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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON

**FINANCE AND
GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

**Virtual Meeting
Wednesday, August 28, 2024
Issue No. 142**

MIKE STARCHUK, MLA, CHAIR

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Finance and Government Services

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

MINUTES

Select Standing Committee on
Finance and Government Services

Wednesday, August 28, 2024

10:30 a.m.

Virtual Meeting

Present: Mike Starchuk, MLA (Chair); Tom Shypitka, MLA (Deputy Chair); Susie Chant, MLA; Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA; Coralee Oakes, MLA; Ravi Parmar, MLA; Nicholas Simons, MLA; Ben Stewart, MLA; Henry Yao, MLA

1. The Chair called the Committee to order at 10:34 a.m.
2. **Resolved**, that the Committee meet *in camera*. (Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA)
3. The Committee met *in camera* from 10:35 a.m. to 10:55 a.m.
4. The Committee continued in public session at 10:55 a.m.
5. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions regarding a request for 2024-25 supplemental funding:
Office of the Representative for Children and Youth:
 - Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth, Representative for Children and Youth
 - Pippa Rowcliffe, Deputy Representative
6. The Committee recessed from 11:17 a.m. to 11:18 a.m.
7. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions regarding a request for 2024-25 supplemental funding:
Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner:
 - Prabhu Rajan, Police Complaint Commissioner
 - Dave Van Swieten, Deputy, Corporate Shared Services
 - Sandra Sajko, Chief Administrative Officer
8. **Resolved**, that the Committee meet *in camera*. (Ravi Parmar, MLA)
9. The Committee met *in camera* from 11:41 a.m. to 12:31 p.m.
10. The Committee continued in public session at 12:31 p.m.
11. **Resolved**, that the Committee recommend the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth be granted access to supplementary funding up to \$380,000 for operating expenditures in 2024-25 to address costs associated with the investigation and systemic review undertaken by the Office between June 2023 and July 2024. (Coralee Oakes, MLA)

12. The Committee adjourned to the call of the chair at 12:32 p.m.

Mike Starchuk, MLA
Chair

Jennifer Arril
Clerk of Committees

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2024

The committee met at 10:34 a.m.

[M. Starchuk in the chair.]

Deliberations

M. Starchuk (Chair): Good morning, everyone. My name is Mike Starchuk. I'm the MLA for Surrey-Cloverdale and the Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, a committee of the Legislative Assembly that includes MLAs from government and opposition parties.

We're going to begin our meeting with an in-camera portion, following which we'll hear supplementary funding requests from the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth and the office of the police commissioner.

Do we need a motion to begin the meeting, then, Jenn?

J. Arril (Clerk of Committees): Just a motion to go in camera.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Okay. I'll ask for a motion to go in camera, then.

First. Seconded.

Motion approved.

The committee continued in camera from 10:35 a.m. to 10:55 a.m.

[M. Starchuk in the chair.]

M. Starchuk (Chair): Good morning. If you are ready, Dr. Charlesworth, we will now hear your supplementary funding request for your Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.

We've set aside ten minutes for the presentation, followed by ten minutes for committee questions.

If you're ready, go ahead and begin your presentation.

Supplementary Funding Requests

OFFICE OF THE REPRESENTATIVE
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

J. Charlesworth: I am ready. Thank you so much.

It's always a pleasure to come before this committee. As I know that this is the last time that I'll be before this committee in this constellation, I just wanted to express my gratitude for the support that you've shared with our organization over the last number of years and, also, for your great questions and, of course, your support for the citizens of British Columbia as MLAs. So just gratitude to all of you for the work that you do for your communities.

I am joining you today from the beautiful lands of the W̱SÁNEĆ people — the W̱JOLELP, W̱SIKEM, BO̱KE-ĆEN and STÁUTW Nations — that are in these beautiful territories.

Joining me today is Pippa Rowcliffe, who is the deputy representative responsible for corporate services. Our CFO is off right now, so Pippa will be all things numbers today.

The last time we met, I came before you to request contingency funding to support an investigation and systemic review. The investigation was called for by citizens across British Columbia and by our Indigenous and other partners. We also undertook a systemic review which was very strongly encouraged by our First Nations partners, leadership committee and leadership council, the Our Children Our Way Society and the Indigenous child and family service organizations.

At that time, I outlined what I believed the scope of the work would be and its significance as the largest report of its kind released by this office since our inception. I'm coming before you now following the release of that report.

We did meet our deadlines. We released *Don't Look Away* on July 16, and we released a report a week later called *No Time to Wait* that was very specific to MCFD. *Don't Look Away* actually addressed a cross-government approach to child well-being.

I wanted to let you know that when we released *Don't Look Away*, we were joined by close to 3,000 people. There were 2,800 folks who joined us online. It was a remarkable undertaking. There were about 150 people with us in person in Vancouver.

One of the beautiful things is we brought the whole system into the room. We had health authorities. We had Indigenous leaders. We had the ministry folks across nine different ministries. It was really an opportunity for us to make a stand and identify the collective responsibilities that we have for child well-being.

During that time, not only did we share the unimaginable heartbreak that was experienced by the little boy who we named Colby in this report, but we laid out a North Star and a pathway forward for fundamental transformation. We felt that it was really important to do it within the timeline that we had set aside, because we wanted to be helpful to an incoming government.

The beautiful thing is.... I'm very pleased to say that all recommendations were unequivocally accepted by government, and we received strong support from both sides of the House. So thank you for that.

I am very proud of this work and very proud of the team. I want to say, on the public record, just how incredible the RCY team was to pull this off. Something that in other jurisdictions has taken three years we did in ten months. Immense gratitude for all of the folks who stepped in, all of our staff, the many researchers that joined us and our circle of advisers as well.

[11:00 a.m.]

Just to get on to the numbers now, the committee.... I'm grateful for the belief that this committee had in our work when we started. At that time, we requested and received from you contingency funding of \$248,000 for the last fiscal year to support the systemic review and \$214,000 for this fiscal year.

What was interesting is.... Of course, knowing that we had that money, that contingency money, did put wind in our sails and ensured that we felt confident embarking on a very ambitious approach to doing this work.

What we had hoped was that a significant amount of work would have been done in last fiscal year. But as you may appreciate, there was a lot of sensitivity — three Indigenous communities, one of which was pursuing jurisdiction. We had to do a lot of work on trust-building before we rolled up the sleeves and did a lot of the research. Consequently, we didn't spend the money that we were allocated in contingency last fiscal year. The costs really came over in this fiscal year.

We actually just wanted to let you know that we didn't access the contingency funding. We also gave the treasury back \$369,000 last year. If we'd had the opportunity to carry over, of course, we wouldn't be coming before you. Nonetheless, here we are.

We are asking for \$380,000 in contingency funds. This is in addition to the pre-approved \$100,000 contingency for the unexpected or unforeseen increase in the legislative officer's salary. Of that \$380,000, we are talking about \$320,000 that will help us address the increased costs this fiscal year for the systemic review and \$60,000 for two critically important streams of work related to *Don't Look Away* and the implementation of that over the next six months.

We feel that's really important. There is tremendous momentum. I'm pleased to say that the day after the release, we had a wonderful meeting with the senior leadership in government to talk about the initial steps, and we've had meetings every two weeks since then to keep the work going forward.

That's why we're here before you today: to ask for that \$380,000 in contingencies. Of course, if we don't need it, we won't use it, but it will help us ensure that we can balance our budget. Right now we are projecting a deficit of \$357,000.

That's the ask. Basically, to explain why.... I've said that a lot of costs that we expected to incur last year we didn't. So we're bringing it forward. Also, the scope of this project expanded. You don't really know, when you begin these things, exactly all the complexity. We found tremendous complexity.

We actually commissioned ten additional comprehensive reviews of other deaths or injuries of children in order to make sure, when we were doing the systemic findings, we actually knew that we weren't dealing with outliers. We

were dealing with common patterns. We had to bring in some additional staff and expertise to do that.

We also did extensive engagement. We hadn't anticipated doing that. We did, for example, 38 online engagement sessions. We surveyed over 1,000 people. We reviewed 5,000 pieces of documentary evidence. It was massive. I'm pleased to say that we had very, very strong participation across this province from family members, from service providers, from ministry staff, from other government staff.

I do feel like we bit off a lot, more than we even knew we would, but we were able to pull that all off. Of course, that cost us some money.

You might be curious as to what would happen if we tried to work within the existing budget. What would the consequences be?

Basically, there are a couple of things. The good news is our staffing is very stable. We actually can't count on staffing slippage, like we sometimes are able to do, of not filling positions when they become vacant. Our staff are very stable now, unprecedented for the last five or six years, which is wonderful for us. Also, our in-box assignments and reportables have increased 25 percent over the year.

All this to say staffing is not an option for us — to cut those kinds of services without basically upsetting the balance that we've achieved and, also, our ability to meet our statutory requirements.

[11:05 a.m.]

We would be having to look at stopping or delaying other work that's underway, which includes follow-up work that we're doing on children who are lost, fleeing or missing from care; work that we're doing on behalf of and in support of children with extremely complex needs — girls, in that case; work that we're doing on children with disabilities, work that we're doing on young people who are deeply impacted by the toxic drug crisis — we're actually doing that in partnership with the Wosk Centre for Dialogue; and of course, the capacity that we have to follow up on *No Time to Wait* and *Don't Look Away*.

All this to say that we're hoping you will be favourable to our request. We appreciate the faith that you've put in us before and hope that you will see the value of contributing to this so that we can carry on the work on the systemic review and on the many other things we feel are important for the well-being of children and youth.

I will stop there — I see that I've run out of time — and send it over to you, Chair, for any questions.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Thank you, Dr. Charlesworth. You actually did finish before the zeros came up. So not only did you return some funds back to the Legislature; you actually returned a few seconds back to us.

Now it's time for questions.

S. Chant: Hi. How are you?

J. Charlesworth: Hi, Susie.

S. Chant: Nice to see you.

Because my numbers brain is a little weird, you said that things are up 25 percent. Do you have the numbers to work with that so that I know...? Was that 125 people in 100 or 2.5 in ten or...?

J. Charlesworth: Ah yes. Thank you very much.

Pippa is probably looking right now at the stats that we got. Basically, we are dealing with about 600 reportable circumstances a month, about half of which meet the threshold for what we call in-mandate or critical injuries and deaths. So that gives you a sense. We've been up 25 percent in.... That's 5,000 a year.

We're getting 5,000. I think it was 5,200 this last year. That's an increase of 25 percent year over year.

R. Leonard: Hello. Thank you for your presentation. It's good to see you.

I'm really pleased to hear that there was lots of cooperation in getting this report out. It's obviously one of the things that makes a ten-month turnaround happen. And really pleased to hear how much engagement there was — that you had built that kind of trust to make things move along. Even though things didn't happen the year before, you built the case to make it a robust report. That's really a tribute to you and your team. So thank you for that.

On the same point that Susie was asking about — this 25 percent increase. Now, I know that a lot of work has been done in other sectors, like getting women to report domestic violence. Is that part of why we're seeing more of these reportables, or is there an increase happening in our society?

J. Charlesworth: Great question. I think it's actually a both/and, Ronna-Rae.

Certainly, we are seeing.... The ministry has really improved their reporting. That's one thing. That's a very good outcome — that they are actually seeing the necessity and the importance of doing the reporting. So we know that's an increase there.

We also are seeing more challenges associated with things like the toxic drug supply. That is a huge issue, and it's affecting our children in two significant ways. One directly, in terms of young people experiencing overdose events.

[11:10 a.m.]

The other thing is.... Call it indirect. Their parents are dying. The significant people in their lives, their caregivers, are dying. We track what's called an emotional harm injury, when children are losing their parents, their significant adults. So that adds to it.

Sadly, we are also seeing an increase in the number of injuries that children are experiencing while they're in

group care or foster care, and that is getting reported as well.

I think there are a few things. One is the complexity. As you know, the number of children in care has gone down, which is a good thing in the grand scheme of things. But what that has meant is that the children who are in care typically have very extreme and complex needs, and we don't have a workforce, in many cases, that can meet the needs of the children. So we do see some egregious conduct. We're tracking those. So that's certainly an increase as well.

And level of violence. We identify it in *Don't Look Away*, what we call five collective responsibilities. It's an all-in effort. One of them, the very first one, was addressing the level of violence that we're seeing in our communities and in our families. So I think it's a combination of things that's driving that up.

I do think, overall, there is an increase in the number of concerning situations that children are experiencing — mental health, of course, post-COVID.

Does that answer your question, Ronna-Rae?

R. Leonard: Thank you very much. Yes, very good. I appreciate that.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Coralee, I saw your hand up there a while ago.

C. Oakes: It was up, and then it was down, because I had questions, and then you answered it very well.

I just want to acknowledge all of the work that your team is doing. I know it's very difficult work. Please know how much it's appreciated on behalf of us legislators.

Maybe just a question because there has been significant work and partnership. One of the challenges, I think, that still faces the sector is a comprehensive gathering of the resources that are available. I'm wondering, throughout this process, if there has been some thought or some work that has been done to do that comprehensive gathering of resources to support the sector.

J. Charlesworth: Can I ask a clarifying question, Coralee? When you say comprehensive resources or gathering of the resources, are you meaning things like human resources and training and education things to support the sector, or other things?

C. Oakes: I think it's all of those.

I think the first thing is, especially coming from rural remote communities: where are the resources? I know we're so grateful to have the office in Prince George, but we still feel that as we have more complex cases and files that you've identified.... I wonder if, through that process, you're also identifying perhaps the gaps that we have. It's one thing to identify that this is the problem. Here are the gaps of services that we have in communities.

I guess the second element, and you acknowledged that, is training, because it's one thing to say these are the gaps, but this is the training gap that we have, and that's why there's that disconnect of even.... Everyone, I feel, is in such a stressful situation in that we're so short-staffed, it feels like, and training is a big part of that in our communities, but we can't actually get to those outcomes unless we identify what the problem is.

J. Charlesworth: Yeah, beautiful questions. Two things. One is that in *Don't Look Away*, we identified what we called our collective responsibilities, which really is about trying to mobilize a more cohesive approach to the delivery of child well-being services — not just child protection, well-being.

As you know well, if we can back up the bus, if we can provide supports to families, to kin-carers, to children in those early years and provide what we call early help when the first signs of problems are arising, then we can change that trajectory so that we aren't needing those very high-cost, difficult-to-acquire resources later on down the way.

That's one thing. That is part and parcel of the transition and transformation planning that we're doing right now.

And you're absolutely right. I feel very committed to not just identifying the problems but to being part of the solution, because we are part of the system as well. So our whole approach to this has been completely different.

To Ronna-Rae's comment earlier — the level of engagement, participation — we are so fortunate that we have been able to work so well with all of the public bodies involved in this, and I have no doubt that it will continue.

[11:15 a.m.]

Absolutely, we need to do more around the mobilizing and identifying the gaps. I think we know a lot of the gaps. It's a matter of: now how do we fill them?

That was one of the reasons we did the second report, *No Time To Wait*. It was very focused on MCFD's work-force capacity, and we've identified a number of short-term, do-now kinds of actions, because if we don't have the resources, then we can't do all of the other things that are necessary. So that has also been accepted, and government is working on that.

You're working in rural remote areas where we've got a significant number of offices, especially in rural remote but not just in rural remote anymore, where there's less than 50 percent capacity. You can't do the proactive work without that capacity. So I think we're on the right track, but it's going to require us to continue going forward and working together in order to address it.

We also don't have people that want to enter into our field. That's a problem. We're not getting the seats filled in the current post-secondary. So one of the things I want to do is spend time saying this is an amazing area of career. We also have to make it safe and supportive, provide the right training, do all of the things in order for people to love what they get to do for young people.

There are a lot of things we've got to do, but I completely agree with your direction you're heading in.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Okay. I'm not seeing any other questions that are there.

Dr. Charlesworth, thank you very much for your presentation today and for your committed enthusiasm over files that are very onerous. I can only imagine how it takes a toll on a person's body and brain and mental well-being at the end of the day, but the work that you do is very important to the people of British Columbia.

On that note, we will let you go, and thank you very much for what we've heard today.

I guess we'll take a quick break to reset the table and get the Police Complaint Commissioner up.

Thank you very much, Dr. Charlesworth.

J. Charlesworth: Thank you very much.
Be well, everyone. Take care.

The committee recessed from 11:17 a.m. to 11:18 a.m.

[M. Starchuk in the chair.]

M. Starchuk (Chair): Good morning, Prabhu and Dave. Welcome to the committee again and, in all likelihood, for the last time for quite some time.

We're now ready to hear your supplementary funding request from your office, which is the Police Complaint Commissioner. We've set aside ten minutes for the presentation, followed by ten minutes for committee questions.

Prabhu, if you are ready right now, you can go ahead and proceed with your presentation.

OFFICE OF THE POLICE COMPLAINT COMMISSIONER

P. Rajan: Good morning, Chair and Deputy Chair and members of the committee. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak with you during what must be an unconventional time, weeks before the writ drops.

I would first like to acknowledge that the work of the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner takes place across unique and diverse traditional Indigenous territories, and we respect the many territorial keepers of this place we now call British Columbia.

I thank the ɫəkʷəŋən people, also known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations communities, past, present and future for their stewardship, care and leadership on the land on which our main office is located.

Our work also extends across different homelands of Indigenous peoples. On behalf of myself and all our staff, I express extreme gratitude for being able to live and work on this beautiful land.

I'm fortunate to have here with me Sandra Sajko, the OPCC's chief administrative officer, and Dave Van Swieten with corporate shared services. I expect to lean on them to assist with any technical questions you might have.

[11:20 a.m.]

You should have before you our supplementary budget request submission and spreadsheet. I'll begin.

I'm respectfully requesting the following: (1) an additional \$595,000 in capital funding for fiscal year 2024-2025 in respect of unanticipated tenant improvement costs for our intended Lower Mainland office and (2) an increase of \$169,000 in operating funding for each of fiscal years 2025-26 and '26-27 for this office.

These amounts represent the maximum amount of expenditures expected for this initiative to be completed. It is possible that the actual costs will be lower, and if they are, we would return any unused funds.

As set out in our written submission, this supplemental funding request is required for us to continue plans to secure a Lower Mainland office presence. I acknowledge my appearance before you in April for additional funds for this very office space, which you granted.

I certainly did not want to have to appear before you once more to ask you for supplementary funding for this office. Unfortunately, the cost estimates provided by the real property division, Ministry of Citizens' Services, set out in our April 2024 submission did not reflect current real estate market conditions. As a result of our public procurement process, a process that does remain open, it has become clear that rent and construction costs for tenant improvements will significantly exceed the amount of funding previously requested and approved.

One of our critical requirements is to have convenient access to a SkyTrain route to ensure accessibility for people who use our services. This need has added to the anticipated cost of any potential lease space. I'm making this request because a Lower Mainland office is in the best interests of the public we serve and of significant benefit to our Lower Mainland staff. We do not have a physical presence in the Lower Mainland today, even though most municipal police services are in that area.

A new office would make us much more accessible to the public. We've also planned a front-counter intake service and interview space. The office would also serve as home to our new systemic investigation and observer programs, which I expect will largely involve local police departments.

I anticipate that this office would enhance our outreach capacity and allow us to create better connections with the local community. We currently have nine OPCC staff in the Lower Mainland, all of whom work entirely from home. As we speak, we are in the process of hiring more staff, and we have several other competitions anticipated this fiscal year. This will only add to our Lower Mainland complement.

In my view, the ability to engage with colleagues and

management in person is critical for staff development and positive workplace culture. The Lower Mainland also has a much larger labour market compared to Vancouver Island, and a new office will support our future recruitment and retention efforts for a diverse and inclusive workplace that is representative of the communities we serve.

RPD has now updated its cost estimates based on a range of responses we have received through the procurement process. I would note that our request for fiscal '24-25 is only for additional capital funds. We will manage any additional operational costs for this particular fiscal year within our existing budget. Our request for fiscals '25-26 and '26-27 is for operational costs only, which mostly consist of rental costs.

I would not be before you today if this matter were not rather urgent. Without the funding assurances we are seeking, RPD will be unable to complete the evaluation process or engage in lease negotiations. We would be unable to commit to a lease if we do not have funding certainty. As we have not yet signed a lease for a specific location, and given that estimating project timelines is difficult, we have assumed that any tenant improvements will be completed this fiscal year.

[11:25 a.m.]

I would note that if our request is granted, it is possible that we would have to transfer capital funding to next fiscal year if we cannot complete tenant improvements by March 31, 2025, depending on the extent of renovations. This, however, would not increase the total amount of the funding envelope for this office.

In terms of efficiencies, we have not included any costs associated with space for in-person adjudicated matters. We did not view such costs as justifiable, especially in light of the additional costs I've discussed just now. We will continue to rent space for adjudications as required, as well as continuing space-sharing arrangements.

In sum, if this funding request is not approved, we would not be able to sign a lease under our present procurement process, and we would have to abandon our current plans for a Lower Mainland presence. Therefore, I respectfully ask that you grant our request. Should the committee support our request, I will return with an update on the status of this project at the next opportunity.

In closing, I'm thankful for the committee's time and attention. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have. If I can't properly answer a question, I'm sure Ms. Sajko or Mr. Van Swieten will be able to.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Thank you very much for your presentation, Prabhu.

Are there any questions from the committee that's in front of us right now?

R. Leonard: Thank you very much for your presentation and for the stick-to-it-iveness to try and secure a location.

You mentioned that the majority of the forces that you are looking after are in the Lower Mainland. I know this was an issue that was raised early in the days before things kind of exploded over in the Lower Mainland. I guess my question is: what's the split? Is there a possibility that it would be prudent to close down Victoria and be solely in Vancouver?

P. Rajan: Thank you very much for your question. In terms of the split, four services are on Vancouver Island; two, I believe, are beyond the Lower Mainland area, which would then leave, doing math correctly, nine services in the Lower Mainland. Of course, I'm not sure of the exact percentage, but I would say a large majority of the complaints and activity that we have flow from those nine Lower Mainland spaces.

I don't believe it's either-or. With all due respect, I think our presence is required both on the Island, which has been the head office.... It has many benefits, and it has been asked for, for a very long time. In this day and age, I do think it's important to remain connected with community. As I mentioned, we have four services here.

I can imagine that the Lower Mainland space may grow, depending on whether government sees fit to give us further authorities. For now, I think it's important to maintain both.

S. Chant: In your efforts to find a site, have you looked anywhere other than Surrey?

P. Rajan: I cannot get too specific, because it is an open process, but I can tell you that we've looked at Surrey, and we've looked at Vancouver. In terms of the spaces that met our requirements, the bulk of the best options were in that corridor. We've narrowed it down, but I don't want to get into any more specifics. Certainly, Surrey was one of the options.

B. Stewart: Thanks very much, Prabhu. Just a couple of questions.

This issue about the Surrey police service has obviously been a topic in the Legislature for quite a few years. There's a transition going on now, with the RCMP not being overseen by your office. I guess the question really is: when they're at full capacity, will this office have the space for the additional services that you have to provide?

[11:30 a.m.]

Secondly, the existing nine staff that you mentioned are in the Lower Mainland. I guess the question is.... When you create an office and you're talking about culture and things like that, and they've been accustomed to working from home, I'm just kind of wondering: what type of buy-in do you have from those nine?

P. Rajan: Thank you very much for that question. Let me just begin by saying that we very much engaged staff

in this process. We felt it's not something that's just done behind closed doors with management. It was very much important to us to engage and consult with staff, which we did. They were quite engaged. They provided us with some elements of a workspace that they would like.

To be fair, I can tell you.... It quite impressed me that for the staff we consulted, their concern was the public we serve: "How can we best serve the people who need our services?" I was quite gratified in hearing that that was their priority — not their own, necessarily, personal needs. That being said, it will be a transition. We've had an ongoing dialogue with them, and I will have an ongoing dialogue as we move forward.

It's not easy, because they've been working from home. I've articulated pretty well since I began that I do see tremendous benefit in being able to work in person and work with them. Obviously, it'll be a hybrid model. That, maybe, segues into your other question about the Surrey expansion. Certainly, we have taken into consideration the positions we have approval for, to add to deal with the Surrey expansion.

As you know, we don't actually do the investigations. We oversee them. In this day and age, being able to connect on the investigations themselves, they can be done from Victoria as well. That's what we're doing right now.

Really, at least, our focus at this time is our expansion into doing other new work, actual systemic investigations, observer program, outreach. I've been engaged in a fair bit of outreach right now — I'm travelling back and forth a fair bit — with community groups, Indigenous leadership in communities and, also, policing organizations.

I think it's really important. I'm doing these initial meetings. It's pretty important that our office maintain that community connection. Therefore, it would be helpful to have people on the ground in the Lower Mainland, instead of always flying in from Vancouver Island, to maintain that connection.

That's where I think the office really serves a purpose — and, of course, to have direct contact with the public, if they were to come to our office and wish to seek advice or to file a complaint.

H. Yao: Thank you so much.

I guess I'm a bit more curious, actually. Based on your previous response, it sounded like, according to you, the staff are able to handle.... You're not really doing the investigation. You're overseeing the investigation. That's what your staff are doing. So the location itself is really meant for outreach purposes and community engagement.

Are you saying all your nine staff in the Lower Mainland are outreach staff? They are all there to do community engagement? Or are there people who are there to oversee investigations? If they are all outreach, I guess it makes more sense. But then why do they need to be in the SkyTrain station when your job is to engage them by going outwards, not having people, probably, come towards you?

I may be confused. Why does it have to be a SkyTrain station location now? Your staff should be the ones driving around, going to different communities to make sure we have proper engagement, assuming that's what the nine staff are assigned to do.

My apologies. If you don't mind me saying, it may be just my lack of awareness of the situation.

P. Rajan: No, I welcome any and all questions, MLA Yao.

Let me just start. The purpose of the office would, of course, include outreach and that type of engagement. As I mentioned, we have a systemic program, which is a brand-new function. It is, in my view, a critical function which will largely engage the Lower Mainland police departments, I would think. We will actually have interview authority. We will have to meet with people directly. We'll have space in this office to interview people and to meet with people.

[11:35 a.m.]

As you all know, I'm new to the province, but let me, as an aside, say that I'm loving it here. Thank you, B.C.

I've been on the SkyTrain, and I would hope that our staff is not just driving around. I'm hopeful that our staff is using the SkyTrain. It's obviously about us going outward, but it's also about people coming to us. If we are in the most accessible place possible, where we have a sense of our numbers.... Let's say that if Surrey is growing and people wish to access us, well, they would access, hopefully, a SkyTrain to potentially go to Vancouver and maybe be within walking distance of those within Vancouver.

We obviously can't be fully accessible to everybody in the Lower Mainland, but we're trying to maximize that potential. While our current Lower Mainland staff are, largely, investigative analysts, we're building out, because we have to build a systemic program. We have to build more of the outreach program. If we're going to have some expansion, we will have people from the Lower Mainland working there.

We'll want some management presence there, likely a director, who can supervise staff. We've been thinking very deeply about how we can potentially create a space in which we're able to expand more broadly. That's the intent, and we'll have a variety of positions, I expect, in the Lower Mainland.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Are there any other comments or questions?

With regard to your last answer, Prabhu, have you taken a look at how, for the most part, interconnected SkyTrain is with the various municipal departments that are around there?

I know the Port Moody side of things. I know Delta is very close — and New Westminster, Vancouver, Surrey, other jurisdictions. Do you know what percentage of cov-

erage would be there for people in your office to get to a centrally located thing for the general public and/or staff?

P. Rajan: Certainly, that was a strong part of our analysis.

I don't know if Sandra has any further details on the interconnectivity with possible options and the various police departments. Not every police department is on a SkyTrain, but maybe it's close to a SkyTrain.

Sandra, do you have any additional information you might be able to provide?

S. Sajko: Sure. I can add to that, Commissioner.

I think currently Abbotsford police department, Nelson police department, obviously, and West Vancouver wouldn't necessarily be right on a SkyTrain route, but there are certainly other options from the Fraser Valley.

For Abbotsford, there's the West Coast Express, and then of course there's getting to the SeaBus on the other side of the bridge there for West Vancouver. Other than Nelson, I think that there's ability to get to that SkyTrain route.

P. Rajan: I would just add Stl'atl'imx. That's another service that wouldn't be on SkyTrain.

M. Starchuk (Chair): No, that just makes a ton of sense as to what your location is because of the people that you'll be dealing with. If you're going to have a storefront there and somebody has a complaint about something — that may or may not be there, for your educational component — they can get there.

S. Chant: This may be a little bit off topic, and I apologize if it is. Do you have oversight of the tribal police as well?

P. Rajan: Yeah, just Stl'atl'imx. That's right; we do.

S. Chant: Just Stl'atl'imx. We have a tribal police group on the North Shore as well, that is a combo of West Van and North Van RCMP, as well as, I think, a couple of their own folks. Do you have oversight with that group?

P. Rajan: Thank you for the question, MLA Chant. I do believe we may have even discussed this the last time I was before you.

No, we don't have jurisdiction over that particular service — only one, Stl'atl'imx. As you know, we don't have any jurisdiction over RCMP. Maybe it's that mixture that has caused a lack of jurisdiction.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Not seeing any other comments or questions, Prabhu, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

[11:40 a.m.]

Just a note, for those of us that are following the things that are going on, you're getting your trial by fire. I believe it would be an appropriate term that is out there. It is very unique, in the sense of some of the things that have come forward, and there's no shying away, from yourself in your office, to the bottom of the complaint. So I want to just....

For the brief period of time that you've been here as the Police Complaint Commissioner, I think you've got a good taste of what British Columbia has to offer in a very, very short length of time.

P. Rajan: I wouldn't have it any other way.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Having said all of that, thank you very much for your presentation. We will take a short break to reset the room.

P. Rajan: Thank you, everyone. I wish you well.

M. Starchuk (Chair): There we go.
Motion to go in camera. Seconded.

Motion approved.

The committee continued in camera from 11:41 a.m. to 12:31 p.m.

[M. Starchuk in the chair.]

S. Chant: I think Ronna-Rae was very excited to move the motion.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Okay. We are now in public for this.

Ronna-Rae, you have your hand up and are ready to move a motion.

R. Leonard: I'm afraid I can't because I can't get at it.

Votes on Supplementary Funding

OFFICE OF THE REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

C. Oakes: I move:

[That the Committee recommend the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth be granted access to supplementary funding up to \$380,000 for operating expenditures in 2024-25 to address costs associated with the investigation and systemic review undertaken by the Office between June 2023 and July 2024.]

R. Leonard: Second.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Coralee, thank you for that motion.

Any debate?

Motion approved.

M. Starchuk (Chair): I believe, then, that ends all the business that is here for the committee.

A motion to adjourn.

N. Simons: So moved.

Motion approved.

The committee adjourned at 12:32 p.m.

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