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Chair: The Honourable John McKay





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• (1545)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

This is a continuing study on the housing issue from the motion adopted October 19, on the lack of available housing on or near bases for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families and the challenges facing members and their families when they are required to move across the country.

I want to welcome the witnesses to the committee meeting.

We will start with retired sergeant Christopher Banks.

Welcome back to the committee, sir. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Christopher Banks (Sergeant (Retired), As an Individual):** Thank you, and thank you for having me back.

My name is Christopher Banks. I retired in 2019 after 20 years as a sergeant and quartermaster in the army reserve.

During my career, I was fortunate to have been given many opportunities, which took me to bases and training centres across the country. I have been fortunate to meet and engage with many members of the forces and the veteran community.

The challenges that members face are nothing new. It has been an issue discussed since I was a young troop. I remember as a private seeing the PMQs being torn down in Toronto. Now there is nothing for Toronto. Toronto isn't alone in that regard.

In other cities where soldiers are often posted, housing is either privatized, such as in Vancouver, or insufficient, such as in Ottawa, which only has 145 units. To rub salt in the wound, earlier this year the government eliminated the PLD allowance that was meant to help members living in high cost of living areas. This was done in the guise of a pay raise, which didn't cover the loss of PLD, leaving many members losing income with an interim benefit still in the works.

This is a significant part of the recruiting and retention problem that the CAF faces.

Debbie Lowther, the CEO of Veterans Emergency Transition Services testified to the veterans affairs committee on October 31 this year that her organization has assisted and continues to assist serving members who are living in their cars due to the cost of living in their posting location. I encourage the committee to include her testimony in your study and invite her to testify in person.

With so many housing needs in larger metropolitan areas, I would ask the committee to study the possibility of repurposing federally owned office buildings in urban centres, which are no longer in use due to working from home, to use as apartment-style PMQs and barracks for military housing.

The situation isn't much better on bases either. Wait-lists for PMQs can be longer than the posting for some members. Barracks aren't always available or an option if the member has a family. Living off base in the current real estate and rental markets creates economic stress on the member and their family.

Members have raised the issues of corruption and apathy of the maintenance contractors. Families feel like they are nickel-and-dimed when making requests. Many of the PMQs are old and lack modern insulation, heating, wiring and are just outlived. Units are condemned or awaiting repairs or demolition while families wait.

For families, the challenges continue, with limited to zero career opportunities for spouses and limited jobs for those inclined to work part time. Education can be less than stellar depending on the posting. For those with dependants with special needs, a posting can endanger them. For health care, most of the bases don't have a full hospital. Off base, we are subject to the same lack of doctors that the whole country faces.

I also encourage the committee to include barracks in its study. Barracks are suffering from the same issues: There are not enough and many that do exist are in poor repair. There have been promises of new barracks to address the shortages on bases for more than 30 years.

Please consider not only the barracks that are full-time housing units, but also the transient barracks that are used for courses or taskings, particularly by reservists during summer training surges and operational pre-deployment phases. It is too familiar an occasion, when reservists arrive en masse to a base or training centre for months of training to be told there aren't enough rooms available. They will spend the sweltering summer or frigid winter in a tent.

What Canada needs—not even right now, but decades ago—is a surge in federally built houses and apartments on bases, such as what Canada did when soldiers returned home from the Second World War.

It doesn't need more privatization, which only exacerbates the problem. Every single time something is outsourced or privatized away from the military, the quality goes down. Only the cost goes up.

In conclusion, I would like to express the pain felt by the Canadians who comprise our armed forces. As I mentioned, this is part of the CAF's recruiting and retention problems. Many have given up. Far too many have had to choose between a healthy and stable family and their career. So many are asking why they should stay in the CAF, if this is how it is.

This is just one of many serious issues facing serving members. There is little faith among the serving and veteran communities that things will change. When we see how things are being addressed by the powers that be, many have lost faith in the system they defend.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Banks.

Ms. Hill, you have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Shannon Hill (Ph.D. candidate, Queen's University, As an Individual):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for the invitation to come before you today to speak about some of the research that I have been part of.

I come before the committee as a Ph.D. candidate at Queen's University and member of the Families Matter Research Group, which is led by Dr. Heidi Cramm out of Queen's University.

My doctoral research has focused on better understanding the educational experiences of adolescents living in Canadian military families as they frequently relocate and transition between schools and across education systems. I'm a civilian with no military experience; however, I grew up in a Canadian military family and have first-hand experience of what it's like to be a military-connected student. I also became a certified teacher in Ontario in 2015.

I'm here to share with you today what we currently know about how frequent relocations can impact the educational experiences of military-connected children and youth. To date, the knowledge base has been overwhelmingly informed by American research and often captures the perspectives of parents and educators.

From available research, we know that military families relocate three times more frequently than civilian families. Given the frequency of relocations that military families can experience, it has been reported in the United States that military-connected children and youth can attend up to nine schools before graduation.

Socially, relocating requires military-connected students to leave behind old peer networks and develop new friendships. This can be particularly challenging for adolescents, given the important role peer networks play in adolescent development. Since relocations do not always occur at the end of the school year, participation in ex-

tracurricular activities may also be put at risk for military-connected students. Again, depending on when a relocation occurs, tryouts or sign-ups for clubs and sports either at the school and/or community levels may have already passed, creating further social implications.

Academically, military-connected students may experience challenges such as curricular gaps and/or redundancies, particularly if they relocate across jurisdictional boundaries where differing standards and requirements exist. Given differences in standards and requirements across education systems, entry into school as well as post-secondary opportunities for military-connected students can be impacted.

For military-connected students with special needs, the challenges I've discussed can become further compounded and added to the challenges and stressors that military families face when trying to access and re-establish health care services following a relocation. Unbeknownst to most Canadians, there is no dedicated health care system that provides services to military families. As such, military families access publicly funded services and can be put on a waiting list for two to three years. However, military families may have to relocate to a new location before gaining access to services, thus starting this process all over again.

With differences that exist across special education systems, such as eligibility requirements, services offered and delivery methods, relocations and school transitions for military-connected students who require access to special education services can become increasingly complex and challenging for military families to navigate, particularly if they relocate to isolated or rural locations, where the availability and accessibility of specialized services can be limited.

It's important to note that despite available research focusing overwhelmingly on challenges faced by military families during times of relocation, positives associated with relocating have also been cited within the research, such as having the opportunity to start anew, travel and meet new people.

In the 2013 ombudsman report "On the Homefront", it was identified that child and youth education is consistently identified as one of the dominant reasons for release from the Canadian Armed Forces. Despite this, there has continued to be a lack of Canadian research conducted on the educational experiences of military-connected children and youth. In fact, I am one of only a few individuals within Canada who is conducting research on this topic and trying to raise awareness of a unique population whose needs and experiences are not well understood.

At this critical point in time, where there is emphasis being placed within Canadian defence policy to support military families and reduce the implications of their high mobility, it is critical, moving forward, to increase Canadian research capacity to ensure that future strategic decisions to support the educational experiences of military-connected students are informed by Canadian evidence rather than international evidence, where key contextual differences can exist.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to our discussion today.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hill.

Our final presenter is Alyssa Truong, please, for five minutes.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong (As an Individual):** Good afternoon. Thank you for having me today. Being here is an honour and a privilege.

I am a military spouse; however, beyond that, I strive to advocate and assist fellow military spouses and members of the defence community in advocacy, policy awareness and assistance.

I appreciate that today's discussion surrounds the housing crisis that's currently happening and precisely how that is affecting the CAF community. I have had the unique opportunity to hear many of the stories and struggles that CAF families experience regarding housing. I hope I can highlight some of those factors today. You will notice much of the information I'm going to provide surrounds the RHUs, and I trust that some of the other individuals can share some of the other factors.

First, the need for RHUs on many bases, and predominantly those that are situated in higher-cost locations, creates extreme stress for many families. Given the unique nature of military life, a family's financial climate can look different from post to post. For example, some provinces have additional requirements for job portability for regulated professionals such as nurses, counsellors, ECEs, or social workers. A spouse may be able to work efficiently in one region, but not in the other, thus affecting the type of home a family may need to acquire. Specific to those families requesting RHUs with children or dependants with medical needs, medical care may be delayed until a legal address is acquired by the family and can have medical implications for the family and individuals seeking ongoing medical care.

In addition, some RHUs have mould or poor ventilation, which can contribute to aggravating one's health conditions or create health challenges for families. For some bases there is greater compassion for medical needs, and in others, based on the experience of other CAF families, they've come up against roadblocks or barriers. When a family is placed on the RHU list, they are placed on a first-come, first-served basis. This does not take into account one's personal family situation. While some families do not have medical needs or require accommodations, many do. Many families have expressed that CFHA does not take into account the family's medical needs or personal situation, or places barriers to care, which can result in additional stressors or emotional fatigue for the family.

In some situations, the families coming in from an OUTCAN have a hard date by which they are required to depart the originat-

ing country. Without housing, a family would be placed in a very difficult and stressful situation.

Another factor that affects the CAF community is that the military member actually owns the RHU. In situations of intimate partner violence, this creates an inequitable, and I would cautiously say, human rights issue. It is often the policy of CFHA to suggest to the victims of intimate partner violence that they remove themselves and live in a shelter or seek other accommodations.

Given the geographic moves that come with CAF life, this creates a problematic situation as a spouse may not have the financial means to relocate immediately, or if children are involved, the ability to seek housing on the economy. The public knowledge of this policy creates a potentially unsafe environment as spouses are often cautious to leave an abusive situation because the member owns the RHU, perpetuating the cycle of abuse.

We've often heard the tag line that living on base is a privilege, not a right. While I sincerely acknowledge the privilege of living on a military base at a reduced rate, I would gently suggest that housing is one of the most significant stressors for military families. Families may have short posts, children with special needs or other complexities, that prohibit them from living off base at a higher economic cost. Currently housing is neither equitable or accessible, and more accessibility would decrease the stressors for both CAF families and their members.

Thank you.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll commence with our six-minute round.

Mr. Bezan for six minutes please.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** I want to thank everyone for coming and testifying at committee today. This is an important study. As Sergeant Banks talked about, this is part of the retention issue that we are dealing with in that a lot of people in the military find themselves undervalued. Last week government officials were here. They talked about \$40 million a year going in and they built a grand 38 homes in the last two years. They originally identified that they were going to build 1,300 homes over 10 years, and that was five years ago. They only built a total of 137 homes in that five-year period.

We know that there's a wait-list of over 40,000 people wanting to have military housing. We know that according to the minister's testimony there's a need for and a shortfall of another 7,000 homes. We had the Canadian Forces Housing Agency here, and when I said that 19% of the homes that are currently in stock are in poor condition, they said, no, they're just below average.

Would you describe these as below-average homes and compared to what, or are they just in poor condition and we shouldn't be putting our troops in them?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I would say that it's probably all of the above. It really depends on the units that you're looking at.

I was talking to a friend of mine who left the army reserve and went to the navy. He was telling me about homes that are in his community of PMQs that are unoccupied. Some are falling apart and some are mid-renovation, and there has been a series of renovators going in and not finishing the work. It's all of the above.

**Mr. James Bezan:** You made the statement that these are corrupt contractors and corrupt maintenance contractors. Are these individuals who are on the payroll of national defence or are they private citizens?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** The contractors I'm talking about are not DND employees. They're contracted, subcontracted or, in some cases, sub-subcontracted out from whoever gets the contract for base maintenance for that particular base.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Do you call them corrupt because of their not finishing the jobs they're hired to do, or are they overcharging or not competent?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** Again, it would be all of the above, because it is subjective to the units that we're talking about.

I don't have experience living in the PMQs myself—I would recommend asking Alyssa that question—but I do have experience as an officer in charge of the Brampton Armoury for 10 years. I dealt with those contractors. There was a lot of work done 99%, and they never showed up again. There's a lot of work done on paper, but I never once saw anyone come into the building to do that work. That kind of contract corruption is, I'm sure, what they were referring to.

• (1600)

**Mr. James Bezan:** Sergeant Banks and Ms. Truong, in the issues around finding appropriate housing, there is a need to go off base, because there is a lack of available or proper housing for families. Then you have to go into competition.

The Liberal government has made a lot of hoopla and photo ops with their housing accelerator fund. Can you tell us whether this has done anything to help provide housing for military families?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I've been out for four years. I'm going to defer to Alyssa on that one.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Okay.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I'm not sure that I can adequately answer that question.

We live on base and have for two and a half years. I wasn't aware of the policy. I do know about the new PLD situation that has just switched. I can only speak from my experience. Should my family

live off base, due to my husband's rank, we would only see about \$150 a month.

Unfortunately, we live in the Borden area, so a three-bed, two-bathroom home would be close to \$3,800, which would be significantly more than what we are paying on base. It is more of a financial inequity situation.

I'm not sure if that answers your question.

**Mr. James Bezan:** You're saying that the housing accelerator fund hasn't done anything to generate extra housing to bring down the cost of living to address the needs that military families have, and you're not aware of any members who have been able to access any of that so-called housing that the government says they're building.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I cannot speak to that, unfortunately.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I receive letters from current serving members. I know of one family that was based in Manitoba at CFB Shilo, and they were transferred to Halifax. They sold their home, put a bid on a home in Halifax and still couldn't afford to buy the house. They had a combined income of over \$125,000 a year, and they're living in a tent in Halifax. That's the way our current serving members are being treated.

How do we fix this?

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds to answer that question.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Anyone...?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I put the recommendation in my opening statement that what we need is the same war surge in housing that we saw after the end of the Second World War.

I think that's probably it.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Lambropoulos, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Thanks, Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses who are with us today for the incredible work that they've done, their service, or the work they continue to do for families in the military and for spouses.

Can you reflect on your own experiences and the experiences of people you've spoken to or have served with to tell us if there are any gaps in what our committee has taken a look at?

So far we have studied housing, health care and child care. I heard education today. I've heard a couple of other things that may be important to take a deeper dive into. Can you give us some ideas on issues that definitely experience gaps and that we don't have a lot of research on that could help us improve the situation for members and their families?

It's a question for everybody, so I guess we'll start with Christopher Banks and then Shannon and Alyssa.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I spent most of my military training on CFB Petawawa and in training centre Meaford. When I got to Meaford in 2000, there were two buildings—shacks—and a few bigger rooms, but they were only transient as well.

It was promised to us then that there would be new buildings coming. Twenty-three years later, there's still nothing.

When I was serving in Petawawa and training for Afghanistan, 12 of us were put in a room meant for four people. They pulled out the single beds, put in bunk beds and then told us to go find cots for the other four.

This is a problem that didn't change much in the entire time I was in the military. It just keeps getting worse, because the buildings are falling apart.

What I heard from the last committee meeting was that they're only building triple-digit at best for four-digit demand. It's going to be 70 years before the problem is fixed, and that's not including any new units that go down in that time frame. This problem is not going to be fixed in my lifetime at this rate.

• (1605)

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you.

Shannon, is there anything you'd like us to focus on, to take a deeper look into, going forward?

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** Thank you so much for that question.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, certainly it would be looking at the educational experiences of children and youth who live in military families. That's a very under-represented area in research in Canada and, as I mentioned, decision-makers have had to rely heavily on American research, which has made up the bulk of the evidence base to date.

In terms of areas for educational research, I think it would be great to look at how the different military lifestyle factors—frequent relocations, regular absence or risk of injury, illness and/or death—can influence the educational experiences. As well would be looking at the educational experiences of children and youth who live and relocate within Canada versus outside of Canada. In particular it would be interesting to look at the educational experiences of children and youth who attend the Canadian Armed Forces schools that are overseas, and finally the educational experiences of children and youth who have special needs in military families. That's a subpopulation we know even less about.

Those are some general directions that future research would benefit from.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Alyssa, if you don't mind, go for it, and I will have one more question afterwards.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Sure. I did highlight some of the inequities, such as spouses not having the right to live on base when intimate partner violence happens. It is a passion of mine to ensure that not just the military member but also the family is cared for. I think that would be a prudent area to look into, given that I know from personal anecdotal experience that many women, especially, hesitate to leave abusive situations because they are afraid of being homeless.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you very much.

A couple of you spoke a lot about education and about some kids being worse off than others, especially those who have special needs. Moving around frequently can definitely have a major impact on their lives and on their educational journeys.

Could anybody here tell me what the procedure is for choosing which families are going to be moving around, and whether, for some families who do have these additional challenges to deal with within their own families, there's any way of exempting them from moving as many times? Is there any way to improve that by taking the needs of certain members into account when making these kinds of decisions?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** It's my understanding that these decisions are usually made person by person by the career managers. I'm not too sure whether it's a broad policy solution or more of a personnel management solution.

I would also say that, to your last question, when Shannon brought up the special needs, I was reminded of a point that I wanted to make about the families who get separated because of their family needs. When I was working in Brampton, there was a gentleman posted to my unit who couldn't bring his family with him because he had two children who had special needs. He ended up separating from his family and seeing them only on the weekends.

That's actually pretty common—families that are separated, with the parent living on base during the week and then maybe having a chance to go home on weekends.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Champoux. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the three witnesses for being with us today.

Sergeant Banks, thank you for your service to the country. It's a pleasure to meet you.

In your opening remarks and afterwards, you talked about the fact that facilities were in poor repair and that the services available to serving members of the armed forces were outdated and unattractive. Clearly, a career in the Canadian Armed Forces, or CAF, is not an appealing prospect. Most of these issues are known and, the vast majority of the time, have been reported to the committee by former and inactive members of the armed forces. They are people like you, people I've met in my riding who had careers in the armed forces and have talked about these issues. We seem to have a harder time when we want to consult with serving members of the CAF. I think members are more reluctant to speak openly because of the duty of loyalty.

Does the CAF have some sort of process whereby members are able to raise concerns and provide input on decisions that will have a significant impact not only on their careers, but also on their home lives and children?

Are they able to speak out, or are they stuck venting their frustrations anonymously on social media, say?

Do you think the CAF has a sound mechanism for communication?

• (1610)

[English]

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** Could you rephrase that question, please? I'm just trying to put it into words.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Of course.

I was wondering whether serving members have access to some sort of mechanism to share their dissatisfaction, problems they're having or changes they want to see in how they are treated during postings, for instance.

Can they speak freely within the armed forces and raise problems they are having?

[English]

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** To say that they can freely express themselves...no. We're pretty regulated in that fashion. There are policies that are supposed to ensure that career managers and leadership have open door policies so they can have these kinds of discussions at the lowest level, but that's entirely subject to the personalities who are in those leadership positions, because, unfortunately, not every person who gets into a leadership position is fit to be a leader. That's just the reality of it.

There's also the grievance system within the military that can be utilized, but there are also a lot of trust issues that the military community has about the grievance system. A lot of allegations of those same poor leaders, who will take a grievance, throw it in the garbage, rip it up or use it to smear someone's campaign.

While those mechanisms exist, there's not a whole lot of trust in them.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I take it, then, that there is still resistance to hearing what members have to say. I imagine that change isn't smooth, that communication is non-existent and that people are reluctant to report problems they're having. That is why people like you, Sergeant Banks, appear before the committee.

Ms. Hill, you talked about the impact on military families of being relocated here, there and everywhere. Their lives are uprooted no matter where they are being relocated. Everyone has to adapt, especially school-age children.

In your research, did you examine the impact of language? I'm thinking of English-speaking families who have to move to Quebec or, the opposite, Quebecers having to move to English-speaking communities.

Can you elaborate on how that aspect of relocation affects members of the military and their families?

[English]

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** Thank you so much for that question.

To start with, from a research perspective, it's something that has been under-researched, but it is something that we do hear quite a lot of from families. This is particularly as it relates to my doctoral research. Certainly, relocations to Quebec were seen as further challenging because of the language piece, but it was also because of the way the education system is set up in Quebec in comparison with other provinces and territories.

I would like to note that one of the issues that was raised in my research was that families might be limited in terms of the schools they can send their children to in a particular location. If they're looking for French immersion, for example, depending on where they're relocating, there might be only one school that offers French immersion. There can be limited options in terms of what schools families can even send their children to, depending on where they relocate.

Certainly, the language piece has definitely come up as a concern.

• (1615)

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** To your knowledge, is that something that is taken into account before a member of the military is sent to a given place?

Does the CAF consider the fact that this makes it harder for people to adapt to the new community, especially children? That's all the more true for children with special needs.

[English]

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** I can't speak to that from specifically a DND perspective. I will say, though, that there have been recommendations put forward to reduce the amount of relocations for families that do have children, particularly adolescents, given the greater impact socially and academically that relocations can have, as well as children who have special needs. I can't speak specifically, but certainly there have been some recommendations put forth.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[English]

Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Thank you to all for being here today.

Last week, at the beginning of this study, we heard from government officials from CAF and DND. I think Mr. Bezan mentioned it, but they spoke about those satisfaction levels for military housing. They actually quoted that it was at the 85% mark in terms of satisfaction. It sounds as though, from testimony we're hearing now from both Mr. Banks and Ms. Truong, that it is not in fact the case.

Can you maybe explain where that disconnect seems to be?



**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I can offer a hypothesis. When I was still in the military, I was part of a lot of these surveys. I put my hand up for everything that came down. Some of them are done by paper and some of them are done by town halls. When you're in the town hall variant, you can see this happen in real time: The facilitators will reject, out of hand, certain comments that don't fit the scope of the study. A lot of times we're told, oh, that's a budget thing and it's not going to happen, or, oh, that's just a gripe and the hardship of the service. The comments get rejected out of turn.

It's the same with the paper copies. When we do those paper surveys, we get together afterwards and ask each other about what we put. When the eventual report comes out months later and we all get together, we see that the comments we brought up are nowhere to be found in the highlighted section. You have to go all the way back to the raw data.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Ms. Truong, from a spousal family aspect, can you put forward maybe an equal hypothesis?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** If I understood your statement correctly, 85% of families said they were happy with on-base housing. Is that correct?

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** That's what we were told last week, yes.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Okay.

I would say that it's probably fair. Those of us who do get the privilege of living on base are probably reasonably happy. I am very happy to have a roof over my head. I think the greater stressor is that an astronomical number of families do not get that privilege.

I think if we were to be posted somewhere that didn't have that ability for us to seek housing, then we would be outside of that demographic. I'd actually be curious to hear the actual demographic they were looking at and screening as opposed to whether it was an overarching number.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** So it's more like 85% of an overall 15% as opposed to 85% total.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** It's possible, certainly.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you.

I want to hear from you, Ms. Truong. You spoke about the challenges that spouses have, especially when they are potentially fleeing domestic violence.

I've been told that when partners split, the partner, typically the woman, has to stay near or on base with the children. The spouse gets all the rights. The active serving member gets all the rights in terms of where they're located. I don't know if you have experience with this, but could you expand on it in terms of rights for spouses in that regard as well?

• (1620)

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I certainly cannot speak officially, but I can speak based on my own experience working with and alongside military spouses.

That is correct. I'll give an example. At Borden, if someone were fleeing domestic violence and children were involved, they would more than likely need to live in the geographical area, which is not

affordable. That often can place individuals in a difficult position because they are unable to afford it and, therefore, have to make difficult decisions with regard to custody arrangements. It is certainly a concern.

I would certainly love to see some greater advocacy and guidelines around what happens in these types of situations to ensure that both the family and the member are protected.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** In terms of any of those financial supports, PLD, CFHD or whatever, are any of those extended to those family members in circumstances where they have to find additional housing because of an abusive situation or a breakdown in the family unit?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** No. When you're a military member living on base, your rent comes off your pay. Therefore, any thing or money that gets allocated is a benefit to the military member, not to the family.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Those women have no access.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** That is correct.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Ms. Hill, I want you to expand on this.

I don't know if your research expanded to.... In terms of children who are moving around and are experiencing these difficulties throughout their life, and all of the things that you mentioned, can you expand...? Have you looked at what happens after they age out? As adults, what are the complications? What are we looking at that way? Could you be more explicit on that?

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** From a Canadian perspective, I'm not aware of any research that has looked at that. Again, that's another further area for research. You'll probably hear me say that a lot today as it relates to military-connected children and youth and education. We just don't have the research. I think it would be a great further area.

In saying that, there is a body of work that is coming out of the U.K., particularly around post-secondary or higher education pathways—so once they've graduated—that somewhat relates. Otherwise, no, there isn't any research that I'm aware of.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Next is a five-minute round.

Mr. Kelly, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC):** Thank you.

We had some testimony last week about the condition of homes. There was a lot of talk about average and below-average homes. Average, of course, is a statistic compared with everything else. Homes could all deteriorate at the same pace and still be in average condition.

In the mortgage business, when we read an appraisal, an average condition home is really meant to mean a "not in very nice condition" type of place.

**A voice:** It's a starter.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** I'd ask both Sergeant Banks and Ms. Truong about the actual condition of a typical dwelling on base.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I would struggle to say that it's all the same because it's going to be wildly different from base to base.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Perhaps you could give some examples from your career.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** There's paint peeling, lead paint identification, asbestos identification that takes years to remediate, broken faucets, broken utilities, you name it.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Is that the characterization you would say is average?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** It's typical.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** A typical dwelling on base would have health hazards like exposed asbestos and paint peeling.

• (1625)

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** When I speak, I'm not saying it's limited to the housing units. I'm talking about every building that was built prior to the 1980s.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** That's most of the buildings. Most of the buildings were built in the 1950s and 1960s. Is that correct?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** That's my understanding. However, I can only speak to the bases that I've been training on.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Thank you.

Ms. Truong, do you want to get in on that?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Sure. I had the opportunity to be a spouse on two bases.

In Greenwood we had a fully renovated RHU. We were the first ones, I believe, to live in it. It was what I would consider above average.

In Borden we live in what I would consider an average RHU. It was renovated in the early 2010s. It is livable. However, beyond living conditions on the surface, personally we have experienced sewage backups, the furnace breaking, hot water issues. Along with just the foundation of the home, there are still aspects of living on base that have the internal workings of the home that can be problematic as well.

I know that in Borden there are lots of unrenovated RHUs. Those would be what Sergeant Banks was talking about, with some paint chipping off into dishes, warning signs, that sort of thing. Borden has done a good job of remediating lots of the RHUs, but there is still room for improvement.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** It's typical in a dwelling to have warnings about hazards to the occupants' health. That's normal in a house on base.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I have not experienced that personally, so I can't express that personally. I have heard anecdotal reports of that, yes.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Sergeant Banks, you said that in some of the buildings—not necessarily a dwelling, but buildings—it is normal to see warnings about things like lead paint chips and asbestos or other health hazards.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** The warnings are often just verbal. It's not like there are always signs posted.

The Brampton Armoury suffered lead paint for, I think, six years before we had a remediation. There's still asbestos in the building, but we were told as long as we don't disturb the floor tiles—which is where the asbestos is contained—it'll be fine.

However, then we have contractors coming in and drilling holes in those same tiles to run cat 5 wires for the new IT system.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Would you consider these typical dwellings to match up with what a normal Canadian would consider a pleasant living quarter for them to raise their family?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** "Average" is a pretty subjective word. I would say that it is pretty typical for some rundown urban centre houses, but not very typical for suburban houses, which are typically better maintained.

It's a flawed comparison, I think.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Fisher, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to our witnesses.

Sergeant Banks, it's nice to see you again. Welcome back to committee.

I'm interested in military families. Of course, it's important that we recognize when a military member serves, their military family serves as well. In fact, I said at the last meeting that we owe military families a debt of gratitude. Military spouses support their loved ones in so many ways, serving both here and serving abroad.

Ms. Hill, I understand your research focuses on military families here in Canada. I'm interested in if you've had a chance to study supports for military members and their families in other countries.

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** Thank you for that question.

From my research specifically I was looking at the relocation and school transition experience within Canada. In saying that, some of the families I did speak to certainly had experiences relocating outside Canada.

From a support perspective, what some people might not know is that when military members and their families are posted outside Canada, they have to undergo quite an extensive screening process across various domains, one of which is child and youth education. This is to make sure that their children will have access to the same quality of education that they would if they were to stay in Canada. From my knowledge, military members and their families don't undergo that screening process when they stay inside Canada. The families I spoke to mentioned feeling that they had more support leaving the country. That's not to say there are certainly supports within Canada.

The focus of my study was specifically within Canada, but some of those points about the experience outside Canada came up.

• (1630)

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** I have another question that I want to ask.

Is there a country you're aware of that does it really, really well that we could take a quick look at?

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** That's a great question. I don't think there's enough research for me to be able to answer that.

Again, I think more research is warranted, particularly on the experience outside of Canada.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Okay, thank you.

Ms. Truong, my riding is home to CFB Shearwater. We have a military family resource centre, and it's an incredible resource for that community and military families.

We had a chance to chat with officials, and so I will ask this question.

In 2018, we invested new funding to modernize the military family services program and provide additional supports to military families.

You do an awful lot of work, and you've been recognized for that work with military family resource centres. How important are the MFRCs to ensuring that military families are supported, especially as it pertains to relocation?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** They are vital. Without supports, I don't think that families would be able to traverse the number of moves they have to do.

As you noted, you're in Shearwater. Every MFRC is very different, depending on the demographic they serve. We've had two different experiences between Greenwood and Borden. I would like to also see a little more levelling of the playing field with that too, because it can be very stressful to try to traverse moves, schools, health care, etc.

They are an invaluable resource.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Absolutely. Thank you for that.

Ms. Hill, you listed off a bunch of things that would impact young people: going to school and furthering their education after multiple relocations. You talked about one example where somebody went to nine schools. I'm aware of someone who went to three different high schools in a three-year span.

You talked about clubs, sports, leaving friends behind, curricular gaps. You also said that there are some positives from this, but then you moved on. My interest was piqued on that. For someone who has never had to relocate, I struggle to think of what those positives might be, other than seeing this great country that we live in.

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** That's a great question.

To clarify, the note about the nine schools was that it's been reported in the United States that students can attend up to nine schools, and certainly that can differ.

I can speak from my personal experience of growing up in a military family in terms of the positives. Certainly it was challenging to have to move and to have to make new friends and change schools, but I was very fortunate for the experience. To this day, I've met so many incredible people whom I've stayed in touch with. I know people all around the world.

A lot of the adolescents I spoke to in my study also talked about being proud of living in a military family, despite these challenges.

I wanted to emphasize that, because I often find that the negatives or the challenges get focused on a lot. It is important to note that there are positives—

**The Chair:** We're going to have to leave the answer there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you may go ahead for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That's very interesting, Ms. Hill.

I want to revisit the fact that the CAF has to make itself more attractive to prospective members interested in a career in the armed forces. In our riding offices, when situations involving veterans come across our desks, the issue is always that the veteran can't access services they are entitled to and very much need. Many of the veterans I speak to say they want to give up because the idea of facing off against the beast of bureaucracy is just too daunting.

Sergeant Banks, you're telling us today that the living conditions in the CAF aren't necessarily any more enticing.

Why would a young person thinking about enlisting be interested in a career in the armed forces today? Does it still hold any appeal, in your view?

• (1635)

[*English*]

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** Sometimes it's easy to think that we're sitting here with a list of complaints like "I hated my career" and "I didn't have a good time", but for everything negative I have to say, I also have a lot of good things.

I had some of the best experiences in my life. I met some of the best people in my life there. It's like Shannon said. It's the same thing. I have friends all over the world now. That's something that most people don't get to have. There's a lot of good that comes with it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Nevertheless, there is a lot work to be done to make this bureaucratic beast better for people, both while they are serving and after they retire.

Do you think efforts are being made to fix the situation? It seems as though we are always hearing about the same problems, the same barriers, the same challenges, not just for veterans—who deserve to be treated properly—but also for serving members.

Are you hopeful? Are you optimistic?

[English]

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I would say that there are a lot of genuine people within the military and supporting the military who do genuinely want to see improvement and who do genuinely work hard to make those improvements happen. They're small and incremental sometimes, but they do exist.

**The Chair:** Madam Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you.

Mr. Banks, you've talked a lot about the maintenance and property management on base, and those contractors, subcontractors and sub-subcontractors. I've certainly heard from a lot of the union representation that those services used to be provided by full-time public servants on base.

Could you talk about the feelings that exist now? You talked about it before, but go into a bit more depth about that relationship, I guess, with what you see in terms of those contractors and subcontractors on base.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I mean, on one extent, there are problems with the availability of contractors. There are so many contractors who get blacklisted because of the piss-poor performance—pardon my language—they do during the course of their contract, but because there's no one willing to take up our tender for the next contract, that blacklisted company gets hired to do the same terrible job all over again. That has always been a problem.

From my perspective as an OIC armouries, it was that they were trying to centralize so many services that the smaller armouries that were outside, like for Brampton.... We were pretty far outside of the city of Toronto comparatively. We were often forgotten because we weren't in that Toronto bubble, but we were still supported by the Toronto garrison.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Often, base commanders are forced because of the way the financial pots of money are split to go through those contractors, yet they're told that it saves money overall. Do you believe that is the case?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** Given the number of times that we've had to spend money, to pull money from other line items to spend on fixing the gaps from the hired contractors who left, I would say that it's probably no.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Have you ever seen maybe an instance where somebody, like an actual forces member, has had to spend their own money because they can't deal with the fact that things aren't being fixed as needed?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** Unfortunately, I'd probably have a harder time telling you the number of people who didn't end up spending their own money or using their own equipment or just for the office stuff for the armouries....

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Gallant, you have five minutes, please.

• (1640)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Thank you.

Contractors are telling me that new builds on bases must have heat pumps.

The problem is, if it's an existing home that needs to be redone, the wiring has to be done, because these are era World War II houses, and they may have only 60 or 100 amp service. Even if they take it down, that's all they have for service. That doesn't even include the vehicle chargers for the electric cars that we're going to be forced to buy after 2035.

The problem isn't just the wiring in the homes. The distribution lines don't have the capacity to bring in that kind of power. If people in the neighbourhood all have their furnaces on in the winter, then get home and plug in their cars and everyone starts cooking, the transformers get fried.

This means that not only are we going to need more housing, but we're also going to have to replace the existing housing, so we really have not only a crisis now but another one in the making.

Are any of you aware of how the cycle of new builds is prioritized or even which buildings get renovated? Do you know how that cycle works?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** That is not information that is typically shared with people outside of the real property offices.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** There is a cycle they go through. They triage it, so to speak.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I can only imagine, based on my understanding of the military system at large, that there is a system, but that's not something they share.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Okay.

In your experience for new builds, who is responsible for issuing the building permits, and who does the inspections to make sure the buildings are built to code? Do you know?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** For new builds...?

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** For new builds, on base.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** That is outside of my expertise, I'm afraid.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Okay. I ask because it's federal land, and the usual building inspectors don't apply, so I'm just wondering where they get the building inspectors. What we were told was that, back in Petawawa, corrupt contractors would build a place, look at the walls, have the insulation and vapour barrier put in, and as soon as somebody had looked at it, they would tear it out and put it in the next house. Then they'd close it up. That's why we have some that are very cold.

In your research, how long does it take for housing with black mould to have it removed and the proper vapour barriers installed?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I would defer to Alyssa for that question.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Okay.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I do not have an answer to that question. I'm so sorry. That is also outside of my scope of knowledge.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Didn't you have any families attending the family resource centre whose housing was in such poor condition and needed some direction on how to go about having that ameliorated?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I'm sure there are. I am aware of families who have had significant issues with their RHUs. I just don't know about timelines or the proper policies or procedures that they went through.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Okay.

Were you made aware of any family crises that ensued as a consequence of Brookfield Global Relocation Services, BGRS, being hacked?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I am aware of the hack. However, I also cannot speak to any personal experience. It has not been something that has impacted my family. It's something I saw in the news, but beyond that, unfortunately, I can't speak to that.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** We had to deal with the crises of families who had to be moved by a certain date. Brookfield was handling the money and the move. They were down for a couple of weeks, and the crisis was there. Even the minister wasn't aware of it, and nobody in the chain of command knew how to deal with it.

I just thought that maybe, being with the PMFRC, you would have known how to handle that, but I know it's oblique.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I actually don't work for an MFRC. I'm just a military spouse who did some advocacy, as well as being heavily involved in the community.

I am aware of people who are impacted, but I don't know the level of impact, unfortunately.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gallant.

Do you have anybody you could bring before this committee who would give direct testimony of insulation and vapour barriers being taken out after an inspection and put into another unit? Do you have anybody you could bring before the committee to say that?

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** This happened a while ago, so I'm not sure they'd still be in the military.

**The Chair:** Well, it's a pretty shocking thing.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Yes, well, it was commonplace.

**The Chair:** If you do come up with a witness, I'm sure the committee would be very interested.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** A regular base commander would also be good because they live these kinds of situations every day.

**The Chair:** We're open to suggestions.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Mr. Collins, you have five minutes.

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

Thanks, witnesses, for your attendance today.

Mr. Banks, I really liked your comments related to the whole issue of residential conversions. I think you referenced office towers, in terms of providing an opportunity for government to leverage their assets in providing housing.

I sat as a city councillor for a long time on our municipal non-profit, and we faced many of the challenges the military faces today. We had long wait lists. We had housing stock that was built in the sixties and seventies, and limited resources to fix those units as well as to build new to accommodate those people who were on the wait list.

We had to look for unique ways and opportunities to provide new housing for those people who needed it. One of the things we were forced to do, because we didn't have assistance at the time from other levels of government, was to look at the land holdings we owned and to leverage the equity we had in those lands to provide housing for people.

You've capitalized on that, but you were also very clear in terms of the no privatization line. Can you expand upon that? I ask because those conversions that I referenced at the municipal level happened in partnership, for the most part, with the private sector. I am just hoping you could expand upon your recommendation that we do the conversions, but maybe not in partnership with the private sector.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** When I spoke against privatization, I was speaking against the management aspect of it. In Vancouver, CFHA, to my understanding, does not run the show out there. They've contracted it out to a private company who does it on their behalf. That's what I am referring to. Soldiers and their families don't want to be dealing with subcontractors. They want to deal with someone who has actual accountability, where there's a complaint process that can be adhered to, and to not be told, sorry, they are a contractor outside of the chain of the command and there's nothing they can do.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Thanks for clarifying that.

One of the things we found as a housing provider, to draw on my experience sitting on our non-profit, was that it was very expensive to maintain single-family homes, semis and even townhouse units. We gravitated to higher density. I think StatsCan shows that only 6% of the housing provided to CAF members is in the higher-density form.

Do you have an opinion in terms of where we should be going from a development perspective? You did reference the conversion of office towers in urban areas. Do you have any thoughts on that, to assist?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** To speak of urban centres, I think of Toronto, where a lot of people are posted in and out. The 4th division is there. The support group is there along with 32 brigade and a bunch of reserve and cadet units. There are people posted in from bases across the country at various ranks. If you're a private, corporal or lieutenant, it's going to be a pretty big hardship for you to get housing and afford the cost of living if you don't already have friends or can find a roommate or maybe have family in the city.

On base, there is an appetite for condo or apartment-style housing in favour of the traditional houses. Not everybody wants a house. Not everybody wants to maintain a property. Some people just want a quiet space. There is diversity among the demand, so it is definitely there.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Thank you for that.

Ms. Truong, you talked about domestic violence. You raised a great issue in terms of the opportunities, or lack thereof, that exist for those people trying to escape family violence. I hadn't thought about the whole issue of when you're in a remote, northern or rural area, there aren't a lot of housing opportunities and, by extension, there aren't a lot of emergency shelters that women or others might seek in urban areas.

How is that issue dealt with currently in terms of those who run into the circumstance of having to escape? They've now made the decision to leave the housing unit they're in, but they're in an area that might not have those social supports in place the way we would in large urban centres.

• (1650)

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** That's a great question. I would say there are probably areas that predominantly women can go to, but they often create additional barriers. I'll give an example. In Borden the closest women's shelter is about 25 minutes away. That includes needing a vehicle. You can't walk. Oftentimes, these barriers to seeking social assistance are greater. It's been my personal experience that individuals just simply stay within the family home in a potentially dangerous situation.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Can you provide recommendations to the committee that would seek to change our current policies?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Oh, I think—

**Mr. Chad Collins:** If you don't have them off the top of your head, I'd be interested in receiving them in writing if you could provide them to the committee. I think it's an issue that needs to be addressed.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Yes. I would be happy to give some thought to it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Collins.

Mrs. Kramp-Neuman, you have five minutes.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Thank you.

First, I'm going to provide a little bit of context from some correspondence that has been received from a current serving member who resides in an RHU in Halifax with regard to the band-aids that are being provided to his housing unit and that of his family.

The heat pump unit becomes unserviceable. They've had only emergency heat, because the pump did not work. Electrical usage and the power bills have effectively doubled. Open holes in the doors and the window frames allow cold and warm air and pests to freely come and go. He's seen photos of electrical sockets installed improperly, doors taped with duct tape to keep the cold out, and pests, including rats, that run rampantly throughout the neighbourhood. This individual asks why he's doing his job if the organiza-

tion is not giving a speck of consideration or respect to the people it employs to protect Canada or the values.

Mr. Banks, you suggested in your statement earlier that people often need to choose between a career and/or a healthy, stable family. With recruiting and retention clearly a problem in many different aspects, you suggested that many people have lost faith. Could you just elaborate on that and on what needs to change?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** Just so we're clear, this is not a sentiment that's limited to the housing situation. This is across the board. From reading the news, I don't even think this is limited to the military. This is happening across the public sector.

Budgets keep getting slashed, and it's.... I'm trying to speak eloquently so that I'm not being adversarial. When we are experiencing those problems every single day, it's hard to watch when the powers that be sit in committees like this or make statements on the news saying that there is no problem and that the budget cuts are not going to create a new problem. Every single day there is something that's broken that we're forced to use or something that's missing that we're forced to pretend is actually there. It's like going through exercises saying "Bang! Bang!" because we don't have enough blank ammunition to go around.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Therefore, we need to spend more and spend it smartly.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** We would need to reverse 60 years of budget cuts.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** In addition to this, the mandate of the FMRG is that it's established to help the Canadian military achieve operational readiness by enhancing the quality of life and enriching the military experience for families.

Ms. Hill, with your studies and experience with our soldiers and families not having sufficient or consistent housing, could you speak to mental health and how it affects the military personnel and their families? Can you speak to your research on that?

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** Unfortunately, my research has not specifically looked at mental health, so I would say that it's outside of my scope to answer that question.

• (1655)

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Perhaps, Chris, you could elaborate more.

In your opening statement, you spoke with regard to the post living differential. Could you expand on that and how potential relocation, which happens, affects our military personnel?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** It was quite the slap in the face to those who were receiving the PLD to be told, especially in the manner in which they were told, that they would be losing it. They were told, "Don't worry. Here comes a pay raise that's going to cover the loss." It didn't. They were told, "Oh, don't worry. There is an interim benefit coming."

It's hard to just keep dancing around it, but things are breaking and people are breaking. This can't last forever.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Okay. Thank you.

What are you folks hearing from veterans and/or active service members with regard to the housing quality and availability, and how it's affecting their morale, as well as further retention and recruitment in general?

That's for any one of you.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mrs. Kramp-Neuman, you're out of time. I'm sure someone will work in that question again.

Madam Lalonde, you have five minutes, please.

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

I would like to say thank you to our three witnesses who are here today.

Sergeant Banks, thank you for your service.

I'm going to start my questions with Ms. Truong.

You've been recognized, and I had the great pleasure of being part of that recognition. I know that today you're here to speak about the housing and family members, and I really appreciate your insight.

You were recognized as a leader with the Canadian Armed Forces spousal community and have been awarded the Liz Hoffman Memorial Commendation for your work as part of the Borden military family resource centre board of directors. I would really like you to share with me, and with our committee, the initiative that led to this recognition.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

I became a military spouse seven years ago and started hearing of the great need our community had. I realized that I have a lot of tools in my tool box and the ability to meet some of those needs, so I took the opportunity to basically just be present. I read the relocation manual every year so that when spouses ask about moving, I can help answer those questions.

I also have had the opportunity to sit on the board of directors of the local MFRC, as well as to spearhead a community grassroots support network, which has been extremely life-giving to our community.

Those are some of the reasons why I was recognized, but I do want to amplify the fact that I am just one spouse and that there are many like me who take the opportunity to use their abilities, gifts and education to impact the defence community.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you very much for that.

I want to at least acknowledge that recognition. I was privileged to be part of that, as were some of the committee members who are here.

Thanks for this.

I would like to ask Ms. Hill a question.

There's been a lot of conversation today. You referenced the lack of research.

As a researcher, if you had the opportunity, as you do today, to make a recommendation on how our committee can help Canadian military members and their families, what would it be?

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** That's a great question.

In my opinion, to properly support members and their families, we need to know what their experiences and needs are. As it relates to educational experiences, from a Canadian perspective, we just don't have that evidence base yet. We need to know what the experiences and needs are before we can create and implement responsive services and supports.

Related to child and youth education, I think raising awareness about this population would be super beneficial. As I said, it still remains an under-represented population. Just knowing this population has unique experiences and needs would be very beneficial.

• (1700)

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Without putting words in your mouth, what I'm hearing is perhaps a few more dollars attached to a research project, so we don't have to go abroad or to the United States to better understand the lives of our Canadian military and their families, would be a recommendation.

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** Yes, absolutely. More funding for more research would be incredibly beneficial.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you for that.

Sergeant Banks, I cannot leave this time without also giving you an opportunity to share a recommendation you might certainly appreciate to see. I know you talked about the federal assets component.

Are there other thoughts that could help this committee help with housing...and their families?

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** I think putting more of the maintenance contracts, the real property maintenance and management, back in the hands of the people who are accountable to the same system we are part of would probably go a long way. Representation is the one thing the military lacks, but it is constantly in demand. That's why it's a veteran sitting at this committee, not a serving member.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Champoux. You have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Truong, I'm curious to hear your opinion on something. These days, every sector is experiencing a labour shortage. Every private company is bending over backward to keep its staff and make sure people are happy. These businesses listen to their employees, look after them, coddle them. It's as though the CAF does the exact opposite.

Do you talk about that amongst yourselves? Do people feel discouraged by the treatment they receive in the armed forces? Are they seriously contemplating a change in career, as a result?

Positive change is clearly lacking when it comes to how CAF members are treated.

What's the general state of the troops, if I can put it that way?

[*English*]

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I'm not sure I can answer that question very eloquently, as a spouse. I can from a military spouse perspective. I know spouses leave their employment on a regular basis when they are posted.

I'm not sure I answered your question. However, rephrase it a little, if I didn't.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I'm talking about CAF members from a family standpoint. I'm wondering about the discussions military families have amongst themselves, spouse to spouse, say.

Do you talk about the fact that you don't necessarily feel that you're treated well or, at least, the same way people who work for companies in the private sector are treated? I'm referring to private employers who strive to keep their staff so they don't leave.

Do you feel that, because of how they are treated, military families are seeing military life as too great a sacrifice? Are members of the military contemplating changing careers because of that?

I'm more interested in the inherent difficulties of a career in the military and the challenge around member retention.

[*English*]

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** That's a great question. I certainly do hear from spouses who are frustrated, but I think at the core of most frustrations I hear is that they just want to be cared for. That includes medical, education and housing. If those needs were met I think that individuals would feel additionally cared for and therefore probably just generally happier with their lifestyle.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Ms. Truong, just to continue on where you were going, we heard about those educational challenges that families encounter, but what about the challenges about finding child care provisions? Could you talk about that for this committee?

• (1705)

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Child care accessibility is a significant issue. It is probably one of the most common questions asked on the spouses group locally. Where can I find child care? As I'm sure many of you know, without child care, the primary parent cannot find work. It is a vicious cycle in which if child care is not accessible and affordable the, often, wife or mother cannot work. Therefore, that impacts the financial stability of the household.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** What is the situation in terms of how military families find child care? What does that look like? How available is it?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Generally it is often very difficult because of the wait-list. I don't think this is just a military issue. I think this is probably a global Canadian issue that there are just simply not enough child care spots. Some bases have larger child care centres than others. Some offer emergency child care, some do not. There can be a little bit of a disparity of care depending on what base an individual lives on.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** In terms of supports that have been announced by the federal government to provide more affordable child care, what is the provision of the public spaces versus private spaces on bases? Can you give us a breakdown of that?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Unfortunately, I can't speak to that at all. I'm not aware of what public spaces or private spaces would be available.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. Kelly, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Thanks.

Ms. Truong, I'd like to go back to your opening statement. You said, and I want to make sure that I got it clearly, that housing is the most significant stressor for military families.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** In my lived experience, I would say that is probably accurate.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Housing is deemed the single most significant stressor for military families.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I would think so. It trickles down to everything else. Without stable housing, you're going to be stressed. You may not be able to find work to keep that stable housing. It's a vicious cycle.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** It exacerbates the other stresses on family life in the forces.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I would think so, yes. It's been my experience from hearing from other spouses that it is the single most stressful aspect of being a military family.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Fixing this would be critical to fixing the crisis of morale in the forces. Is that correct?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I'm not sure that fixing housing would alleviate all of the stressors, but it would probably alleviate some significant stressors. I couldn't adequately state what would assist in raising significant morale.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Let me ask the question in a different way. Do the issues around housing affect morale in the forces?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Yes, they do.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Thank you.

They would also affect retention. In your capacity as an advocate for military spouses, are you aware of people leaving the forces because of the stresses of access and availability of housing?



**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I have heard of families that, because they're being posted to a region in which they cannot access adequate housing, have made the choice to release, yes, but I am not aware of people leaving a base because of housing. It's more of the move aspect of individuals.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** The prospect of moving to an unaffordable housing market is a trigger for members to leave the forces.

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I can't speak for everyone, but I can definitely recall a number of people I know personally who have chosen to release versus moving to another base because of unaffordable housing.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** We're pretty clear about the affordability now. I want to go back and focus on the actual condition of the housing.

I don't know how much time I have left.

**The Chair:** You have two minutes.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Good. I have some time.

Could you give us more information, if you have any more detailed information, about conditions of base housing and how they might also affect the quality of life for serving families?

• (1710)

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** I can't speak adequately to overall housing. I can speak to how individuals with medically complex children have traversed housing, and some of the barriers that they have seen. I know that is a significant stressor, but unfortunately, I cannot speak to how that is impacting families overall, CAF-wide, because I only live on one base.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** I'll ask Sergeant Banks to weigh in on the same point, if he can.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** Could you repeat the question?

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** It's about the housing conditions you've observed. I really appreciate that you've given us valuable testimony about issues beyond housing, but the report that we need to table in Parliament is about housing, so I'll ask you to keep your remarks on housing.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** Just so we're clear, there's a difference between transient housing and living quarters. For living quarters, Alyssa would probably be the better person to ask, but for transient quarters, where I spent most of my experience, because I never lived in the PMQs, yes, absolutely, these buildings are falling apart.

I can think of P-50 in Petawawa as a prime example. That's where I did my first leadership course in 2002. That building, 20 years ago, was falling apart. Utilities were falling off the side of the building, brickwork was falling, paint was peeling and there was talk of lead paint and asbestos in the building. Right now, 20 years later, that building is still in use.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fillmore, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses today.

It's a very interesting opportunity we have here. We have three witnesses, one of whom has been a serving member, one is the

spouse of a serving member, and one has parents who were serving members. You have some experience with the lifestyle.

I want to invite you to talk about the relocation aspect, if I could. It's clearly the source of hardship and difficulty, especially with some of the issues we've heard today around affordability.

I'd love to hear from all of you. Do you have reflections on whether we've reached a point where the Canadian Armed Forces should do some reflection on the whole concept of relocation, or at least make some adjustments to it? What might those be? What are the feelings or observations you have about that? I would love to hear those.

Maybe, to make it easier, we'll start with you, Chris.

**Mr. Christopher Banks:** One thing I would say when it comes to transfers is to keep in mind that, to answer an earlier question as well, there are intertrade transfers to get a preferential posting. People will leave the trade they're in because where their trade is centralized in those bases, there is not a good housing market and there are not good situations. They will change trades to get into a different job.

It's hard to make a change, because there is a practical reason for the transfers to move people across the country. You don't want to have units that are understaffed, but at the same time, it's also looked at as an experience builder. It has a lot of truth in it.

Saying that we need to change the system, we need to change the way we do it, not what we're doing.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Thank you.

Ms. Hill, happy birthday, by the way. I just outed you.

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** That's okay.

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here on my birthday.

**The Chair:** What else would you want to be doing?

**Ms. Shannon Hill:** Exactly.

I think it's a really interesting question and, to go off of Mr. Banks' comments to reiterate a point I made earlier, there are starting to be recommendations and recognition to potentially reduce the number of relocations, particularly with families who have children, adolescents or kids with special needs. I think that recognition has started to be made, so I wanted to add that piece into it.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Thank you.

Ms. Truong, do you have anything to share on that?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Yes, it's a great question. I want to echo Sergeant Banks that moving is part of military life, and I'm not sure the moving needs to stop. It's the way we're doing it.

I don't mind moving, but reducing some of the stressors that come along with moving, including housing, health care and education, are the things that probably need to be looked at.

• (1715)

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Okay, thank you.

Do I still have a couple of minutes?

**The Chair:** You have about a minute.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** I just want to say to my colleague Mrs. Kramp-Neuman that I'm sorry that the member in Halifax didn't reach out to one of the MPs who represent them. If you would like to direct them to us or share the correspondence, I would be very happy to go to work on their behalf. Thank you for that.

If there are just a few seconds left, I'll come back to the MFRCs, and this will be a quick question.

I'm not sure whose depth of experience is greater; maybe it's Ms. Truong's. Regarding the supports that the MFRCs provide around those housing transitions, can you tell us specifically what they are?

**Ms. Alyssa Truong:** Generally, an MFRC would provide a welcome package to a family. The MFRC is outside of the housing situation. Some MFRCs might provide a listing of local rentals, but I know that, specifically for Borden, to my knowledge, you would receive a welcome package when you arrived on base to help you integrate.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Thank you all for your testimony today.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, that brings us to the conclusion of our three rounds.

Witnesses, I want to thank each and every one of you for your testimony.

Before we let you go, Sergeant Banks, you used a very powerful word, corruption. Usually corruption is associated with dishonesty, fraud, bribery and things of that nature.

The testimony before this committee carries with it a privilege and an immunity, and, in the event that you have specific instances or allegations that you would wish to make with respect to any elements of corruption, I can assure you that the committee would be very interested in it.

I'm not asking you to say something at this point, but in the event that you do have an opportunity to reflect on your testimony and wish to give specific allegations of corruption, that would be helpful.

Go ahead, Mrs. Gallant.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** This committee studied quality of life in 2004, which included housing. I was looking up to see who we have—

**The Chair:** You were here in 2004?

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** I was here.

We looked at housing back then, but when I go to the parliamentary website, it doesn't have our testimony online.

Would you know if we have paper copies or does the record just stop electronically and go away after a while so we don't have access to it?

**The Chair:** The short answer is I don't know.

The clerk has assured me that she'll look into it.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** With that, thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.







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