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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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• (1600)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Order. Committee members, I call the meeting back to order, as we've moved in public to continue.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, February 3, 2023, the committee will commence its study of Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin our discussion. Before we do the witness list, I simply want to remind members that we are appearing in a virtual manner. Today everybody is actually in the room. I would ask that you wait until I recognize you to speak. Direct all of your questions and answers through the chair. You have the option of choosing to speak in the official language of your choice. If there is an issue with interpretation, please get my attention, and I will suspend while it is clarified.

From the federal secretariat on early learning and child care, we have Michelle Lattimore, director general; Elizabeth Casuga, director; Kelly Nares, director; and Christian Paradis, director.

From the indigenous early learning and child care secretariat, we have Jill Henry, director, policy, and Cheri Reddin, director general.

I welcome the department to begin its presentation, following which we'll open the floor to questions. You have up to 30 minutes to give your overview to committee members.

Ms. Lattimore, you have the floor.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore (Director General, Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon.

[Translation]

We are here today to give you a technical briefing on the early learning and child care system across Canada, and on Bill C-35, which as you know was tabled in Parliament on December 8, 2022.

[English]

Today's briefing will provide details on the vision, objectives and other key elements of Bill C-35, but prior to outlining the specifics of the proposed legislation, I understand there is some interest in digging into the agreements, so we would like to take some time to situate the bill within the broader context of the Canada-wide sys-

tem that is being built in collaboration with provincial, territorial and indigenous partners. After the presentation, we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Slide 3 in our deck provides an overview of recent federal commitments with respect to early learning in child care. Since 2016, the Government of Canada, in collaboration with provincial, territorial, and indigenous partners, has provided significant investments—which I won't repeat, but they are detailed on the slide—and has undertaken a range of activities to advance a Canada-wide system. What is perhaps most important for you to understand is that this work is grounded in two frameworks: the multilateral early learning and child care framework and the indigenous early learning and child care framework.

The multilateral framework was endorsed in June 2017 by all federal, provincial, and territorial ministers, with the exception of Quebec. This framework sets the foundation for a shared long-term vision for early learning and child care, guided by the agreed-upon principles of quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity. It is these shared principles that formed the foundation of the initial bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories in 2017, as well as extensions to those agreements, and to the new Canada-wide agreement signed just last year.

[Translation]

I'd like to note that, although Quebec stated that it supported the general principles included in the framework, it does not approve of or formally adhere to the framework itself. The governments of Quebec and Canada acknowledge Quebec's leadership in early learning and child care. Together, they have negotiated asymmetrical agreements for the transfer of federal funds. Under those agreements, Quebec is not subject to the same accountability and reporting requirements, which I will come back to.

[English]

Concurrently, in 2017 the Government of Canada and indigenous partners undertook a comprehensive engagement process to support indigenous early learning and child care. Informed by this engagement, the government worked with indigenous partners to co-develop the indigenous early learning and child care framework, which was endorsed by the Government of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis National Council and publicly released in September 2018.

This framework lays out a shared vision, principles and a path forward for high-quality, culturally strong indigenous early learning and child care for first nations, Inuit and Métis families.

As I mentioned at the outset, I would like to take a little time on slide 4 to position the legislation within the broader context of the Canada-wide system, core to which are the bilateral agreements with provinces, territories and indigenous partners. These are five-year Canada-wide agreements that run from fiscal year 2021-22 to 2025-26. They govern the transfer to the provinces and territories of the \$27.2-billion investment announced in budget 2021.

We also have what we often refer to as the extension agreements, a separate set of bilateral agreements with provinces and territories that outline the transfer of budget 2016 and 2017 investments.

Finally, we have funding agreements with indigenous partners for indigenous early learning and child care. These are guided by the co-developed indigenous early learning and child care framework and managed through national and regional partnership tables.

- (1605)

[Translation]

The system is so much more than just the agreements. What we are trying to show is the many other initiatives that support the system across Canada, as it continues to develop.

[English]

First, we have a number of multilateral entities looking at current challenges and emerging issues regarding early learning and child care, including, importantly, challenges related to the early childhood educator workforce.

These entities include, first, the national and regional indigenous early learning and child care partnership tables, which support early learning and child care implementation to enable first nations-led, Inuit-led and Métis-led decision-making and a pathway to transfer high-quality indigenous early learning and child care programs to regional indigenous governing bodies; second, the federal, provincial and territorial forum of ministers most responsible for early learning and child care, which was established in July 2022 as a mechanism to discuss emerging issues and advance shared ELCC priorities; third, the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care, which was announced in November 2022 to provide advice and a forum for engagement on issues facing the early learning and child care sector.

Supporting this work are our program—the federal secretariat on early learning and child care—and the indigenous early learning and child care secretariat.

The federal secretariat, which I lead, was first announced in the government's 2020 fall economic statement and launched in August 2021. Among other things, we negotiate and manage the bilateral agreements with provinces and territories, provide oversight for investments in data and research projects, manage the early learning and child care innovation program and provide secretariat support to the national advisory council and the FPT ministers table.

My colleague Ms. Reddin leads the indigenous early learning and child care secretariat, which was established at ESDC in response to feedback from national engagement and commitments on the indigenous early learning and child care framework around improving federal coordination and streamlining administration.

Ms. Reddin and her team act as a federal focal point for indigenous ELCC transformation, support indigenous elements of broader Government of Canada ELCC strategies and liaise with key federal departments on the implementation of the indigenous ELCC transformative initiative to ensure better horizontal coordination among departments in support of comprehensive and holistic indigenous ELCC approaches.

Last, of course, Bill C-35, the Canada early learning and child care act, is intended to complement and reinforce other elements of the Canada-wide system by, among other things, establishing in law federal commitments to provincial, territorial and indigenous partners to continue to work with them to build and maintain a Canada-wide system.

[Translation]

It's a lot, but on the fifth slide, you can see the agreements with the provinces and territories, which are essential to the development and maintenance of the system across Canada.

[English]

As I mentioned previously, budget 2021 earmarked \$27.2 billion for provincial and territorial transfers to form the cornerstone of the system, complementing bilateral agreements in ELCC that were signed with provinces and territories to implement earlier federal funding from budgets 2016 and 2017.

Budget 2021 also committed the federal government to work with provincial and territorial governments to support primarily not-for-profit providers to expand the number of regulated spaces. Agreements were signed with all 13 provinces and territories between July 2021 and March 2022, with Quebec signing an asymmetrical agreement in recognition of their existing ELCC system.

The Canada-wide agreements are long, they are detailed, and they're all available online, but most importantly, they are binding legal documents that lay out provincial and territorial commitments to meet objectives related to four agreed-upon principles: affordability, access, high quality and inclusivity. They lay out eligible areas of investment, financial provisions and reporting requirements.

[Translation]

On the sixth slide, we highlight certain specific commitments included in the agreements.

[English]

First is affordability. The goal is to reduce average fees for regulated child care by 50% by the end of 2022 and achieve an average cost of \$10 a day for regulated child care for children under six by 2025-26. We'll see in the table on the following slide exactly where provinces and territories are at on that.

Under "Access", agreements commit each jurisdiction to creating a specific number of new child care spaces by 2025-26, with over 250,000 of them—the vast majority—being not-for-profit spaces.

The Canada-wide agreements also commit the provinces and territories to specific activities related to the delivery of high-quality child care. For all provinces and territories, this includes commitments to support the recruitment and retention of a skilled, qualified, early childhood educator workforce. In terms of the principle of inclusion, provinces and territories have committed to developing and implementing plans to ensure that vulnerable children and children from diverse populations have equitable access to regulated child care spaces.

- (1610)

[Translation]

The seventh slide gives you an idea of the current situation in terms of affordability and accessibility. I won't go into that any further, as the table is quite explicit.

[English]

Slide 7 is here to outline some of the progress that provinces and territories have been making with respect to shared objectives and commitments on affordability and access. You'll see that all but one jurisdiction approved the commitment to reduce child care fees by 50% by the end of 2022, but at the end of the day, that was reflective of the fact that Manitoba was able to jump to a \$10-a-day commitment as of April 2 of this year, which was just announced on

Friday. Everyone else, you will see, is either on track or there already. You'll note that affordability commitments are not applicable to the Quebec agreement, as the province already had a highly affordable system in place at the time of signature.

Finally, as I mentioned previously, in the Canada-wide agreements provinces and territories have committed to creating over 250,000 new spaces by March of 2026. The last column of the table summarizes space creation in each province and territory.

The next slide of the presentation, slide 8, provides some recent examples of provincial and territorial announcements related to the provision of high-quality early learning and child care programs and services, which, as many of you know, is closely tied to the ECE workforce. While the Government of Canada cannot set standards that amount to regulating child care, including the ECE workforce, as the jurisdiction of this falls under the purview of provinces and territories, what the federal government can do is attach some limited conditions to money transferred to provinces, which we do through the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreements and their associated action plans.

For example, through the Canada-wide agreements, jurisdictions are required to demonstrate meaningful progress on improving the quality of ELCC programs and services through workforce-related commitments. As a result, we are seeing provinces and territories announcing ECE workforce strategies and measures to recruit and retain ECEs in the sector in areas such as hiring, retention, training and wage increases.

Funding is also being used to recruit, train and retain indigenous early childhood educators, including the establishment of baseline wage scales to remain competitive with the ELCC sites operating in a provincial and territorial context.

[Translation]

In addition to establishing agreed principles and objectives, each agreement describes the eligible investment areas.

[English]

These areas of investment vary somewhat in each bilateral agreement, recognizing that each jurisdiction has the responsibility to develop or enhance a system that best responds to the needs and priorities of their communities. However, I can say in general that the agreements lay out the following: first, that federal funding is invested to expand regulated or licensed child care for children under six years old; second, that non-profit or publicly delivered child care is prioritized while recognizing that in some jurisdictions non-profit, public and private, and for-profit operators all play a role in the delivery of high-quality regulated child care; third, that provinces and territories take into account the needs of official language minority communities in developing and delivering programs and services; fourth, that they deliver innovative approaches to support the principles of the Canada-wide system; and finally, that they make efforts to target funding toward vulnerable families, including families of children with disabilities, lower-income families and families in underserved communities.

The agreements include provincial and territorial action plans that provide more details on specific investments that PTs will undertake in support of eligible areas in order to achieve the Canada-wide early learning and child care objectives. Currently, provinces and territories have prepared action plans for the fiscal years of 2021-22 and 2022-23. They will be submitting their action plans for the remaining years of the Canada-wide agreements at the beginning of the next fiscal year, with two exceptions: The Ontario plan is a little bit different because Ontario signed so late, so we already have its plan for next year, and Quebec is not required to submit an action plan under its asymmetrical agreement.

• (1615)

[Translation]

The agreements also include financial provisions and very detailed reports. They are outlined on the tenth slide. They include clarifications about the allocation and disbursement of federal funds. For instance, Canada's contribution is paid out in fairly equal semi-annual payments.

[English]

There are conditions around this. Beginning in the second year of the agreement, which is this year, the Canada-wide second payment is withheld if a province or territory does not submit an annual progress report outlining data and results achieved, as well as an audited financial statement of the previous fiscal year. In addition, beginning in 2023-24, the first annual payment could be withheld if a jurisdiction has not submitted its detailed action plan covering the remainder of the agreement. Funding may also be withheld if a jurisdiction is unable to meet the agreed-upon objectives as set out in the agreement.

[Translation]

Finally, the agreements also include details on their administration. We have already discussed the issue of reports, but we also included some other key measures that are in the agreements.

[English]

There is the establishment of bilateral implementation committees as a means to monitor progress on the implementation of the agreements and to provide a forum to identify challenges in consultation with stakeholders and partners.

Lastly, there are clear processes for any disputes related to agreement non-compliance. Ultimately, this concludes with a six-month termination clause, which is available to both parties if terms of the agreement are not respected.

I will turn to my colleague, Ms. Reddin, to look at the next slides.

Ms. Cheri Reddin (Director General, Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Secretariat, Department of Employment and Social Development): The Canada-wide approach includes an indigenous-specific strategy that complements the Canada-wide agreements in place. The goal is not to create separate systems but rather to enable indigenous-led strategies within comprehensive and coordinated systems that meet the needs of indigenous children and families wherever they live.

As mentioned, in 2017 a comprehensive national engagement was held on indigenous early learning and child care. This informed the co-development of the indigenous early learning and child care framework. The framework includes an indigenous-specific vision and principles, and it guides our work in this sector. It includes distinct first nations, Inuit and Métis early learning and child care frameworks. Since the mid 1990s, the federal government has been investing in aboriginal head start and day care programs, and this will continue.

[Translation]

Additional investments for indigenous early learning and child care, committed to in 2017 and strengthened in Budget 2021, build on those former programs and advance the priorities of the indigenous early learning and child care framework, and the development of the system across Canada. Most of these investments are held in funding envelopes based on high quality ELCC, and the funding is administered through amendments to contribution agreements. These funds are jointly managed through national and regional partnership tables with Canada, a process that puts indigenous leaders at the forefront of decisions concerning the allocation of funds, priorities and work plans.

[English]

Indigenous leaders have the flexibility to direct which agreement they would like to receive ELCC funding through. Four federal partners—Employment and Social Development Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada—are lined up to support and administer agreements under a common set of program authorities.

These investments fall into three broad categories. In the first category are dedicated investments in governance and partnership building. This is to enable greater self-determination and indigenous government participation—alongside Canada and the provinces and territories—in the design and implementation of a Canada-wide system by hiring staff at the political and technical levels and establishing centres of expertise akin to ministries in a federal-provincial-territorial context.

The second is increased investments to support indigenous early learning and child care programs and services. This funding is flexible and supports a number of priorities identified by indigenous leaders, including, for example, the development of culturally appropriate curricula and learning tools, linguistic revitalization initiatives for early learners and expanded access or hours of care.

Finally, the third category consists of dedicated investments in indigenous early learning and child care infrastructure, including minor capital repairs and renovations at existing federal indigenous early learning and child care sites. Starting next fiscal year, there are new investments to replace sites that have outlived their useful life or to build new centres in communities that are underserved.

Indigenous early learning and child care investments alone are not enough to achieve the vision of a Canada-wide system. Collaboration among federal, provincial, territorial and indigenous governments is required to help break down barriers in access to early learning and child care programs and services and to promote culturally appropriate early learning and child care models.

To anchor this collaboration with indigenous partners as well as federal and provincial governments, the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreements recognize reconciliation, the indigenous early learning and child care framework and the importance of working collaboratively with indigenous governing bodies and organizations. The indigenous early learning and child care transformation initiative supports federal implementation of the framework. It shifts from a previous program delivery model—aboriginal head start and day care service providers—to a program delivery model with indigenous governments.

We heard, through engagement, “We know best. We want to be at the forefront of making decisions about children and families in our communities.” This approach aligns with that feedback.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

This approach also aligns with the broader commitments of establishing a government-to-government relationship with indigenous peoples. Finally, this approach aligns with call to action number 12 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, calling on the federal, provincial, territorial and indigenous governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood and education programs for indigenous families.

[*English*]

There are close to 60 national and regional partnership tables or bilateral relationships on indigenous early learning and child care across the country. Some of these tables are long-standing and have entrenched governance processes. Others are new and emerging

and are focused around key experts or identified technical conveners. Technical capacity is emerging to support and provide advice to indigenous leaders for their decisions.

These partnership tables develop plans and funding allocations and set priorities. They coordinate indigenous early learning and child care activities and enable the sharing of best practices by bringing together many indigenous partners across programs, sectors, communities and governments, both nationally and regionally. They are also beginning to serve as venues for provincial-territorial dialogue and influence where there is willingness, especially in the context of advancing a Canada-wide early learning and child care system.

What is key is that indigenous leaders are at the forefront of decision-making on funding allocations, plans and priorities. Canada is at the table to provide oversight and expertise, but the primary federal objective is to ensure that the federal system is lined up to support indigenous priorities and decisions.

Slide 14 provides some examples of early progress in advancing and strengthening indigenous early learning and child care. In Manitoba, for example, a strategy and governance model designed and owned by a first nation is guiding multi-year investments in indigenous early learning and child care, building on a province-wide first nations education model. In addition, federal investments have supported a total of 73 Inuit communities to expand and improve access to culturally appropriate early learning and child care programs and services.

In Nunavut, federal funding is supporting indigenous language resources, Inuit cultural programs and subsidies for the early childhood educator workforce and improvements to child care facilities.

Last, I'll highlight that the Métis nation governments have been working to improve access, affordability and availability of culturally appropriate and Métis-specific early learning and child care programs and services. This includes child care subsidies in Alberta, Michif and Dene immersion programs for kindergarten students in Saskatchewan and the establishment of new Métis child care sites in Manitoba, the Northwest Territories and British Columbia.

Thank you.

I'll turn back to you, Michelle, to present the vision and approach behind Bill C-35.

• (1625)

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thank you, Cheri.

I might say what is most important, and that is what I think you'll find on slide 15.

What I hope you all see at this point is that negotiated agreements are and will remain at the core of how the federal government will work with provincial, territorial and indigenous partners to implement a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care. They are short-term by intention, enabling signatories the flexibility to reflect and to correct their course as the Canada-wide system evolves. Their associated action plans build in the possibility to articulate even shorter-term investment plans and expected results.

The proposed legislation, on the other hand, looks beyond the short term and toward future generations of families and children. Complementing the agreements, the legislation affirms a sustained and ongoing federal commitment to building a Canada-wide early learning and child care system alongside provinces, territories and indigenous partners. In doing so, the proposed legislation would establish in law the federal goals and commitments with respect to a Canada-wide early learning and child care system.

The bill was drafted to fully respect provincial and territorial jurisdiction and indigenous rights, including the right to self-determination. This includes not imposing conditions on provincial and territorial governments and indigenous peoples. Rather, this bill has been developed to complement and support—not replace or supersede—the Canada-wide agreements with provinces and territories and funding agreements with indigenous partners.

Overall, the legislation represents a significant step forward in demonstrating the federal government's long-term commitment to early learning and child care and continued collaboration with provinces, territories and indigenous peoples. Overall, as I hope I've communicated, this is an exercise in collaboration, and it is truly in that spirit that we welcome the committee's study.

We'd be pleased to answer questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lattimore.

We'll now open the floor to questions, beginning with Madame Ferreri for six minutes.

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

Thank you to everyone for being here. It's quite a group. Child care is pretty important to this country and to our Canadian families, so thank you for all your work on it.

Is there any way we could get tabled with the committee...? On page 7, you've clearly laid out the affordability, but could we have the current wait-lists for each province and territory? Are you able to table that with the committee?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Wait-lists are very difficult for us to track in detail at the federal level. The administration of child care is a provincial and territorial responsibility. We understand that there is not enough supply of child care in this country and that as affordability investments are made, demand is certainly going to become higher. Provinces and territories track wait-lists in different ways. We see them at the municipal level and sometimes, but very rarely, at the provincial or territorial level—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I'm sorry. I don't want to interrupt, but I have so many questions. How are you able to decide what the current demand is if you don't have that data?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: One of the ways we estimate demand is by first looking at.... One thing we were able to do was look at the Quebec model to get a sense of what it looks like when every family that would like access to a space has access to a space. Based on the experience that we've been able to gather from Quebec, it looks as though about 59% of the children in the province have access to a space. We can use the space availability that exists at the provincial or territorial level to estimate what might be left over at the end.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Would it be beneficial to write that into the bill to ensure that you're able to collect this data to assess and monitor access? Access is one of the key principles in the bill, but you can't access it if the wait-lists are too long.

• (1630)

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: It's a great question and it's a really good example of what we're using the bilateral agreements to do. We do have language in the bilateral agreements that speaks to the importance of data and reporting at both the federal and the provincial-territorial level to help us understand and track progress over time.

One of the things that certainly we around this table, as well as provinces and territories, face is that our provincial and territorial colleagues are all at different levels. Some provinces are doing really great work in data collection, while others have a long way to go. We in the secretariat are here to support them in that work and to detail, through the bilateral agreements, how to get that done.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you.

On slide 9 it says to “target funding towards families more in need”. However, the specific wording of Bill C-35 is “enable families of varying incomes to benefit”. How do you reconcile these?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The language we're using when we refer to varying needs of families is intended, in the language of legislation, to be all-encompassing of the varying needs of children and families in this country. It's meant to be encompassing language within the legislation.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: In the way it is interpreted, however, it's not putting those who are most vulnerable, in terms of needing the affordability, out front. I just wanted to ask that.

On slides 5, 6 and 15 you have stated that the bill is inclusive no matter where they live, yet on slide 6 it states that it is primarily targeted at not-for-profit public family-based child care. As we know, Canada is a geographically huge country. Many rural parts do not even have centre-based child care. How are you reconciling that it's inclusive no matter where they live, but you're primarily working for “not-for-profit/public/family-based child care”?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: As I mentioned previously, there is a recognition in the bilateral agreement that while the priority is not-for-profit child care and the expansion of public child care in Canada, there is a recognition that provinces and territories all have different approaches, and that the for-profit and private sector do play a role in some provinces and territories. Through the long-term funding that is promised under the agreements, there are mechanisms available to ensure that all parents who are making use of licensed child care facilities, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, can have access to service under the Canada-wide system, and there are mechanisms built into our bilateral agreements to ensure there is space for profit where that is reasonable.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Again coming back to this, page 17 says “Inclusivity”, but again it contradicts your slide 6 on access and wait-lists. There seems to be a very big disconnect between wanting to be inclusive but then stating that you're going primarily for not-for-profit and public child care. How are you being inclusive in providing access for all if it's primarily targeted at one specific group?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I think that the bilateral agreements do provide access to for-profit child care. We've worked closely with Alberta, for example, to develop a cost control framework that will guide the expansion of for-profit delivery in that province.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Ferreri.

Mr. Long, you have six minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon. Good afternoon, colleagues.

Thank you to our witnesses this afternoon, and thank you for your work on behalf of all Canadians.

I ran in 2015 to be part of a government that delivered transformational programs. Whether those programs were the Canada child benefit or the housing benefit or the workers benefit or what have you, they're transformational. They are there to have a major impact on the lives of Canadians. There's absolutely no question that the child care agreements that were signed across the country will do that.

I don't think it's any secret that in the last election the Conservative Party actually ran to scrap that program. I heard at very many doors from concerned parents who were saying we were coming forth with a program that was going to cut their child care costs in half, down to \$10, and the Conservative Party was running to scrap it. That was in their platform, actually.

For those Canadians who are watching or listening today, can you give us, at 20,000 feet, how important Bill C-35 is? We all know about the bilateral agreements. We all saw the pictures with the premiers and the minister and things like that, and they were wonderful, right across the country, but can you just speak at a very high level to people listening in about how important Bill C-35 is and what that means?

• (1635)

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: This legislation is about the long term. This legislation entrenches into law the Government of Canada's vision for a Canada-wide early learning and child care system, which is that is that all families, regardless of their socio-economic stand-

ing or their racial identity, whether their child has a disability or needs enhanced or individualized support or where they live in Canada, will have access to high-quality, affordable, inclusive early learning and child care.

It includes this commitment of federal funding for the Canada-wide system, as well as with indigenous governing bodies, that goes beyond the current five-year agreements with provinces and territories. Then it lays out in clause 7 the principles that will guide those investment decisions. It sets the guideposts for federal engagement on early learning and child care from a Canada-wide perspective and ensures that the long-term funding is there to support it.

This legislation is about ensuring that a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care remains in place long, long into the future, benefiting future generations of families and children long after the benefits for those who are seeing those benefits today.

Mr. Wayne Long: I guess, in a word, it entrenches it.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: It does entrench it.

Mr. Wayne Long: I think it was MP Ferreri who talked about rural versus urban. There have been some members who have said that the initiative, the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreement, will result in rural Canadians subsidizing those in urban areas. We've heard that. It was the member for Kelowna—Lake Country who said that the Government of Canada has opened the door to a two-tiered framework of child care.

Is it true that wealthy Canadians will receive better services?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: There is nothing proposed in the Canada-wide agreements or legislation that creates a two-tier system or that would provide wealthy Canadians with a level of child care that is different from the child care provided to any other Canadian.

What this legislation does, in the context of the Canada-wide system, is ensure that families have choice. Families that choose to send children to licensed child care can feel confident it is of high quality and will be inclusive of their needs. It recognizes that these investments are there within the context of other investments, such as the child care benefit, to support families in Canada. Families that choose to stay home with their children have access to those supports as well.

What the Canada-wide system does is level the playing field across the country and move us, in a transformational way, toward something more consistent from province to province.

• (1640)

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Federal funding is for licensed care. What's the significance of licensed child care, and why does it matter?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Licensed child care matters in provinces and territories. Again, I'll remind the committee that licensing is a matter of provincial and territorial jurisdiction. That is not something the federal government has purview to be involved in.

Licensing ensures the quality of care that children receive in the country. It is the federal government's intention to ensure that we are supporting those spaces that are regulated and provide access to high-quality care.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long.

[Translation]

Welcome, Ms. Bérubé. You have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to be on this committee with my colleagues. I thank the witnesses for being here today.

We can agree that Bill C-303, which was introduced in 2006 by the NDP, is the forerunner of Bill C-35, save for a few differences. There is one difference that concerns me in Bill C-35. There is no indication of the exemption for Quebec.

Do you think it would be good if Bill C-35 were to include a provision setting out Quebec's full withdrawal from this program, with full compensation and without conditions? This would preclude negotiations, and even disagreements, between the federal and provincial governments every five years.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thank you for your question.

[English]

Again, this is federally focused legislation that imposes no conditions on the Province of Quebec or any other province or territory in Canada.

Quebec remains a signatory of the Canada-wide plan through an asymmetrical agreement. What this legislation does is ensure the federal government will be there for Quebec and all other provinces in the long term, with continued funding to support—in the case of Quebec—continued improvement of its already very successful early learning and child care system.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Why was clause 4 of Bill C-303 concerning Quebec's exemption not kept and included in Bill C-35?

[English]

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I will note that previous private members' bills that were tabled predate the Canada-wide system—a system that relies in particular on bilateral agreements with provinces and territories for the transfer of funds. What we saw in a number of previous private members' bills were different approaches to use legislation to create conditionality for provinces and territories. These were not bills that were solely federally focused, which is what we're looking at today.

In the case of Quebec, legislation that had a provincial or territorial focus may have required that kind of exemption clause. However, as I explained, we have the opportunity to use bilateral agreements. In the case of Quebec in particular, we have asymmetrical agreements to ensure that Quebec—in recognition of the investments made and the success of its system—is not held to the same reporting requirements as other provinces and territories. There is nothing in particular to exempt Quebec from in this legislation, since there is nothing in the legislation that imposes requirements on Quebec.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: How does the agreement with Quebec differ from those with the other provinces, territories and indigenous communities, within the multilateral early learning and child care framework?

[English]

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The Quebec agreement, the asymmetrical agreement, is different in a few important ways. Quebec is not required to provide the federal government with action plans outlining in detail how they will invest funding. Also, there is a recognition with respect to reporting that Quebec reports within the province to its population and is not required to submit audited financial statements or annual reporting in the same way that other provinces and territories in the country are.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Do you think that, like Bill C-303, Bill C-35 should recognize the Government of Quebec's expertise in child care services, unique in North America, as the international community did in 2003?

[English]

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I won't presume to speak to whether or not that is something that should exist in the legislation. What I will say is that there is certainly recognition in the bilateral agreements with Quebec—and in all of our work with Quebec, frankly, even at the FPT ministers table—that recognizes the value that the province brings to this area with respect to its long history of work in this field.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: According to the Constitution, education, like family policies, is not a matter of federal jurisdiction.

Do you believe that Bill C-35 respects the Constitution and the various areas of jurisdiction?

[English]

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The legislation respects the jurisdiction of all provinces and territories with respect to early learning and child care, as well as the role that indigenous partners and people in government play in making decisions about indigenous early learning and child care and how it applies to their children and families. There is nothing in the proposed legislation that intrudes in any way on provincial or territorial jurisdiction.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You spoke earlier about indigenous children. There are several indigenous communities in my riding. One part of Bill C-35 concerns me. We know that the public data that you have on indigenous children is outdated.

Despite that, can we be sure that Bill C-35 meets the needs and demands of indigenous communities?

[English]

Ms. Cheri Reddin: There's work outside the legislation to look at indigenous data in this phase.

As you can imagine, the collection of data relating to indigenous children and families is sensitive and requires great care and collaboration. It's for that reason that we have a public commitment to co-develop a first nation, Inuit, and Métis early learning and child care results framework to inform our work in this phase to assess progress and gaps going forward.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[English]

Next we have Madame Zarrillo for six minutes.

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

I want to start by thanking you for being here. I'd like to let you know that families in my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam will be benefiting greatly from this bill. The second-largest expense after their housing is child care. This will be life-changing for so many people in the most expensive region of the country.

I would like to revisit some information about the federal government having limited influence. I don't think those were the exact words, but the federal government doesn't necessarily have full influence here, because it's provincial-territorial and indigenous government.

I want to talk about the workers and immigration opportunities. StatsCan released data that said that 95% of child care workers are women and that one-third of those workers are immigrants and/or non-permanent residents. There's been a long-standing call from the NDP to regularize workers who are already here in Canada supporting our economy in very important ways.

I'm wondering if the action plans that were spoken of include a workforce strategy and if there are any changes being proposed to immigration law.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thank you. It's a really great question.

Provinces and territories have at this point been putting forward workforce strategies that attack challenges with respect to recruitment and retention and, importantly, to the recognition of the early childhood educator workforce. It is, as you've said, a highly gendered and racialized workforce, so there are a number of challenges that will need to be addressed as we move forward.

It is a matter of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, but there is work that the federal government can do to help play in that game. The legislation itself, in paragraph 7(1)(d), recognizes the role of the workforce in contributing to high-quality child care. We use the bilateral agreements to negotiate with provinces and territories greater investments in the workforce itself. We've seen other, more dedicated investments in the workforce as well—a \$420-million investment that was dedicated in budget 2021 specifically to the workforce itself. There is ongoing work that we can do at the federal level to support this more jurisdictionally focused work.

There are some things that we are thinking about and doing right now. We are working in collaboration with the federal-provincial-territorial forum of ministers most responsible to talk to provinces and territories about how we can help them share best practices and look at regularization, at opportunities that would not necessarily be focused on immigration but would allow for more mobility in the workforce. The National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care has had workforce as their first priority since being established in November 2022, and the national and regional indigenous partnership tables are also seized with how to address workforce challenges in indigenous early learning and child care.

Whether or not at this point the solutions are in immigration or in standardized licensing, I think we are on the cusp right now of doing that work with provinces and territories. This next round of action plan negotiations that we're getting into right now, which cover the last three years of the agreements, give us an opportunity to really dig in deeper in this space, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

• (1650)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

I'll just do a shout-out here that this is important. There's been exploitation. It's been undervalued, underpaid, for a really long time. I would like to shine a light on this important work. We need to be regularizing the immigration status for people who are doing this very important work.

I want to go to paragraph 7(1)(d), because you mentioned it—"qualified and well-supported". Can you just give us the interpretation from your department of "qualified and well-supported"?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: "Qualified and well-supported", to some extent—because, again, we are dealing with provincial and territorial jurisdiction—is, I think, probably interpreted a little bit differently in each province and territory across the country.

From our perspective, the Government of Canada is working with provinces and territories to ensure that early childhood educators are well paid, that their profession is respected within communities, but we can't go as far as to set wage grids or wage scales, because the early childhood education sector is very much within the provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

By enshrining this principle in legislation, we are underscoring a principle that is already included in the bilateral agreements, and then we'll use the bilateral agreements to work with provinces and territories to add more detail about what that really means within each jurisdiction.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: In my last few seconds I'm going to ask Ms. Reddin a question.

You twice mentioned indigenous decision-makers “at the forefront”, and I just wanted to understand.... We know that free, prior and informed consent is a must in this country, so I'm wondering how free, prior and informed consent intersects with this statement made twice today about indigenous decision-makers being at the forefront in co-development.

Ms. Cheri Reddin: The proposed legislation will contribute to Canada's implementation of UNDRIP, including the UNDRIP commitment to free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples on laws, policies or programs that affect their territories.

The Department of Justice currently has a co-development process under way with indigenous governments to give a practical application and an action plan to what free, prior and informed consent will look like for the federal government. We're not trying to get out ahead of that process.

The legislation is intended to be flexible and to keep up to date as the Crown-indigenous relationship evolves, and to catch up to that action plan co-development process.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Zarrillo.

Madame Falk, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Budget 2021 made a commitment to introduce early learning child care legislation following consultations with provincial, territorial and indigenous partners, and experts and stakeholders.

When did that consultation take place? Did it inform this legislation as well as the agreements that are now in place with the provinces and territories?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thank you for the question.

On the engagement on the legislation, we did pretabling engagement. That took place between January and March 2022. This was a discussion guide, so it was a short document that we put together that was shared with provincial and territorial governments, approximately 50 indigenous partners and about 70 early learning and child care national stakeholders in the space.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

Can the department provide the committee with the full list of the groups and the individuals that it consulted with?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: We published a “what we heard” report online in November 2022, which I believe—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Can you table who you met with with the committee, please?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I believe that information's available online, but if not, we can provide it to the committee.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Perfect.

Did you say that private child care was consulted at all, or was it just not-for-profit?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: We reached out to 70 national and regional stakeholders. I don't want to speak for sure right now about whether or not there were private entities that were involved in that, but we can consult the list.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Why don't you know that?

For me, representing a rural riding that does not have access... The major city's two and a half hours away, either way, east or west, from me. That's an important component for parents where I live.

I would make the assumption that the department knew whether they consulted with private care providers or not.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Yes, I've certainly spoken with private providers in the past.

What I don't—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: That's not part of this consultation process.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The consultation process took place between January and March last year. I would want to have a look at that list again before confirming absolutely the names on there. I do not remember the names of all 70 on that list that were consulted.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: What was identified by each stream as the greatest obstacle in ensuring affordable access to child care?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: In terms of assuring...?

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: For public and for non-profit providers, what was the greatest obstacle that they felt was in the way for access to affordable child care for parents and children?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Our “what we heard” report does not break down what we heard from the perspective of not-for-profit providers or for-profit providers. What our report details is what we heard from provinces and territories, from indigenous partners and from experts and stakeholders in the space.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Did the department consult with child care providers in rural and remote areas, besides the indigenous stakeholders?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Yes, child care providers from rural and remote areas are engaged at our implementation committee tables and are engaged at every step of the way as we look to build the Canada-wide system. We don't distinguish between engaging only with folks at the urban level or at the rural or regional level.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: It matters though, because rural and urban are very different. They have different needs. They even have different access. That very much matters.

I hope that the department makes that distinction, because there are people in my riding who can't access child care, and if we're not differentiating, that's a problem.

As my follow-up question, what was identified as the greatest obstacle in providing affordable access to child care in rural and remote communities? How is the department going to address, specifically for rural and remote communities, the obstacles that parents and children have in accessing child care?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I'll just specify that the engagement that I'm speaking about was on legislation. The legislation was not seeking a specific response on access to affordable child care. We were seeking—

• (1700)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: That obstacle won't be addressed.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: We were seeking a response on the legislation and the discussion guide outlining what we expected to see in the legislation, and on the principles that we anticipated would form part of it. Specific responses on challenges that are being faced by rural or remote families in accessing child care have not been specifically addressed through this engagement process.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Okay. That's very unfortunate.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

Ms. Saks, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our officials who are joining us here today to give us some detail and technical briefing on the legislation.

I do appreciate that we spent some time on the agreements earlier, because many of the consultations on what my colleague Ms. Falk was asking about—rural access—are part of the provincial consultations that happen with stakeholders that are unique to each province and territory.

I'd like to dig into some of the language of the legislation, because there seemed to be a lack of clarity by my colleague, Ms. Ferreri, when it comes to inclusion. In 7(c) it says:

support the provision of early learning and child care programs and services that are inclusive and that respect and value the diversity of all children and families and respond to their varying needs

Could you help us understand the language of inclusivity and that we're referring to families and children and not child care providers, because they vary from province to territory?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Certainly.

Inclusivity is addressed in the legislation, as you mentioned, in two different places. We address it in the declaration portion of the legislation in terms of laying out a purpose. That purpose is to ensure that the Canada-wide system is inclusive of the needs of diverse families across Canada, whether they are racialized families, families with a disability or families in rural and remote communities that may not have access to early learning and child care. It's addressed in the declaration section.

We also address inclusivity in the principles as we describe the principles of the legislation. Inclusivity, of course, is in there, and that aligns with the existing bilateral agreements that have at their core needed investments from provinces and territories in inclusive early learning and child care.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I'd like to lean into some comments made about flexibility of access in relation to those who are shift workers or those who may have different working hours. We live in an environment today where work varies from family to family and community to community.

Paragraph 6(b) of the declaration does address flexibility, but can we discuss how the bilateral agreements anchor the understanding by provinces and territories of the need for flexibility of access in their own communities?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thank you.

As you mentioned, it is in paragraph 6(b) in the legislation that we speak to the importance of having flexibility in early learning and child care programs and services so that they respond to the varying needs of children and families. Of course, there are greater details on all of this in the bilateral agreements. Each province and territory has its own regulations and policies for things like hours of care, length of care during the day, weekend care and pieces like that.

To give you an example, the Alberta agreement indicates that an additional grant for those operating flexible and overnight child care would be provided with such a grant. Other agreements with provinces and territories recognize this really important component and have committed to other measures.

Bill C-35 was drafted, again, to fully respect provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Regulation of hours of care is a matter of provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I'll try to use my time wisely.

My colleague Ms. Ferreri was asking about spaces earlier. Just so we're all clear, which order of government is directly accountable for creating new child care spaces?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The provinces and the territories are responsible for the creation of child care spaces.

• (1705)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you.

I have no more questions, Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saks.

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

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Bill C-35 does not include a definition of child care.

I'd like to know if the bill would apply to before- and after-school programs and part-time programs.

What other types of child care services does the bill cover?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thank you.

Child care is defined in the legislation. There is legal language in there that speaks to....

Kelly, you might have to help me. That's where we use the word "tutor". It's jurisprudence language. Would you mind jumping in?

Mrs. Kelly Nares (Director, Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care, Department of Employment and Social Development): The legislation speaks to parents, caregivers and tutors, which encompasses the generally understood "parents and guardians".

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: The bill does not mention the age of children targeted by the Canada-wide early learning and child care system.

Why were the age categories of children to whom the bill will apply not specified?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thank you for the question. It's an important one that speaks to the longevity that is intended by this bill.

As you may be aware, the Canada-wide early learning and child care system right now is intended for and focused on children from the ages of zero to six across Canada. There are other commitments in this space with respect to before-school and after-school care.

By not putting specificity around that, the legislation provides flexibility in the long term for the government to expand its focus to children over the age of six, if necessary. Instead of locking us in long term, it really provides the flexibility for the Canada-wide system to grow over time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Is there a reason why the federal government has until now focused its work on children who are not yet of school age?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The simple answer to that question may be that we have to start somewhere. We're starting with children who we know are at a vulnerable age in terms of the incredible impact of investment in their care at this time.

We're starting from the beginning, but at the same time I will say that we're working with provinces and territories to look for opportunities to expand investments in before-school and after-school care, which may go beyond the age of six. Provinces and territories, having jurisdiction in this area, of course always have the flexibility to make those investments themselves.

The choice of the federal government was to start at this young age when, as we know, the benefits are so important for these children.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[*English*]

Madame Zarrillo, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much, Chair.

I'm going to go back to the decent work and working conditions.

As was previously mentioned, 95% of the workforce are women. I'm always conscious of the discrimination that women face—especially immigrant women—every day in the workforce. I just want to go back to paragraph 7(1)(d) with regard to this idea of the workforce.

Ms. Lattimore, maybe you could share some of the discussions that happened around the language of "qualified and well-supported early childhood education workforce". Why wasn't it stronger or more explicit in mentioning fair wages and working conditions?

We know that marginalized groups need this protection. I want to get an understanding of why the language is maybe a little less explicit than it could be.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thanks. I appreciate that question.

Again, I think it's really a reflection of the limitations we have in federal jurisdiction. In paragraph 7(1)(d) and its focus on quality, we are looking, on the one hand, to reflect the vital importance of the ECE workforce in contributing to that quality care without, on the other hand, stepping on provincial and territorial jurisdiction, which is what we would be doing if we attempted to be more prescriptive with respect to specific wages.

Where we can get into a little bit more specificity is in the bilateral agreements. That's where we see, with provinces and territories, commitments to the development of things like wage grids, wage floors and real investments that, as I mentioned earlier, we believe we will see improving over time.

The focus really in the first few years of the bilateral agreements has been on access and affordability. I think we will see space created for greater investments on the workforce in the coming year. Certainly the work that we're doing now with the federal-provincial-territorial forum of ministers most responsible for early learning and child care, as well as with the national advisory council, is to really dig in on the challenges in the workforce space.

• (1710)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: You mentioned that we're hoping that these things happen. We really do need to keep an eye on it. I'm going to want to know about reporting.

I just want to mention something here. Childcare Resource and Research Unit is a non-profit that conducts research for the child care market in Canada. They were saying that child care workers are making between \$16 and just under \$19 an hour, and that the federal government did leave out of this agreement setting minimum wages. This advocate group and advocates are saying that child care wages have to hit \$30 an hour to meet demand for the service and that the wages aren't coming up fast enough.

If it's being monitored, could you let us know how it's being monitored? I know that there is reporting and that they're talking about reporting, but how can we ensure that exploitation does not continue in this sector as it grows?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I think the numbers associated with wages are of concern to everyone who is working and building policy in this space. Part of our role, both multilaterally and bilaterally, is to stay on top of those wages and to work openly with organizations like the CRRU and other advocates that are doing this important research.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Zarrillo.

Ms. Gray, you have five minutes.

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

Thanks to all of you for being here.

With regard to the government's decision to put a focus on funding public and not-for-profit child care spaces, did this recommendation come from the department, or was this direction from the minister?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Budget 2021, I believe, spoke to a focus on not-for-profit child care. That's been reflected in the bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Are you saying, then, that the direction came from the minister?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I personally have not been privy to where that direction would have come from.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Your department is the one working on this child care legislation. If that direction didn't come from your department, which is working on this legislation for child care, who would it have come from, then, if it didn't come from the minister?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The not-for-profit focus that is in the federal legislation aligns with the not-for-profit focus that is in the bilateral agreements. That's the reason that it's there right now. The intention with the legislation is to ensure consistency with the bilateral agreements.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Okay. Therefore, it didn't come from work that your department had done and recommended to the minister. It came from the other way, and then you worked on this legislation.

What research and considerations were provided by the minister to your department to make this the focus? Can you table that for this committee?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Again, having not been here at the time that decisions may have been made about this, I can't speak around whether or not direction was provided. What I can tell you is that there certainly is a body of research that links not-for-profit

care with the provision of high-quality care. What the legislation and the bilateral agreements reflect, or certainly the bilateral agreements, is that for-profit and private care do play a role in the provision of high-quality child care in Canada. The bilateral agreements provide space for that.

• (1715)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Can you table the research that you're referencing for this committee, then?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: We'd be happy to provide research that supports that.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I understand from your presentation slides that the goal of this department is to create 250,000 new child care spaces within three years. Where did this 250,000 number come from?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The goal of the provinces and territories together will be creating 250,000 spaces. Space creation itself is not something that the federal government can do. What we can do is provide—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you. I understand that, but where did the number of 250,000 come from? Where's the calculation for that? What are the metrics for that? Where did that number come from? Was it also a direction from the minister? Do you have analysis? Do you have a report that you can table? What's the breakdown for that?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: As I think I mentioned earlier, some of the work that was done to support space creation numbers in the Canada-wide agreements comes from experience with the Province of Quebec and the determination that there is a coverage rate with respect to early learning and child care availability that ensures that families who have access to a licensed space can get access to that space.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Well, that wasn't the question, though. The question was, where did the 250,000 number come from? It sounds like you don't know where the number came from, and yet it's right in your presentation that it is the goal of the federal government to work with the provincial governments.

I'll move on.

What percentage of child care spaces presently are run by private operators?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I don't have a number for the percentage of child care spaces that are run by private operators. That would be a number that is collected potentially at the municipal or territorial level, or potentially by municipalities—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Through this legislation, there will be funding that will be going to government and not-for-profit organizations, and yet what you're saying is that you don't know how many private operators there are. Is that correct? You don't know how many will be left out of this.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Private operators are not left out of the Canada-wide agreement. Private operators are recognized as being—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: My question is, how many are there? What does this represent?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: What private operators.... I'm sorry; I'm not understanding your question.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: How many private operators are there in the country?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I don't have a number in front of me that I can speak to right now with respect to the number of private operators in the country.

The Chair: Ask a short question, please.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: You've got in here that you're going to be primarily focusing on the not-for-profit child care and just a reference to "recognizing and respecting", so does that mean that right out of the gate, private operators won't receive any funding?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Private operators are already receiving funding under the Canada-wide agreements.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gray. You went over quite a bit, but I did not want to interfere with your line of questioning.

We'll now move to Mr. Van Bynen for five minutes.

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

I appreciate you coming forward outlining the parameters of this program.

Having just recently crossed over the age of 40, I thought maybe it's just a little too late for me to get any benefit out of this, but the reality is that for every dollar invested, it's \$1.51 to \$2.80 that's being returned to the economy. My point here is that you don't need to have children to benefit from this program. It strengthens the economy overall. I'm glad to see this bill go forward. I'm eager to see this go forward and I'm eager to see this embedded in legislation. I'm glad that this bill is before this committee.

During debate, some members criticized this bill for lacking detail on implementation. Our understanding is that the conditions and the targets are set in the bilateral agreements, which this legislation reinforces. Could you please confirm whether this is correct and explain how exactly the system is being operationalized?

● (1720)

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The system is being operationalized by provinces and territories with the support of the federal government.

One of the things that I think people tend to point to in the bilateral agreements is the requirement for bilateral implementation committees. These are committees that exist at the working level between public servants in the federal government within our secretariat and the provinces and territories. They are mandated to meet at least twice a year to monitor ongoing progress of implementation of the agreements.

Importantly, implementation committees also include regional and national stakeholders to ensure that those views, the actual experience of what implementation feels like on the ground, are reflected at those committees.

What I will say, though, is that although we do spend a lot of time thinking about and tracking the work of implementation committees, it is really the relationships that this team builds with

provincial and territorial colleagues in working with them on a day-to-day basis that are at the core of ongoing positive implementation. Those relationships are built from engaging over the little challenges that are faced day to day in planning for investments and in doing some of that course correction that I mentioned earlier. For example, a province like Saskatchewan may think that it's going to reach \$10 a day much later in the agreement and then actually be in a position to announce \$10 a day yesterday.

That's how we monitor and manage implementation. It's by maintaining those relationships, along with some formality along the way that you see reflected in the agreements themselves.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: You say on page 10 that there are penalties if you don't receive your information on time from the provinces or the territories. What information are you requesting and what are you going to do with it?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thanks. That's a great question.

There are a few different pieces of information that we require. For each fiscal year, we require from provinces and territories audited financial statements that are a reflection of where funding is spent. That, for us, is just a key function of ensuring the sound use of public funds and that federal funding is going where it is intended.

Provinces and territories also provide to us annual reports that outline their accomplishments under those key principles that are reflected in the agreements. Some provinces and territories publish those annual reports and others don't. The federal government's intention, once we have all of those reports, is to put together a federal report that makes public to Canadian families the progress of the system.

I will say that there have been challenges for many provinces and territories over the last number of years in putting together some of that annual reporting, but we're getting into a bit of a groove with them right now, and this is certainly a very busy time of year for us as a number of those reports are coming in.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Why does the bill not mention the early childhood education workforce?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The early childhood education workforce does have mention in 7(1)(d) of the legislation, where we speak to the importance of the workforce in contributing to high-quality child care in Canada.

Where we do not go further on the workforce is a reflection of our intention to keep this legislation focused purely on the federal aspect so as not to impose conditions on provinces, territories or indigenous partners and to respect fully their jurisdiction in this space.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

That concludes our round. We have only a few minutes left.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adjourn? What's the wish of the committee?

We'll go with a two-minute round. We'll go to Madame Bérubé.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: All right.

Ms. Lattimore, you say that Bill C-35 primarily applies to the federal framework, and therefore did not need to include Quebec's withdrawal with full compensation. However, the current agreement with Quebec is for five years.

What guarantee is there for Quebec that, in the next round of negotiations, standards and obligations won't be imposed by the federal government?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: That's a good question.

That's why the bill is important. We just need to make sure that the federal government is present as a partner beyond five years. If Bill C-35 is passed, it will confirm the government's commitment and funding for the early education and child care system, while maintaining the flexibility needed for agreements with the provinces, like the asymmetrical agreement with Quebec.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What is there in this bill to avoid conflicts between Quebec and Ottawa when the current agreement expires?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: What the bill ensures for the Province of Quebec is that Canada will be there in the long run with funding for continued improvements to the Quebec system of early learning and child care. It has been, and continues to be, the intention of the federal government to work with Quebec to sign asymmetric agreements that recognize Quebec's deep work in this space and its success in building a child care system.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[*English*]

Madame Zarrillo, you have two minutes or less.

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

I want to ask about children with disabilities and families with kids with disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Canada in 1991, talks about how children with disabilities “should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.” I can say that in British Columbia, this is still a work in progress and a challenge. I hear from many families that can't get access to adequate day care.

I want to ask the team what they've heard from families with children with disabilities. What considerations in the bill reflect specific input from families with children with disabilities?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Thank you for the question.

One thing I can speak to, perhaps, with respect to children with disabilities, is the value we are now seeing in having built a national advisory council that is reflective of the diversity of Canada, and

in having, on that council, the voices of individuals who have deep experience with, and appreciation for, the challenges faced by families with children with disabilities.

Bill C-35 acknowledges that the government is committed to continuing to work in this space. This is rights-based legislation. It's reflected in the preamble of the bill as well. Its purpose is to further the progressive realization of the right to benefit from child care services, as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That includes application to persons with disabilities.

We understand the perspective of many vulnerable communities: Child care services are difficult to access and facilities are more expensive to build, so our goal is to work very closely with provinces and territories through the bilateral agreements to ensure inclusive spaces are at the top of the list in terms of those investments as space creation continues.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Zarrillo.

We're going to Madame Ferreri for two minutes and then to members from the governing side for two minutes, whoever that may be.

Madame Ferreri, you have two minutes.

• (1730)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really want on the record that this is about the welfare of the child. There is nobody in here who doesn't want access to quality, affordable child care. There's nobody we've met with or talked to who doesn't agree that this is what we want. The stress in the pages and pages of notes I have from parents whose mental health is declining daily because they do not have access to child care is a major concern.

When I'm doing these lines of questioning about inclusivity and the language, it is for the welfare of the child. It is not to play some political game. It really is about the intersection of providing access to all.

On slide 19 you say, “The Council would consist of 10 to 18 members who are representative of the diversity of Canadian society”. What are the KPIs, key performance indicators, for council members? How are you measuring the success, and how did you decide who these 10 to 18 people are who are representing diversity? Also, does that include small home day cares that are independently operated and owned?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I'm sure that you can appreciate that creating a national advisory council that is reflective of the diversity of Canada while also limiting the size of that council to 18 people makes it almost impossible for every voice and every experience to be heard on that council—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I hate to interrupt, but we're so limited with time. I'm so sorry.

Is private child care represented on that council, and what are the key performance indicators to measure success for this council?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I don't have key performance indicators to measure success at the council. The council is an advisory body in place to provide advice to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: How are we going to measure if it is successful?

The Chair: Give a short answer, please, Ms. Lattimore.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Success at the council this year will reflect the council's work to engage with members of ELCC com-

munities across Canada. It will engage even with the for-profit sector to ensure that the advice that it is providing to the minister on the workforce challenges—I mentioned that it's been tasked with that as its primary priority right now—is reflective of the diverse experience and views of Canadians across the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Ferreri.

The meeting is adjourned.

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