility will still be there.

In terms of the cost, I'll mention one ridiculousness of living in York Region and sometimes having to go to Toronto. Going back and forth, you know that as soon as you cross Steeles, and although each municipality has a wonderful transit service for those with disabilities, you have to take a taxi, and up goes the cost. If you did not have a disability, you would not have that issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Zarrillo.

Thank you to the witnesses.

We'll suspend for two minutes while we change the panels.

Again, thank you, witnesses, for your time and testimony before this committee on this important bill.

Thank you very much.

• (1735)

(Pause)

• (1740)

The Chair: Welcome back.

The committee will resume its study of Bill C-22, an act to reduce poverty and support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act.

To assist the interpreters in their work, I kindly remind all members and witnesses appearing today to introduce themselves when speaking and to speak slowly. Nobody did that in the first round.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for the meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen if you're appearing virtually of either "floor", "English", or "French". Please wait until I recognize you before speaking.

For those participating via video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

I want to emphasize that we are doing interpretation and interpretation in sign language as well.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin our discussion, with but before I do, I forgot to acknowledge Ms. Shelby Kramp-Neuman, who joins us this afternoon. Mr. Morrice is going to join us as well.

From Easter Seals Ontario, we have Alison Morse, senior manager for efficacy and family engagement.

From the Quebec Intellectual Disability Society, we have Amélie Duranleau, executive director, and Samuel Ragot, senior policy analyst and advocacy advisor.

From the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, we have Jen Gammad, communications and advocacy manager.

We will start with Ms. Morse for five minutes, please.

Go ahead, Ms. Morse.

Alison Morse (Senior Manager, Advocacy and Family Engagement, Easter Seals Ontario): Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak here today.

I do go a little bit fast, but I'll try really hard to work on the pacing.

I have been involved with the Easter Seals for well over 30 years. I am the parent of a young person who was supported and I have lived experience of the ways that young people fall into poverty.

I've come here today with a message around families. The families of children with disabilities thought they would be part of this disability benefit. Because it says "persons with disabilities", there was an expectation that it might be broader than it currently is. One thing I would look for in the preamble is to see if we can start to talk about how this may be the first stage in terms of supporting people with disabilities.

When I represent families, I see that they come from a place of fear at the very beginning as their child is diagnosed. They learn to advocate for their child in the education system and in the health care system. On a daily basis, these parents face the challenge of coming up with the money to pay for the equipment and programs that their child may need. Easter Seals Ontario tries to fill that gap. With money raised by donors, we assist families with the cost of equipment. Even with the contribution we make, there still can be a gap that the parents can't fill. Some parents will take on additional debt to cover that, and many other families will do without.

The cost of equipment for somebody with a physical disability can be astronomical. We're talking about \$40,000 for a power wheelchair. There is some government funding, but it is very much aimed at the base model.

Recently, some young people we're supporting have gone to the wheelchairs that allow them to go from sitting to standing. We've seen the self-confidence and growth when they have access to that kind of equipment.

However, what Easter Seals funds is basic equipment, particularly bathroom equipment, which is not covered by the Government of Ontario, and accessibility equipment to enable a child to get into and out of their home and around their home, whether this be lifts or ramps. We fill in that gap.

Many families do not have enough money to buy equipment, so they have to come knocking at the door of charities. Charities do a wonderful job of filling the gap across the social service sector, but as a parent, it's hard to know that you can't support your child and that you have to go knocking at doors, begging to get extra money.

An additional challenge faced by families is the fear for the future. We're very excited about this bill and the fact that it is going to support working-age individuals or persons with a disability, because we know that one of the family's biggest fears is that there will not be enough money to support the person when they get to adulthood.

Some of the kids that we've supported at Easter Seals have a rosy future. They may be going on to post-secondary education. They have career prospects. However, for the majority, it's going to be a piecemeal of part-time jobs, periods of underemployment and unemployment. In addition, those with very severe disabilities are not going to be able to take part in work but are looking for full participation in the community. All of these kids want to be fully included. When their income is 40% below the poverty line here in Ontario, it's very challenging to get the things that make life worthwhile.

The earlier speakers were talking about having to make choices and families adding their names to the list for affordable housing. As has already been indicated in the previous panel, that can be a wait of many years. In some places it's 20 years, and aging parents are still having to support their child because there is not enough money for the individual child to manage on.

I'm here to talk about those fears and to advocate consideration of a long-term plan to expand the Canada disability benefit to include all people with disabilities, including those under the age of 18 and potentially those over the age of 65.

Do I have any more time?

• (1745)

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, Ms. Morse. You may want to cover those items when you're answering some of the questions.

Alison Morse: Okay. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Morse.

Who is speaking for the Quebec Intellectual Disability Society?

Madame Duranleau, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Amélie Duranleau (Executive Director, Quebec Intellectual Disability Society): Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Chair, allow us to thank you for your invitation.

My name is Amélie Duranleau, and I'm the executive director of the Quebec Intellectual Disability Society. With me is Samuel Ragot, who is a policy analyst at the society and a doctoral student at McGill University's School of Social Work, working on financial security for persons with disabilities. We are very pleased to be here to share our thoughts on Bill C-22.

First, we must emphasize that we are very much in favour of the swift passing of Bill C-22, as it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity.

Of course, we are aware that legislators may find voting on a foundational bill, which contains few details, uncomfortable. However, we believe that this is the right thing to do.

On the one hand, consultations with the disability community are still ongoing and will provide key information and expertise. On the other hand, we have had successful experience in developing regulations in relation to a framework legislation in the context of the basic income program in Quebec. In this context, all the modalities of operation had been excluded from the law. We eventually worked with the provincial government for almost four years to come up with a set of regulations that were satisfactory to the majority of the parties involved. As a result, the timeline it set for itself has been met.

In the case of the Canada disability benefit, we think the timeline will be shorter, as many of the consultations with the provinces and territories are already well under way. Since it's possible to achieve success when we work together towards common good, we are confident that this approach is also achievable for the Canadian benefit.

• (1750)

Mr. Samuel Ragot (Senior Policy Analyst and Advocacy Advisor, Quebec Intellectual Disability Society): Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

I would now like to address the importance of working with the provinces and territories. As you know, the provinces and territories all have financial assistance programs for persons with disabilities. It is therefore crucial the federal government works with provincial and territorial governments to avoid penalizing beneficiaries and to avoid disengagement of local governments in the social protection and financial security of persons with disabilities.

In Quebec, as of January 1, 2023, we will have a basic income program, a first in Canada and probably in the world. While this program is not perfect, and we continue to advocate with the provincial government, we must protect it and ensure that the Canadian benefit will not work against local programs in the provinces and territories and, most importantly, that it will actually help those who need it. So far, we are pleased with the approach taken.

We have news from the Quebec government. I spoke to the ministers yesterday, who told us that they were quite supportive of a complementary benefit to provincial programs. So we're satisfied

with that collaborative approach, and we will obviously support all the steps taken in that direction. We are confident that such negotiations are possible. We have seen other cases where this has been successful.

In addition to working with the provinces and territories, we think it is equally important that the Canada disability benefit be fully individualized, that it be a cheque for each person and that it should not take into account the income of spouses in order to limit issues of financial dependency, that it should provide a real way out of poverty, and that it should allow people to work without any clawbacks. We think it's a matter of dignity.

In fact, the current provincial and territorial programs are mostly punitive. They are not really aimed at the well-being of individuals, but rather at the minimal maintenance of living conditions. It is imperative to move away from this vision of welfare, which has been described as

[*English*]

“welfarization” of disabilities.

[*Translation*]

All these fundamental, but very technical elements—emphasis on the word “technical”—should be discussed in the regulatory process and not through amendments to Bill C-22.

Ms. Amélie Duranleau: Indeed, in our opinion, it is adequate to set the parameters of the act through a process of consultation and work with the community. The involvement of persons with disabilities, experts and governments will be crucial. Thus far, we have seen encouraging signs from the government in this regard.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, rest assured that we will be ready to participate in this process. We will be more than happy to share our experience in Quebec on these issues with all of you.

Thank you for moving forward with this very important bill. This is an opportunity that should not be missed. Too many people depend on it.

• (1755)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duranleau.

[*English*]

Ms. Gammad, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Jen Gammad (Communications and Advocacy Manager, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund): Good evening, committee members, and thank you for inviting me here today.

My name is Jen Gammad. I am the communications and advocacy manager at the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, or LEAF for short.

I am grateful to be calling in from Tkaronto, known as Toronto. This land is governed by the dish with one spoon wampum belt covenant.

LEAF is a national charity that works towards ensuring that the law guarantees substantive equality for all women, girls, trans and non-binary people in Canada.

LEAF is here today as an organization allied to disabled communities and organizations that advocate for them. Disability justice is gender justice. Our struggles cannot be separated. We recognize that it is because of the tireless advocacy of these communities that this bill exists in the first place.

I would also like to thank Dr. Sally A. Kimpson, disability scholar and advocate, who authored LEAF's report, "Basic Income, Gender & Disability." LEAF's brief, which we have submitted to the committee, and our position are based on her work.

It is our position that Bill C-22 must be passed as quickly as possible. Disabled women, trans people and non-binary people are among the poorest people in Canada, and they cannot afford to wait any longer.

Make no mistake: Disability poverty is gendered. Reports show that as high as one in three women with disabilities lives in poverty. On average, they make less than disabled men and non-disabled women. Disabled women who are single, single parents, indigenous, racialized, working class and/or newcomers live in the deepest poverty.

Safety is an often-overlooked basic need that is threatened by both ableism and poverty. Disabled women are twice as likely as non-disabled women to be subjected to violence. They are subjected to a wider range and subtler forms of violence, such as caregiver neglect. For those financially dependent on their family, spouse or caregiver, which may often be the case, it may be impossible to leave a violent or abusive situation.

Disability poverty is a vicious structural cycle that contributes to substantive inequality. Without financial security, disabled women and trans people are deprived of and further excluded from a range of cultural, economic, educational, political and social activities and exposed to more violence. Poverty takes away choice, and policy failures create and exacerbate such conditions.

I will touch on existing disability supports in Canada and how they fail to meet the needs of disabled women and trans people.

Disabled women are three times more likely to rely on government transfers than their non-disabled counterparts and more likely than disabled men. However, this country's current provision of supports keeps women, trans and non-binary people poor. For example, the largest source of income for low-income, working-age, disabled women in Canada is from government transfers, mostly provincial or territorial disability benefits, which make up over three-quarters of their total income on average, yet all provincial and territorial support amounts are set far below the market basket measure for their region, and that's not even accounting for the extraordinary costs of being disabled.

Dr. Kimpson accurately described Canada's current range of disability supports as "a fragmented and uncoordinated patchwork of

supports" with differing eligibility criteria amounts, types of benefits and definitions of disability. Many find the process of accessing existing supports confusing, which can discourage folks from applying at all.

The Canada disability benefit, if designed and implemented correctly, provides an opportunity to reach more people who need it, to be less stringent and complicated to apply for than existing benefits and to lift disabled people out of poverty— so how do we get there? The cost of living is skyrocketing, and disability supports continue to stagnate. We cannot delay action any longer.

LEAF urges this government to pass Bill C-22 without delay and ensure that disabled communities lead the design, implementation and evaluation of the benefit.

We amplify the demands of disability rights organizations such as Disability Without Poverty and say that what matters most here is that we get the CDB rolled out as soon as possible and that it's done in collaboration and co-development with disabled people and disabled women who have the expertise to ensure that people don't fall through the cracks.

Such a benefit would be dignity-enhancing. It would promote autonomy. It would reduce the substantive inequality that disabled women and trans people face. Most of all, it would give them more choice in how they want to live their lives.

Thank you.

● (1800)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gammad.

We will go to Ms. Ferreri for six minutes.

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

Thank you so much to our witnesses.

I'm very fortunate to have worked with Easter Seals over my career and have lots of personal connections to people living with intellectual disabilities as well and have been able to work with them throughout my career. I know how important the work is that you guys and Jen from LEAF are doing. Thank you for what you're doing.

I want to use this six minutes as efficiently as we can. I think we all know that this bill needs to get passed. We all know there is a crisis. I want to dig into the amendments. What things do we need to fix? I know we want to pass the bill quickly, but the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, the AODA Alliance, watched our committee on Tuesday, and they were concerned.

I'm going to go to Amélie.

One of their concerns is, "Minister Qualtrough tried to defend the Federal Government's choice to enact what they call 'framework legislation' that leaves it to future regulations to sort out all the details." They went on to say, "What this boils down to is the Government does not want to debate and publicly vote in Parliament on any specifics about the Canada Disability Benefit...".

What would you recommend? We want to move on it quickly and we want to make sure that it's done properly so that the people who are impacted the most.... What amendments to Bill C-22 would you recommend right now?

[Translation]

Ms. Amélie Duranleau: That's a very good question.

A co-building exercise is currently taking place and could be continued. Our predecessors told us that a dozen months would be realistic. Certainly, the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and urgent action is needed. It could be done in a year or so, as long as it gives us enough time to talk to the provinces and territories. We need to make sure that the money will actually get to the individuals and that it will be complementary to what is currently offered.

[English]

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you.

I think that's good feedback in making sure that this is written into the bill.

I will turn to Alison of Easter Seals.

I couldn't agree more with you about supporting families. It's so powerful, Alison, when you speak about this. If the families aren't supported, the person living with the disability will not be successful as well. You have hit a very big nail on the head.

A letter was sent to the committee, and I asked the clerk to make sure that I was allowed to use her name. She has written in multiple times. Her name is Megan. Megan is an autistic Canadian living in Sudbury, Ontario, and she has a lot of concerns. One of her big concerns is, "Will the bill consider anyone working or is it going to discriminate based on age? If so, that's not okay and will leave thousands of Canadians left out."

Alison, as a mom of somebody who is living with a disability, you know that "working age" is different for somebody with a disability. How do you feel about Megan's concerns and what do you think needs to be changed in the bill to ensure the safeguards are there to make sure it's executed properly?

Alison Morse: Thank you very much for allowing me to comment.

In terms of amendments, right now this bill says that it's the Canada disability benefit, and then in the small print, it says it's for

working-age Canadians. I think we need to be thinking bigger in terms of who's going to be included in this Canada disability benefit, and then work on each sector separately.

The working age is probably the group that jumps to mind because there is an expectation that families can take care of their kids, but the experiences that I've had and seen amongst the parents supported by Easter Seals is that it's a major struggle. I would like to see an amendment that acknowledges that people with disabilities are of all ages.

Further, as we get to the regulations, there needs to be lots of input on them to see whether there is a way to look at a lifelong disability. When you're diagnosed as a baby or a preschooler with a disability that is going to affect you permanently for the rest of your life, there needs to be a way to provide the Canada disability benefit to that person. I realize that's not what the thinking was in terms of the early stages of this bill, but I think it's an important direction to recognize and work towards.

In terms of other amendments, families are very concerned about the process for applying. We need to have it so that it's user-friendly, that it is not complicated, that there are people to assist with the process, and that there is an appeal or a dispute resolution mechanism to allow families and other people with disabilities to have an appeal to find out why they were denied or why their benefit was potentially reduced.

I think those would be some important amendments to consider.

● (1805)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Those are excellent amendments, and I hope this committee puts those forth.

To go back to Megan's letter, which I was referring to earlier, she touched on exactly what you just suggested, Alison. One of the things she said in her letter to the committee was this: "Is the government going to allow doctors to bill this to their individual provinces so that Canadians can get them filled out for free?"

What is the cost that's going to be associated with this?

I think you hit a nail on the head with regard to navigating the system, which is a problem we see over and over again with a lot of programs. The intention is good—that's great—but where is the execution in terms of making sure that it is accessible and easy to navigate? Sometimes this is hard even for somebody who doesn't have an intellectual disability. It is sometimes a big challenge for somebody who doesn't have that, so this is another barrier put in place if we don't get this right in the bill. I really appreciate your bringing that up.

The Chair: Ms. Ferreri, we're well over your time, but these are important issues.

Now we go to Mr. Van Bynen for six minutes.

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

I'm happy to see Easter Seals Ontario with us today. I've been engaged with the Easter Seals society for almost 30 years, mostly through the Persechini Easter Seals Run/Walkathon. We've been able to raise in the range of about \$3 million to support Easter Seals kids in Ontario.

However, it shouldn't have to be that way. I think that's what's so important about what we're considering today in terms of providing support. What I've heard is that there are a number of very complicated dynamics that need to be considered as we go forward: the availability of housing, how this fits with the national housing strategy, how it provides a basic income. There are additional needs beyond the basic income, and those are support programs for personal support workers, equipment, etc.

I think it's really important that we actively engage the disabled community in developing the program, the mechanisms, the applications and the appeal processes.

My first question is for Easter Seals Ontario.

I know that Ontario has regulations different from those of any other province, some of which I think are disappointing and include a clawback. How would an organization such as yours be engaged in helping develop the program through these regulations on a provincial basis?

Alison Morse: Easter Seals Ontario would be very pleased to be engaged in those discussions. We would like to have our voice at the table so that we can think about the children and the futures they face, futures that may be limited by poverty. I think it's really important to be able to talk about that and be at the table.

Easter Seals would be very pleased to do that, and not just people who are staff. We have a number of affected parents who would like the opportunity to participate in the process, as well as some young adults with lived experience who would really like to talk about it.

I think we could contribute voices who need to be considered and also some of the ideas that need to be shared.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Are you aware of provincial organizations that would be able to provide province-specific inputs that need to be considered as we develop these regulations?

Alison Morse: The problem is that when you're talking about the disability community, it's a really wide range of people and disabilities. There are a lot of aspects to it. We've been listening to presenters about gender. We've been hearing about the challenges of housing. I think it needs to be a coalition of groups that can speak to various aspects and then for that group to assist with the discussions at the provincial level. You're right; it will vary province to province.

• (1810)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: The other concern that I have is this: How do we recognize the unpaid supports that families are providing that are not covered? First it's to recognize that it's going on and how important that is, but my concern is that if the parents pass on, how are we going to provide for these children who have had these supports without any cost to the government?

Alison Morse: I would say it's a major issue. Aging parents are very, very concerned. You might be concerned when your child is 15, but by the time your child is 45 or 50, you're definitely alarmed, especially if you're the major person providing the care. One of the things that we really need to be talking about is long-term planning and helping the families access a variety of resources so that their child is ready to leave the home well before the parent is incapacitated and no longer able to provide them with care.

We've talked about providing a Canada disability benefit to individuals, but it has to be part of a broader strategy to improve the services and supports that are available to people with disabilities. That includes help with the cost of equipment, but it also includes the cost of programming, including the personal care support workers who are needed by many, many individuals with a disability.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: You mentioned earlier the cost of a wheelchair, the accessibility and having to modify the bathroom for a family. What would you say the costs for those would be?

Alison Morse: I mentioned the cost of a wheelchair. A power wheelchair can be up to \$40,000. A manual wheelchair can cost as much as \$15,000. We're not just talking about a plain wheelchair that's off the shop floor; these are customized wheelchairs that have the appropriate headrest and the appropriate lumbar support. They may have additional features that support the movement of the arms or the legs or stabilize them.

Putting in a bath lift to enable a parent to move their child from their wheelchair into the bath is \$2,300 to \$4,000. A ramp into the house can be \$8,000. A van lift to get your child into an accessible van can cost as much as \$35,000, and that's in addition to the cost of the vehicle that can be modified to include the van lift.

A simple shower commode chair is the chair you put the child in to be safe when they are being bathed in the shower. It needs to be able to support their trunk and head, to make sure that they are safe while they are being bathed.

One of the devices we're seeing being increasingly prescribed is a stander. A stander puts a child in the upright position and mimics the way that the rest of us stand. It has a huge positive potential in supporting the child to bear weight through their bones, which strengthens their bones. It also puts their muscles in a different position. It can reduce contractures. Most excitingly, it can put the child face to face with their peers.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Morse.

Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen. Your time is up.

Madame Chabot, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses.

I'd like to pay special tribute to the Quebec Intellectual Disability Society. I'd like to thank its representatives for accepting our invitation to appear before the committee.

In Quebec, the Quebec Intellectual Disability Society does a very good job of representing people with intellectual disabilities.

A number of things are interesting. I don't have much time to ask my questions, but I'll still have time to ask some of them.

I'd like to clarify that the modalities of the basic income program will go into effect on January 1, 2023. Admittedly, this has taken a lot of work on your part.

You talked about important elements, and I want to ask a few questions about them.

In talking about individualizing benefits, you said that this could serve as a basic parameter for the Canadian benefit.

Why is that important?

Is it an important principle to include in the preamble of the bill?

• (1815)

Mr. Samuel Ragot: The individualization of benefits is fundamental. In fact, it's a prerequisite for the benefit to be functional.

Today, a number of people have said that women with disabilities, in particular, are more likely to experience domestic violence and be financially dependent. Obviously, this is not desirable; it's a situation we want to avoid. In fact, Quebec has begun to address this problem.

As for the federal benefit, that's an issue that can be addressed now, whether it's through the preamble or the regulations. In my view, it's necessary to do so.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I'm going to talk to you about a concern that has been raised by a number of witnesses, by a minister and by the government, and I would like you to tell me if it's a concern for you as well.

The Canadian benefit should be offered as a complement to provincial programs. In the current framework bill, the regulations will be entirely for the benefit of people with disabilities.

As we know, there are as many programs as there are provinces and territories. So it's not the same thing to work in Quebec or in your province as it is to work across Canada, because the programs are different.

Are you concerned that this dynamic will result in some provinces being tempted to make cuts to their own programs?

Mr. Samuel Ragot: It's certainly one of our concerns. It will be important as part of the negotiations to ensure that the provinces and territories do not use federal money to cut or privatize their own social programs. Access to health care and social services is becoming increasingly difficult. It's obviously one of our concerns.

That said, the negotiations that have taken place in other situations, such as with day cares, have been successful. We still feel that there is an openness to this and that we want it to work. That's what we've seen in informal discussions with cabinet members. We think it's something that's feasible that is actually desirable for everybody. It's desirable for governments to see the importance of supporting people and not making this a divisive issue.

Ms. Amélie Duranleau: I'd like to add that it's important that this not be done at the expense of quality universal public services. Complementarity must also be seen in this light.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I'd like to make a quick comment. With respect to early childhood education services, we followed the example of the Quebec model that has been around for 25 years. So it would have been difficult not to make the necessary transfer.

As far as the bill is concerned, the situation is a bit uncomfortable for us as parliamentarians. We need to establish a base amount, eligibility criteria and conditions, and we are being asked to pass the bill quickly. When we asked the minister about this, she talked to us about a minimum of three years. It's important to be aware of what that means.

Despite all that, would there be any parameters, guidelines or amendments that would already be desirable to put in place to guide the discussions? Is there something that already has consensus?

If you don't have the answer right away, you can submit it later.

Mr. Samuel Ragot: I would say that the only desirable amendment, if there is one, would be the effective date of the benefit. It's the only amendment that would be desirable right now, for a really simple reason. I'm on a public policy panel that deals with these issues. We've been meeting for a year and a half, and we still haven't worked out some of the details of what we would like to do.

I'm told that a panel likes to discuss details, but these are details that are sometimes very technical. It may be easier to work out such details in longer consultations than in a consultation on the reading of a bill.

• (1820)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

We have Madame Zarrillo for six minutes, please.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to ask Ms. Gammad about some of the work that was done on basic income, but before I do, Ms. Duranleau, when the basic income happened, you mentioned that there was four years to make regulations. Was there a starting point? Was there a previous agreement on what the amount should be or what the eligibility should be and what the timelines would be? You mentioned there was something around timelines. Was there a predetermined consensus on the eligibility and amount before you started the conversation on basic income in Quebec?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Amélie Duranleau: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

The question is for me, but I'll let my colleague Mr. Ragot answer it. He has been involved since the beginning, so he's very familiar with the history.

Mr. Samuel Ragot: Indeed, some of the details were included in an action plan to fight poverty. The basic income program in Quebec is really intended for people who have been severely restricted in their employment for a long time and who benefit from the social solidarity program, which has very limited access but is a good program otherwise.

There were already some starting points, but we are now seeing that the consultations that the federal government has done are also kind of leading us to that starting point. The consultations that have been conducted by large organizations like Inclusion Canada suggest that we are in a position to know a little bit about what that starting point would be.

[*English*]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

Ms. Gammad, you mentioned the gender lens, diverse genders and trans persons with disabilities. This voice is often not involved in the making of legislation and is often not at the decision-making tables. I also note that LEAF is doing some work around basic income. I'm wondering if you have any best practices or things that you can share with us about how we can get those voices included.

Right now what's in Bill C-22 doesn't necessarily regulate or ensure that those voices will be part of the co-creation. I'm wondering

how we can ensure as legislators that those voices are included in the making of regulations and make sure that this voice is not missed.

Ms. Jen Gammad: Thank you for your question.

I would point back to my earlier comment about those among disabled women who live in the deepest poverty. There are many reports and a lot of data showing who are the most marginalized and who are living in the deepest poverty among this group.. Really put them at the forefront in leading this co-development process.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: All right.

I'm hearing from all the witnesses today about urgency. Hopefully, it won't take four years to get the regulations going.

Have there been conversations in your organizations, Ms. Morse, and then maybe Ms. Gammad, about an interim benefit that could help folks now with the rising costs of rent and the rising costs of food and that could make sure there's some security in the community while these regulations are being made?

Alison Morse: Thank you very much for the opportunity to respond.

We haven't had those discussions—because of the thought that families and children with disabilities are being excluded from this legislation—but I think the prospect of making an interim payment while you develop the system would be ideal. We know right now that a lot of people are really struggling. If they don't get help, as we heard earlier, they could end up with homelessness or they'll be needing more health care services, whether it's for their physical or mental health.

I think the interim benefit might be a good way to start, but part of the issue is that Canada is a very big country. What you can get for your dollar will vary from community to community and from province to province. In terms of some of that individualization that was spoken about for the individual client, I think there may have to be some sort of individualization on a provincial basis as to how the benefit interconnects with their existing programs.

That's not to say that any province would get more or less; there would just be consideration of the uniqueness of each of those autonomous organizations.

• (1825)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Great.

There's probably just enough time for Ms. Gammad to finish.

Ms. Jen Gammad: We haven't considered an interim benefit, but the urgency is there. The need is there for sure. The only thing I would caution against is getting stuck on this interim benefit and the CDB being delayed any further or not rolled out at all.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are you concluding?

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Yes.

Thank you so much to the witnesses.

The Chair: All right.

We have Ms. Gray for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today.

Before I get to my questions, I would like to move a motion that I have on notice. I will go through this quickly so that we can get back to our important witnesses right away. I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion and relevant officials to appear before the committee for no less than two hours regarding the federal funding provided to the Community Media Advocacy Centre by the Government of Canada and the officials' handling of the situation; that the meeting be televised; and that the meeting take place no later than November 10, 2022.

I'll make just a couple of points. To clarify, this would be during our constituency week next week. We have no meetings scheduled then, so it would not take away from any of the work that this committee is doing.

I'll note as well that during the heritage committee meeting on October 21, in testimony regarding the grant given to the CMAC, Minister Rodriguez said, "Minister Hussen is totally responsible for this program."

We have new information that we need answers to. We need to hear from Minister Hussen quickly, given Laith Marouf's anti-Semitism and anti-French views.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gray.

This standing committee's powers come from Standing Order 108(1)(a), and I am bound by the Standing Orders of the House to the committee. It states that "Standing committees shall be severally empowered to examine and enquire into all such matters as may be referred to them by the House". Standing Order 108(2) further states that standing committees are also "empowered to study and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management and operation of the department or departments of government which are assigned to them from time to time by the House."

Specifically, as part of its mandate, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities can study and report on the legislation, expenditure plans, program and policy objectives, and the mandate, management and operation of Employment and Social Development Canada.

While the motion seeks to invite the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion and relevant officials to appear before this committee regarding the federal funding provided to the Community Media Advocacy Centre, the Department of Canadian Heritage funded the Community Media Advocacy Centre. It is also my un-

derstanding, as you indicated, that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage held a briefing to discuss the department's contract with the Community Media Advocacy Centre on Friday, October 7, 2022. While the minister's responsibilities include diversity and inclusion, the motion is outside of the mandate of the committee, as outlined in Standing Order 108, to study and report on the matters related to management and operations of the departments, agencies and Crown corporations for which it is assigned, and it is therefore out of order, Madam Gray. There is no debate. My decision has been made.

Ms. Gray, you can challenge my decision.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Chair, I would like to challenge your decision.

Minister Hussen does report to this committee.

The Chair: That was outlined by the department. It is not assigned to the committee, and it was funded by another department.

I've made my ruling. Ms. Gray, you have challenged it.

Everybody has heard the order. The committee, as I indicated... The ruling I made is in line with Standing Order 108(2) of the House of Commons committee. I must respect the orders given to this committee by the House of Commons, which are unanimously passed at this committee. Based on that, your motion is out of order.

Madam Clerk, call a vote on the chair's ruling. So that we're clear, clearly outline it to committee members.

• (1830)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer): The question is this: Shall the decision of the chair be sustained? If you're in agreement, you vote yes. If you're in disagreement, you vote no.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The chair's ruling is upheld.

We have two minutes left of the committee's timeline.

Do we have unanimous consent to proceed to a question, or does the committee wish to adjourn?

We only have two minutes, but before we do.... If we move to extend, we will need unanimous consent.

I would like to get the budget approved for this study that is currently ongoing. All members of the committee were provided with the budget.

Do I have approval of the budget to do the study?

Every committee member has it. It's \$29,775. Do we have agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I see unanimous consent.

Go ahead, Mr. Aitchison.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: It's a process question, but I'm wondering why we start a study before we actually have a budget. In my world, we have a budget before we start. I've seen us approve budgets around this place after the study is over. How does that work? Why does it work that way?

The Clerk: We often get the witnesses' names during the course of it, so we amalgamate all of the witness names and figure out the regions they are in, but quite often the committee starts its study while we're still amalgamating the witness names. Then it takes time to prepare. We prepare as quickly as possible, but it's really dependent on when we receive the witnesses' names.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: It's still a weak system, but okay.

The Chair: What's the direction of the committee? We are at our two-hour timeline. Do we want to adjourn?

I see that the consensus of the committee is to adjourn. Thank you, witnesses, for appearing today on this important study.

The meeting is adjourned.

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