

**Standing Committee on Oversight
of Government Operations
and Public Accounts
Televised Hearing on the 2023-2024
Annual Report of the Representative
for Children and Youth
April 29, 2025**

Members Present:

George Hickes, Chair
Bobby Anavilok
Janet Brewster
Mary Killiktee
Adam Arreak Lightstone
Karen Nutarak
Joanna Quassa
Craig Simailak

Staff Members:

Siobhan Moss
Kooyoo Nooshoota

Interpreters:

Andrew Dially
Attima Hadlari
Mary Nashook
James Panioyak
Jacopoosie Peter
Blandina Tulugarjuk

Witnesses:

Jane Bates, Representative for Children and Youth
Charlotte Borg, Director of Student Achievement, Department of Education
Christine Ellsworth, Deputy Minister, Department of Justice
Jonathan Ellsworth, Deputy Minister, Department of Family Services
Michael Foote, Chief Coroner, Office of the Coroner
Anna Fowler, Deputy Minister, Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs
Rebecca Hainnu, Deputy Minister, Department of Education

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We are working to ensure accurate and up-to-date statistics are available on the Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit website and will continue increasing the data available.

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In addition to supporting access to Nunavut-specific data collected by other agencies, we are also working to complete the 2025 Food Price Survey. We intend to have the final report completed in Winter 2026.

Mr. Chairman, as much progress as has been made, it may not be reasonable to expect statistics to be available on the timeline required for them to be included in the representative's annual report. Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit is the central statistical agency for the GN, but it is not always the primary source for all Nunavut-related data. This means we are subject to the release timelines of other bodies for tabulation and availability of data.

Mr. Chairman, Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit partners with Statistics Canada to access the data that is collected about the territory through a vast network of resources, and most territorial data is received as a result of our data sharing agreement with Statistics Canada. We make every effort to ensure that data is current and available, but standard collection and tabulation processes mean that some data is lagged by a few months, up to a year.

Mr. Chairman, I understand that many of the issues facing children and youth in Nunavut require collaboration and coordination. I trust that my colleagues here today are committed to improving that collaboration in the best interest of our children and youth and each one of them has a leadership role to play in improving outcomes for young Nunavummiut.

Mr. Chairman, I also understand that when the committee identifies the need for a government-wide action plan to address child sexual abuse and sexual violence in Nunavut that there is an expectation that Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs will lead that work.

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to proceed with that particular, with elders, and creating our elder advisor committee. We're hoping that in September when we go to the principals conference that we are going to start those initial, rolling that out and starting that nomination process. We also intend to put out nominations to members, the MLAs for each constituency, and asking them for nominations for elders as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for clarifying this, (interpretation ends) but I'm wondering, once you have these elder advisors, how often do you plan to meet with them over like in a year? *Qujannamiik.*

Chairman: Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the member for the question. Currently the plan would be that we at a minimum would meet with the elders every three months, but in addition to that they would be doing reviews of when we complete a review we would be consulting them, so on individual advocacy cases.

Additionally when we do systemic reviews we would also be doing reviews not with them, but they would be reviewing the reports and giving us feedback on did we meet standards, and giving us advice about what other things that we should be looking at. So although we plan to formally meet with the elders, like I said every three to four months, there will be a lot more additional work, meeting with them kind of as cases arise and as we're doing reviews. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Ouassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for clarifying that. It

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will probably be more clear now with regard to how we can use Inuit culture in this area. Inuit have a lot of knowledge of past ways and culture and in respect they long for many of them. And I urge you further that elders be established as soon as possible.

(interpretation ends) On another topic, your office's submission on page 39 of your 2023-2024 annual report is to "establish our office as the conscious of child and youth serving Government of Nunavut departments."

Can you describe what you mean by "conscience" in this context. (interpretation)
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the member for the question. In this context, the meaning of "conscience" for us is accountability. We are a watchdog service, and again, it's the conscience of, are we doing the right thing for young people, acting in the best interests of young people, and are our departments acting in the best interests of young people. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(interpretation ends) Your annual report states on page 39 that "the Representative for Children and Youth office does not replace service providers."

How often is your office contacted by an individual who expects or hopes to receive services from you that they have not received from a government department? (interpretation)
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Bates.

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Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the member for the question. That's difficult. We don't keep track necessarily of when a young, I can't give you specific statistical information on the reason for every single case that comes to our attention if it's not receiving services. The point is well taken. I think that might be useful information to be collecting.

When a case is referred to our office, we examine it to see if it's about not receiving services, and if the services that they are receiving are meeting their needs, and if the department is acting in the best interests of that particular child, youth, or family. I trust that answers the question. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Just for clarification, could an individual approach you if they need services or do you get them only when you have a referral from another department? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the question. Although a number of our referrals come directly from departments, we also receive referrals directly from a parent; not as many from young people, but certainly we do receive referrals from the general public as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for explaining that.

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(interpretation ends) I would like to ask any of the departments, Department of Education or Family Services or Health or Justice a similar question. What specific challenges do service providers in your department face in addressing concerns raised with respect to cases where children, youth, and their families feel they are not receiving the services they need?

(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. I'll go to Family Services to start with. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question. We have several avenues where folks complain about the level of services that they're receiving. Some of them are with respect to the speed with which we respond to income assistance applications, some of them are relative to colleagues not responding quickly enough to basic inquiries. Some of them are around application processes for adult learning and training supports. There are various. We get various levels of complaint. This is one of the reasons, Mr. Chair, that we began the Client Relations function in the department.

And if I can just step back a second, Mr. Chair, we also get a number of complaints that come in through the Hon. Minister Nakasuk's office that we address as the executive as well.

But moving forward, as we mentioned, the Client Relations office will prove an invaluable sort of division to ensure that people have an avenue to file complaints with the Department of Family Services to ensure that they are equally and meaningfully addressed in a timely way.

I could go on for a while about the nature of complaints that we do get. They are various, but I would say that every complaint that we receive, particularly at the executive level is addressed as quickly as meaningfully as we

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I would like to go back to the Representative for Children and Youth. Your mandate includes a number of duties that are outlined in the legislation. On page 40 you note that your mandate does not allow you to work on complaints involving businesses or private organizations, for example, if a young person does not receive proper payment from their employer. Is it your view that your mandate should be amended to allow you to work on such issues? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I thank you for the question. To be honest, I've never considered that as a possibility. When we put forward amendments to the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* it was not an amendment that we had considered or put forward. That's not to say that it's not something that perhaps should be considered. I do know that the language commissioner covers off private businesses as well, but again, I would have to give some thought to the logistics and how we would be able to operate. Because as we set out now, and the way the mandate reads inside the act, it's related to government services. So I would think that if we made an amendment to allow for that, there would have to be quite a bit of potentially review of how the act is set out now, just to make sure that it is consistent to allow us to do that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Within the Nunavut government, maybe it would be better if this was a part of your mandate so that all youth can be handled the same way by different departments and for businesses. There has to be a proper thing that they follow to pay young people, and I think some young people don't get paid what's due to

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them. I believe that you need to review this and make amendments. But let me move on.

(interpretation ends) Pages 41-42 of your 2023-2024 annual report includes a number of proposed amendments to the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*. Section 4(1)(b) has been brought into force. Can you elaborate further on the amendments you are proposing with respect to section 7(1), section 3, and section 19. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the member for the question. So with respect to on page 41, one of the amendments was to change the term of office to five years to make it indefinite five-year reappointments. Currently as it stands in now the current term of the Representative for Children and Youth is one five-year term, which can be renewed for a second five-year term. Basically the other independent officers, such as the privacy commissioner, the integrity commissioner and the official languages commissioner, they have five-year terms with additional terms indefinitely, as opposed to only two five-year terms back to back. The reason that again that that was a proposed amendment was to make it consistent with the other independent officers that currently operate inside Nunavut.

I think the other question was section 19. Again, this is related to the reporting of critical injury and deaths. Currently as it stands, what has been in existence since 2015 is the reporting. The Director of Child and Family Services is required to report all critical injuries and deaths of young people, and the coroner is also required to report deaths to the Representative for Children and Youth office.

We received some feedback, in terms of why not all the departments. Of course there are

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some challenges in there, particularly with the Department of Health, because obviously they deal with a lot of injuries and those types, so we would have to be looking at how we refine the reporting. But that was the idea of revising that, was to make it so that it was a requirement for all departments to report critical injuries and deaths to the representative and then we would in turn log those into the database. So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for explaining that, too.

(interpretation ends) My question now is towards Government of Nunavut departments. With respect to your department's working relationship with the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth, what steps have been taken in the past year to improve communication and collaboration between your departmental staff and the representative's office when addressing issues relating to the delivery of service to children and youth? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman (Mr. Lightstone): Thank you, Ms. Quassa. This question was sort of asked yesterday, but if there's any representative from the government that would like to respond. Yes, Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the last couple of years, well, when I first started as deputy minister, Mr. Chair, it was obviously there was a tenuous relationship between the Department of Family Services and the Representative for Children and Youth. I met early on in my tenure with Ms. Bates to identify ways to improve that relationship, and we spoke about many things, the timeliness of our responses, the behaviour of our staff in

Δ⁶/Δ⁷C⁶ (δ⁶δ⁷C⁶): δ⁶δ⁷C⁶. Γ³ < Δ⁶.

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responding to the representative, among other things. Mr. Chair, it was at that point in meeting with my colleagues who are here, we defined a path of basically instructing staff to be more responsive, to be kind and considerate and compassionate when dealing with the representative's office.

We meet as regularly as we can. We have a proactive meeting, actually, scheduled for the week after this, Mr. Chair, though I would admit it takes time to change relationships, given some of the historical that existed within the framework of the department and perhaps in the representative's office as well. Those are just some of the steps we have taken to improve the relationship. We take it very seriously to ensure that we respond within the prescribed timelines that the representative sets for us in submitting information and disclosure requests. When we cannot meet the prescribed timeline we request respectfully for an extension, and Ms. Bates kindly grants those extensions, recognizing that there are a lot of competing priorities within our department as it pertains to providing information to Ms. Bates, the operations generally of the Department of Family Services, and the implementation of the strategic plan. There are a lot of priorities being balanced, but we do make it a top priority, Mr. Chair, to ensure that we are working collaboratively with the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. Back to you, Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I would like to go on to another topic and to the Representative for Children and Youth. Following your last appearance to discuss your annual reports, this committee recommended that government departments work more closely with your office to address your requests for data and

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information. While that recommendation was directed to the government, you also responded to the committee's recommendation with a list of additional information you would like to be provided with each response to your request for data.

Can you clarify why you need so much additional information, including such detail as the explanation of how an average is calculated. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the member for the question. In terms of the reason why we request specific detail is, again, in relation to being able to analyze the data that's reported to us. Often we receive data and then one of the other recommendations was for us to analyze it and to identify trends, and in order to identify trends or to analyze data you have to understand the data that you're looking at.

Often we ask for additional information so that we can understand what it is that we're looking at, because obviously I'm not an expert in several, in many fields. So my questions and the questions of our office is really from an understanding perspective to understand what we're looking at. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Bates. And before I go on to the next name on the list, Ms. Brewster, I would just like to pose a follow-up question. Ms. Quassa had indicated that in the government's previous report that information requests may be strenuous or onerous. This is an issue that I've heard from many ministers and departments from my own information requests, so I would like to ask if the government would be able to provide some examples in which you feel that the information requests were too challenging or too onerous.

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Δ⁶Υ⁹Δ⁷C^{5b} (C¹Δ¹Δ¹C¹): ⁵δ⁵Δ⁵Δ⁵. Γ¹ > Δ¹Δ¹.

Do I have any volunteers to respond? Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I think I wouldn't call them onerous, Mr. Chair. What I would say is that at some times the Department of Family Services struggles with capacity. So often times we get requests from individual advocates to front line. We get requests from managers in the representative's office to our managers similar in nature, all the way up the hierarchy. And so I would say that it's a challenge to meet those requests on occasion, because the work of our community social services workers in and of itself is very onerous.

I would say that trying to manage those priorities, as I mentioned earlier, is a challenge for our department on occasion. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman (Mr. Hickes): Thank you. Next name I have on my list, Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to begin by going back to the discussion about child sexual abuse in Nunavut. Mr. Chair, I hope you'll allow me to pose a question a second time, because I think it's really important that we re-establish the discussion that we were unable to continue due to the lack of a representative from Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs. I see that you're not telling me that I can't do it.

To Ms. Bates again I will ask, in your opening message on page 8 and 9 of your 2023-2024 annual report, you discussed the issue of child sexual abuse in some detail. You state on page 8:

“I can confirm that child sexual abuse in Nunavut continues to be a crisis, a crisis that has remained knowingly unaddressed.”

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I'll ask again: Is it your opinion that the government has knowingly ignored its duty to Nunavut's children when it comes to cases of sexual abuse? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the member for the question. I think I stated yesterday that ignored, I wouldn't say it's ignored. I would probably use the word "avoided". As I stated yesterday, child sexual abuse is a very difficult topic to talk about, and really it has only been in recent years that you've heard it being openly discussed, thanks to the work of a lot of members here in the House.

I think that also, additionally, I think a lot of departments have known that child sexual abuse is definitely a major concern. It's a crisis. But there's never been kind of the coming together of all of that information, I think, to the government to say here it is, here's the crisis, we need to deal with it. Because again you see there's pockets of information. We also don't have a full picture, because we don't have the information about the scope and magnitude of the problem.

So I know it was a strong language that I said that it has been ignored, but I think there have been pockets of places. Departments in their own way have known that this is on the rise, but I don't think all that information is put together and then a collective response been put forward, as we're seeing now happening. So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In my mind I'm trying to figure out the best way to formulate my next set of questions. I know yesterday we heard some statistics about sexually transmitted infections and diseases in

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different age cohorts, some that are congenital and some that are acquired. I guess I'll just go back to how first, we're hearing this – is it an emergency, is it an emerging issue, is it endemic?

I just want to know from Health specifically. Does the data that health currently collects inform that child sexual abuse is a crisis? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the member. I would offer that any of the data that departments have in relation to harm for children supports the concern that child sexual abuse is a crisis. When our children are being harmed, as the government, as members of society, it's all of our responsibility to find ways to support and improve the safety for our children.

Qujannamiik.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask the same question to the Department of Education. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hainnu.

Ms. Hainnu: Thank you, Chair. I thank the member for the question. There was a recommendation made, recommendation number 15 by the representative of child and youth office that the GN immediately develop a sexual abuse plan. We are on board. For Department of Education, we do agree with the recommendation. Wherever as departments we can make improvements, I believe we are. In addition, the office has only been in existence since 2015. I guess in the first five years there was a lot of relationship building and discovering how to collect data, how to act with each other, the corrective meetings, what to

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Δ⁶Υ⁶▷C⁶b (D⁶Υ⁶▷C⁶b): ϕ⁶Δ⁶Υ⁶▷C⁶b. Γ⁶ > Δ⁶Υ⁶▷C⁶b.

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include in the agenda, and then if information datasets were required that we knew them before we went into collecting them. There's been a lot of work towards that.

As the Department of Education, I believe that there are several key areas that the department can do training for school staff. Because we're not reporting sexual abuse. We do the aspect of receiving disclosures, and we take it very seriously. So we're acting with every good intention, as expediently as possible. So the perceived shortfall as a watchdog, I do perceive the Representative for Children and Youth and Ms. Bates and I have had conversations. I do see her office as being my coach. She is telling me where there are gaps, and I take them seriously and we are responsive.

I think for the child sexual abuse, we're on board with the action plan that's Nunavut-wide, and I do fully expect that there can only be positive outcomes informing our children as their rights, informing them of where to go. Yesterday Ms. Nutarak did indicate communication protocols and well into the evening I drafted up a communication protocol that we'll share with our schools, that will go to every child, be taken home by every child. Those are the sorts of things that come out of these experiences, even if it's not the Representative for Children and Youth that are asking us to do something.

We are service providers. It feels good to be of good service, and we have a lot of work to do. But I do agree that Education play a huge role in the action plan, and I hope in the next few years we'll demonstrate some strength in the response. I hope that answers the question. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you. I'm happy to know that you're on board and thank you for working

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so late into the night. I hope you got to watch some of the election results at the same time. I'll ask Justice the same question. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Ellsworth.

Ms. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for the question. I echo my colleague's response, but to provide a response from the Department of Justice, abuse of children and vulnerable people in Nunavut is of significant concern with the Government of Nunavut and with our partners, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police frontline detachments face limitations in their capacity to conduct complex and technical investigations into crimes of a sexual nature involving vulnerable persons or children and youth, particularly.

To address this gap, the ‘V’ Division established their Specialized Investigation Team in 2018, providing dedicated support and expertise for those sensitive cases. The Specialized Investigative Team collaborates with the Department of Family Services in investigation, prioritizing protection of children. However, there are only four members of the Specialized Investigative Team, and we need more. We need more members to be able to be trained into interviewing children and youth when these sorts of really bad things happen to children and youth. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Just for clarification, by the establishment of the specialized investigative team on child sexual abuse, does the Department of Justice agree that child sexual abuse is a crisis in Nunavut? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Ellsworth.

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Ms. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the member for the question. I don't want to say it's a crisis; however, I want to acknowledge that the numbers are very, very high and we need to do something about them. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll go to Family Services with that same question about the data that they're currently collecting and does it inform that child sexual abuse is a crisis. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I would respectfully submit that any instance of child sexual abuse demonstrates a crisis, particularly for that young person. It's my understanding based on the numbers that we've seen, which have only been collected for the last short while, it's hard to make, or it's difficult to make a determination because our data set is so new. However, I understand also that the Department of Health's Nunavut suicide prevention plan has indicated that it's a crisis based on information that the Department of Health has.

When the committee issued its recommendations previously to this hearing, the Government of Nunavut took that recommendation very, very seriously. We need to, as I mentioned earlier in this proceeding, Mr. Chair, we need to stop this cycle of abuse in Nunavut. And as a result of that determination we have been working very diligently to get the sexual abuse action plan activated and implemented. We've worked very regularly with the RCMP to enhance our relationship with them, so that if there is an allegation of misconduct in any way, that the police are immediately informed, that there's

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headquarters oversight reviewing the files that are happening in the detachments. Ms. Ellsworth indicated that there are some capacity issues within the RCMP's frontline detachments, particularly as it pertains to new members. I believe that was raised yesterday by Mr. Anavilok; they don't know the community.

We've taken a very determined stance on ensuring that those relationships are built and we intend to finalize the sexual abuse action plan and operationalize, Mr. Chair, the child abuse and neglect response agreement to respond as quickly as we can to these issues that we see in our communities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you. I feel like I need to go off on a small tangent here, based on that response. Deputy Minister Ellsworth mentioned the suicide intervention plan that indicates that the child sexual abuse is a crisis in Nunavut, and I'll just go back to the Deputy Minister of Health just to quickly ask: Is suicide currently a crisis in Nunavut? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question. Suicide has not been I think publicly called a crisis in Nunavut. However, we know that we have immensely high suicide rates beyond the national average, and the suicide action plan was specifically designed to address what I'm sure many people would identify as a crisis in this territory.

And to my counterparts, a note around the action plan, the action plan is one that's meant to address many of the factors that are connected to people in this territory losing their lives to suicide and the impacts to community and family, and sexual abuse is directly related

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in that action plan as a direct link to suicide.
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Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to stay focused on child sexual abuse and we know that they are intrinsically connected to suicidal ideation and completion as a result of that abuse. So I'm going to parking-lot that discussion, because I think that discussion merits a fulsome discussion on its own. But yes, they are connected, very much.

I just want to correct myself. I was on page 9 of her opening report. At page 9 of her 2023-2024 annual report, the Representative for Children and Youth states that “the crisis of child sexual abuse in Nunavut has remained knowingly unaddressed.”

I would like to ask the representative from Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs: Do you agree with there statement? And can you explain why or why not. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the member for the question. I think there are a lot of words that were thrown out today, “ignored”, “avoided”, “unaddressed”. I do want to say as part of my response that identifying a crisis or leaving something unaddressed, I believe that there has been some positive action over the last while and when we’re looking at very concerning situations such as child and youth abuse and in particular sexual abuse, identifying it as such requires us to also follow up with appropriate and immediate attention and support. I believe it also requires a community response, and one that requires cooperation of service providers as well as the public.

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So to your question, I have full confidence that through the Department of Health, Family Services, Education and Justice working together through the child abuse and neglect response agreement committee that developing that action plan to address child sexual abuse is a step in the right direction. We acknowledge that it requires a large effort and adjustments, I'm sure, to be made along the way, but I'm pleased to know that there is some attention being paid to this and we're moving in the right direction. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, that statement that sexual abuse in Nunavut has remained knowingly unaddressed is a really strong statement, referring to the government as a whole. We're hearing that there's a pulling together of government resources to address this issue. However, what we know about creating action plans and developing new ways of addressing issues takes time, and in the meantime, there are children at risk right now.

My apologies. I just have to take a deep breath here.

That time to pull resources together means that there are children who are experiencing life-altering abuse, and if they survive the immediate abuse in the immediate, in the now and in the immediate future, we know that the lifelong impacts every that abuse does lead to pain, loss of life, anger.

In the meantime, while that work is being done, I'm seeking reassurance to know from Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs what exactly is happening to ensure that children are safe today. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Ms. Fowler.

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Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the member. I appreciate this is a very difficult subject matter to be discussing, let alone looking at addressing. I want to assure the member that our team is doing all that we can in addressing this. I believe this is where reference to a whole-of-government approach has been referenced and talked about. And in doing that, the intention is always for joint activities across departments and agencies to address a common goal, and in this case, addressing child sexual abuse.

I want to try and remain focused on the positive, that there's acknowledgement and that work is being done, and I recognize that this may not mean something right this moment, but I want to assure you that work is happening. In doing that it involves integrating policy development, program management, and service delivery across government. I have confidence and trust that my deputy colleagues that are sitting here with me through the Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement committee is doing exactly that.

I do know it would be ideal to have had this done so that our children in Nunavut weren't facing this right now, but I can assure you, we are doing all that we can to address this.
(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I think I don't want to parse words, but having confidence that action is being taken doesn't have an immediate impact on the safety of those children who are impacted, and we have a responsibility to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable citizens.

I'll ask Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs again: In its 2024 report on the review of the representative's 2020-2023 annual

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reports, the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts made the recommendation that the Government of Nunavut immediately develop a government-wide action plan to address child sexual abuse and sexual violence in Nunavut, and we know that this work has begun.

The committee used the term “immediately”, as it was strongly felt the child sexual abuse situation in Nunavut was indeed a crisis and required immediate attention. Does the government agree that a crisis of this nature requires immediate action? And if so, why has so little been done to address this issue over the past year? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the member for your comment and question. Immediate action, I do believe that we took immediate action, and I will turn to a couple of my colleagues that are here today to highlight some of the immediate steps that were taken through this. We do know that at the political level that there was an immediate gathering of our political leadership to ensure appropriate discussions were had and directions identified.

And I believe with the lead from my deputy colleague Mr. Ellsworth that the Department of Family Services did take immediate action in identifying and laying a path forward that got us to the place where we are today. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I think it was plainly obvious that this issue was going to come up yesterday, and it really concerns me that there weren't representatives from Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs here to address our questions. And that makes me concerned about

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Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for coming back with that to the member. I think regardless of if I call it a crisis, I don't think that will make a difference. I think right now what you're seeing is concerning. It is an issue, and by definition of a crisis it is something that gets met with immediate action and supports, and I think that's exactly what we're doing. If based on information that each of the departments are collecting, we're being

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But I think the point that I want to make here is that it is being addressed, that we are doing something collectively, across the government, and working with our departments in addressing this particular issue. I think that in itself is demonstrating that we are addressing a crisis in our communities. Whether it gets defined through suicide statistics, whether it gets defined through different statistics that the Department of Family Services is collecting and the work that Justice is doing with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and others, I believe that the Government of Nunavut is doing and addressing child sexual abuse in a way that is across government and identified through the appropriate individuals that are around the table right now. There is agreement. There is consensus that it needs to be addressed and I think that's the point that I want to ensure is heard. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The impact of not addressing a crisis is the crisis doesn't stop. I think I said in my opening comments that there are young people who were alive in 2009, right, that are now potentially parents who may have suffered abuse, right. So if you don't address this concern, it's not going to go away. In fact it potentially could get worse.

But I think that again I would echo the Deputy Minister from Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, is that I think the point that we need to focus on right now is that the Standing Committee has made a recommendation. I recognize that they did say “immediately” in that recommendation to create a sexual abuse strategy. It has been a long time coming. It needs to get implemented. It needs to get put in action as fast as possible. But the point is that

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it's happening. And then my job is to make sure that it happens. My job is to make sure that the departments are held accountable and they do what they say they're going to do.

I think that again, I just reinforce that what we've seen is if something is left unaddressed, it doesn't change it. But I think that the up side here, or the light, if you will, at the tunnel is that something is happening.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Bates. Next name I have on my list is Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Chair. My first question will be for Ms. Fowler. In your response to Ms. Brewster's questions about immediate action taken over the last year, and it's unfortunate that this didn't start sooner, yesterday I did bring up the fact that I had posed this exact issue in the previous Assembly as the premier the of the day declared child sexual abuse a crisis. And yet here we are, five years later, finally, having this discussion, much needed discussion at this table.

And at that time I had tabled Greenland's strategy to reduce child sexual abuse, and when I posed questions to the Minister responsible for EIA and the bureau statistics, I indicated that part of Greenland's strategy was conducting a voluntary survey in which they found 30 per cent of adults, both male and female, had indicated that their first sexual encounter was actually non-consensual, highlighting how real and rampant the situation is there.

Back in 2020 I asked the premier if the Bureau of Statistics would do a similar survey, an anonymous, voluntary survey of Nunavummiut to determine the true extent to which child sexual abuse is occurring in the territory, and I did not get a commitment on that. So I guess the first question I would like to ask is whether the Bureau of Statistics has begun work on

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conducting such a survey to find out the true extent of the situation in Nunavut. Thank you, Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the member. And thank you for bringing up the information about the Greenland strategy and some of the work that informed that piece of work. I am less familiar about that piece of work today than I was probably a couple of years ago, but I appreciate you bringing it up again because that is certainly an experience that we can learn from and perhaps build into the work that we are doing here.

With the increase in capacity that we have at the Bureau of Statistics I can commit that we can do what we can with respect to this voluntary survey. I think we would have to do a bit more homework to ensure that we have the appropriate consents and privacy and those kinds of things are considered, but certainly I can take that back and have my team work with the Department of Family Services as we proceed with this piece of work and see if that's something that can be entertained. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Fowler. I was gently reminded that we haven't taken a break this morning. Mr. Lightstone, you know I don't like to interfere with people's lines of questioning but I do also realize that a lot of people have been sitting here for a few hours now with glasses of water in front of them. I think we'll recognize that and we'll take a 10-minute break. I do recognize we started late, and hopefully we don't go into the lunch hour, but I do respect that people need to take a 10-minute break. Thank you.

>>Committee recessed at 10:49 and resumed
at 11:04

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Chairman: Thank you. I would like to call the committee meeting back to order. Where we left off, Mr. Lightstone had a line of questioning. Please proceed.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Chair. I will be posing my next questions to the representative. In your efforts to collect data from the various departments namely Health, Justice and Education, have you been able when it comes to data collection on issues relating to child abuse, whether it's physical, emotional, or sexual, do you receive community-level information, and if so, have you been able to identify specific communities of concern? Thank you, Chair.

Chairman: Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the member for the question. So you'll note in the status section when we attempt to collect information on I would say referrals, that would be the area that I would see as child abuse referrals that go into the Department of Family Services, as noted in this particular annual report, that information is not available. But we have always asked for it to be broken down by region so that again we can do some analysis is there a particular spike in one area versus another, in one community versus another.

Unfortunately, given the current state of that information, I can't speak to that at this point in time. I'm hopeful that in this next fiscal year, based on some of the changes the Department of Family Services has made and the implementation of their Matrix case management system that they will be able to report on referrals, because that's really where your data is on child abuse referrals, basically, child abuse and neglect. But we do question by region so that we do have an idea of which region is seeing a spike in what type of abuse. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Ms. Hunt (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, (interpretation ends) and thank you to the member for the question. Health has not identified a community or region specifically, to the member's question. Our focus has really been on ensuring education and training of our staff to be able to meet the needs, identify treatment or potential abuse, and of course the responsibilities around reporting to the

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appropriate agency or department.
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Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Chair. Yesterday there was a lot of reference to the very powerful statement in the representative's opening comments, or the message from the representative in the annual report with regards to confirming that child sexual abuse in Nunavut continues to be a crisis, and a crisis that remains knowingly unaddressed. For Ms. Fowler's benefit I did bring this up yesterday, with the fact that I guess the challenges that the Department of Family Services has in collecting accurate information specifically on that. However, there are other departments that do have that relevant information, again, Justice and Health, who are actively participating in all cases of child sexual abuse, and yet neither of those departments or the government to date, prior to the OAG report that really shone the spotlight on the issue none of the departments or the government really stood up and declared that crisis or identified this as a significant matter. I just wanted to make that comment.

I'll move on to my next topic. Yesterday I posed questions to the Department of Education on the violence reporting, and indicated that there was sexual violence and student-on-student violence. I would like to ask if this has ever come up in the work of the Representative for Children and Youth's office, whether or not you have worked with the Department of Education on complaints regarding student-on-student sexual violence. Thank you, Chair.

Chairman: Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the member for the question. To my knowledge we have not worked specifically on a case related to student-on-student sexual violence. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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It's very hard to get a good grasp on the homelessness rate of young people. I certainly see in cases where young people are bouncing around, couch surfing if you will. So having a safe place to go, safe houses, youth facilities –

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not facilities, like a youth shelter, if you will. But again, I would really strongly encourage that if the direction of the government is to go to youth shelters, there needs to be attached services that support young people, and it's not just a place to lay your head. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Chair. Just a follow-up question to the representative. There's numerous group homes across Nunavut for youth, and one issue or topic that came up in discussion during the Winter sitting was the possibility of opening those group homes up in evenings and weekends to accept children that are at risk. What are your thoughts on that? Thank you, Chair.

Chairman: Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the member for the question. So I think there is merit to examining that as a possibility. Having said that, group care is typically that young person's home, if you will, temporarily; we always hope it's temporarily. And so often if you're going to have other young people coming and going, say on weekends or in the evenings, I think that you would have to be very mindful of how that went forward, because again, keeping in mind that the young people that are placed there by the Department of Family Services, that's their home and that's where they're getting that stability and that structure. So that would be my only concern with doing that.

I think that I personally would advocate, or as the representative would advocate to potentially have a separate residence, as opposed to incorporating that in a group home setting. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

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Mr. Lightstone: Thank you. That's a very valid point.

I would like to move on to my next topic, and it's for the Department of Family Services regarding the Client Relations office. Yesterday in response to Ms. Brewster's questions, Mr. Ellsworth mentioned reporting on complaints. This is something that the Department of Health's Patient Relations office does not currently do. So my question I would like to ask is how do you foresee the Department of Family Services Client Relations office report on complaints of being conducted. Would that be something annually to the legislative or just made public, published online? Thank you, Chair.

Chairman: Mr. Ellsworth.

Ms. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chair, we would tend to submit that it's important that the public know about the nature and kinds of complaints that we receive at the Department of Family Services. I suspect, although I would need to confer with my colleagues, that it would be likely embedded within the framework of the director's annual report and so we would report the number and nature of complaints, response times, these kinds of data sets. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for that response. That does make sense. My last question is how will this Client Relation office work with the representative for Children and Youth. Thank you, Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's an excellent question, and I think what I would say, given the early days of this function in the

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Department of Family Services, is that we would continue to collaborate with Ms. Bates. I suspect she would want to conduct some reviews of that function to determine its efficacy with respect to resolving complaints, and so we will remain committed to doing just that. We will work with Ms. Bates and her representative officials to ensure any reviews that they undertake will be meaningful.

In addition to that, Mr. Chair, for the benefit of this committee, we have regularly consulted with the Representative for Children and Youth with respect to not only the strategic plan but also standards of practice that are being refined and issued, as well as the sexual abuse action plan that we discussed earlier. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Next name I have on my list, Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, all. First question is to department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs regarding the deputy minister's opening remarks. I'm looking for clarification and some information. On page 2, towards the bottom there, regarding Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit. The deputy minister mentions Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit has four staff positions out of six, including the director, a long-time staff member in Pangnirtung and two casual staff into Iqaluit. It's the two casual staff in Iqaluit that I am looking for some quick clarification.

How long will these casual staff be in those positions? Usually casual is three months long, to my understanding. And some of this corporate knowledge that they will obtain could end up being lost and no longer accessible. Is there a direction or movement to making these casual staff members indeterminant or even a three- to five-year position type situation? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for the question. With respect to the two casuals, they have been in place for a relatively short period of time. The focus was on the two senior members that were out for competition. We are nearing the completion of those two staffing actions at the moment. The casuals also provide us an opportunity to see if there's local talent that we may need to train into some of these roles, and the amount of time that we have for those casuals allows some time to understand the skill set that's coming from the individuals in those positions.

The intent is to fill those two more senior first, and then go to fill those two casual positions more permanently. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank Deputy Minister Fowler. Regarding the staffing actions for the two senior members, the team are nearing completion. You mentioned that just a minute ago but a bit more clarity. Does that mean that the jobs are going out for competition? Are interviews being done now or completed and a job offer is on the table? Just a bit more clarification to see where we are with this Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the member again for the question. We're in the process of hiring a survey manager so that's one of the positions that had been out for competition. We are in the final stages of that. One of the casuals that we have right now is under review for becoming indeterminate and another has just joined us for training purposes. And then the final position, I don't have the title in front of me but we are in the final stages of the interview process. So we've completed

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that part of it. We're nearing the offer stage, I hope. Fingers crossed. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you Deputy Minister. I'm hoping that will get filled very quickly and get some more important work started on that.

Further down on the deputy minister's opening comments, same page, page 2, the last bullet there:

“In addition to supporting access to Nunavut-specific data collected by other agencies, we are also working to complete the 2025 Food Price Survey. We intent to have the final report completed in Winter 2026.”

A bit more clarification or information on the work being done. I myself have brought up in this House during question period to the Minister of Family Services with regards to low-income families or people that are on income support. There have been some comments made by Nunavummiut that ever since the hamlets began utilizing Jordan's Principle to help getting food on the table for their children, that the Northerners and Co-ops raised their pricing on foods and everyday necessities. Going forward, will the department be doing another food price survey to compare to this 2025 food survey that's almost complete? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the member for the question. So for the 2025 Nunavut food price survey, the data collection was completed in April 2025. The Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit is collaborating or they did collaborate with the government liaison officers to collect the survey data from all 25 communities across Nunavut. So that was done

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throughout March and into April. We also collected data from three major Ottawa retailers for the purposes of comparison. Currently the data is being cleaned, validated, and entered to create a structured database for analysis.

So to answer your question, the intent is that, now that we have some capacity and some infrastructure within the Bureau of Statistics, this will be an ongoing survey so that we do have comparable data year over year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Deputy Minister. So does that mean going forward that this information will be used to take on the whole-of-government approach that has been thrown around here a few times now to address some of these issues that we're facing day in and day out by every department? How will that work from the whole-of-government approach. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the member for the question. We recognize food security is an issue across Nunavut. The intention here is that we have this comparable information. Information allows us to provide rationale to the federal government and other entities, or to help inform and shape policy direction within the government. So the intention here now is that we will have continuous comparable information that we can use to help inform the direction, to help address food-security-related issues. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Deputy Minister. To go back to one of my

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Having said that, in 2020 I had consultations with the Department of Family Services and we went through the classifications and tried to come up with classifications or areas that would directly be related to coding at the

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Department of Family Services. We haven't done a review of that classification table since 2020. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Office of the Chief Coroner, the Coroner's office investigates deaths to determine the cause of death and the circumstances surrounding death. What are some of the more important considerations respecting investigations into the deaths of children or youth in Nunavut? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Foote.

Mr. Foote: In investigating deaths, our primary consideration is to determine basically who the person is that has died, how they died, by what manner, and sort of to classify those deaths, whether they are a natural death, whether they are an accidental death, a homicide, which is at the hands of another human being, a suicide, a natural, accidental, suicide, homicide. And then they can be also undetermined or unclassified, depending on whether we have the complete picture.

Sometimes it can take quite some time to put together all of the details. We would gather whether there's a community coroner there to do the site investigation or often times in the communities there aren't always community coroners available. So oftentimes we rely on RCMP partners to gather site information. So we get the site information, what is happening on the spot, photographs, sometimes samples from the scene. Then we would get information generally from health care staff, so if they are brought to the health care centre, then we would put in warrants for medical records, as they are appropriate. We would oftentimes, depending on whether a community coroner is there to take samples or we're reliant on health care staff, nurses, doctors, we would oftentimes

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gather samples as they are appropriate to the case. Then we also could gather any number of additional data. So talking to family members, community members, basically as far as the investigation requires to find out those things, who is this that has died and how did they die and what manner of death it is.

Our purpose in doing this, while we are under Justice, appointed by the Minister of Justice, we are an arm's-length organization. So we're not looking at criminal or civil liability, we are looking at what has happened for the purpose of being able to prevent these sorts of deaths in future. As that really is the purpose of our office, doing an investigation without sharing that information to people that can do something about it has no purpose.

And so really what we are trying to do is get good information and get it out to as many people as can use it as possible. This is the same for children as for adults, with the extra that youth being more vulnerable and having more agencies to support them, more supports in place, there's more people that we're sharing data with and there's more considerations in that.

And so if I might elaborate just a little bit, what we are really working on in terms of that information sharing, there is a long legacy of coroner's office activities, and you know as those systems are progressing I think we're getting better. What we're really working on right now is moving into the digital age, moving away from paper records in the past and being able to digitize into a workable database that we can do queries.

And so the information, as we continue to put it in and clean the data, and by clean it we mean we look at multiple records to make sure that they all are the same and where there are discrepancies we go back to the primary paper records as opposed to what might be in a table

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or a chart, so getting that information a way that we can have accurate data and that to some degree we are up to the now. So moving forward we're fully digitized and any queries on data that is happening in real time is easily accessible and able to be analyzed by our partners. I think that will make our work very helpful.

But the stuff backward, and this will be very important to this report, is not all of the information going back is good. Sometimes there are spots something was missed, something was not collected at the time when things that we are looking at now may not have been collected in the past. So we try to focus on good quality data, because if you just say oh, something could be this or could be that and we'll just put one, that doesn't work. That gives you a false picture of what's happening.

And so we are trying to make sure that our data is complete and is good quality, so if we have question marks about anything, those remain question marks and solidly differentiate it as a question mark so that we can see, where have we been, where are we going and how do we do this.

I know I'm being quite wordy but I want to make sure that I kind of get everything in.

We are building, and nationally, when you look at coroners and chief medical officers from across the country, the kinds of things that we are looking at now versus 10, 20 years ago, it continues to evolve. And so in our current work, we're making things expandible so that as we discover new things that are of consideration, they can continue to be put in and expand us forward. And this can come in terms of medical conditions that we're looking at, toxicology information that we're looking at, suicide and things that come together with that. How to be able to parse out, it has been mentioned about communities and age groups

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and how do you pick out the things that together have a pattern where when you just look at it broadly you don't get that information.

This includes it has come up about we're starting to gather, we have the things put together looking at what is the person's living conditions. And where it used to be that things were sort of, way back they weren't even looking at it, but like were they housed? And now we're looking at multiple different categories to say that someone has a place to live. If they are sleeping on someone's couch or if they have a place for this week but not next, or they are living in a house with three people versus 14 people, all of those are very different. So we're working on gathering that information going forward in a much more sophisticated way. And so I'll kind of sum all of that up because I kind of went in a lot of different directions.

We're putting together our data in a useful way that we can actually see it instead of it just sitting in stacks of paper. We're making sure that it's quality data, so that question marks are not taken to be something that they're not and we're not seeing false trends. We're making our system expandible so that as there are areas that are brought up as questions, even if the data is not available in the past, we can move forward and integrate it into our system and make multiple comparisons.

With that, we try to make things timely. This is the last part that I'll kind of tie everything together, is that being a coroner is a very challenging job emotionally, and it is very hard in terms of finding community coroners. We recently went through a round of trying to hire from the communities, and once people see all that is entailed and how emotionally stressful it can be, it is challenging to find people that can commit to that for personal reasons, family reasons.

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In that, we are trying to make things as simple as possible and automate things. So in our systems, in the past, a coroner's booklet of all the things that you have to do was quite thick, and many pages and many different directions. And I liken it too a doctor versus a paramedic. So a doctor starts with a very broad, open mind of where they're going to go, and they have many, many things broadly that they are following. But it's kind of all wide open and it's large in their mind. Whereas a paramedic has things that are operationalized, algorithms that they follow. You are dealing with this; here's a list of things that you're looking at, and then you follow those and it simplifies things. It makes you much more able to deal with very a stressful situation and continue to move forward, instead of getting caught in all of the different directions until it's hard to move. Myself, even with much training and much experience of traumatic experiences, I get into situations where I find there is a lot going on in the moment and it's hard to put all of that aside and know what is next.

So we are working, myself, the deputy chief, input from community coroners and what we're finding in the records, what are the things that kind of get in the way of putting one foot after the next.

And so with that, a lot of our things are becoming algorithmic and a lot of our things are becoming, you do the one step, you do the next step, and within each of those, as much as we can automate, make a fillable PDF, that you fill in the boxes that note next to it what you're supposed to be doing. You know, when you have a death of a certain type, these are the automatic people that are supposed to be notified, because a child's death versus an adult's death, there are different people that need to be notified.

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Now, a child in care versus a child not in care of the system is different. And so as much of those things as we can put into an automatic system, the better.

To bring it all home, in the case of children's deaths versus adult deaths, we have built into our investigative system, into our investigative algorithm and into our database for being able to search unique features that make sure that people who are in a very difficult situation – and no one is prepared to be in the situations we find ourselves in – to make sure that things don't get missed and to make sure that even if the information is not complete, it is timely, and makes it clear what things we know and what things we don't know.

And that way all of our partner organizations can use this information to the best of their ability and know that we're not being led astray by things that happened sort of in the heat of a stressful situation, that put red herrings. Sorry for my length. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Foote. You've been waiting patiently for a day and a half to get to the questions.

>> *Laughter*

And I'm going to be honest, I think you answered the next four or five questions that we had planned for you, anyway, so it was actually a good use of the time. It might have seemed long-winded but it did get answers to a number of questions that we had for your office, so thank you. Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Chief Coroner. I have one more last question for the chief coroner. Being in some of these outlying communities, the smaller communities, there are less resources than may be available. What are a couple of the specific challenges in classifying the type of death for a

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child or youth? Are there some challenges to specify, like how to classify it? Is there any specific information that you can share with us? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. I will ask you to condense this one a little bit, though, Mr. Foote. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Foote: So there's nothing specific to the child and youth aspect that is more challenging in communities, but there definitely are challenges that come with being in a community logistically, and in terms of the investigation.

So if there is not a community coroner doing the investigation, sometimes there are things that I could look at a person and investigate them, and I would pick up on things that I can see, that I can check in hand. And sometimes it takes a little bit more time when I'm working with, say, an RCMP officer who, if I ask them to look at a certain thing, take a photograph, send it to me, okay, that photograph doesn't show very well what I'm looking for; could you take another picture from another angle with some different light. So some of these are a bit of back and forth just because of not being there, and making sure that we get what we're looking for.

The other thing is if individuals need to go for autopsy, postmortem investigation, being here in Iqaluit is a lot easier to get to the pathologist to get a full autopsy, as opposed to some of the communities or even out on the land, to have to take multiple flights, and sometimes changing in order to get where they're going. And so obviously that has some issues in terms of time, but also in terms of decomposition. And so if people are moving a long distance that sometimes takes quite some time, you know, weather, temperature, these things can become an issue.

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The pathologists are very aware of these things and oftentimes they are not going to make a terrible amount of difference in terms of the results of the pathologist, what they find, but it does make a difference in terms of time.

And then with that, to get medical records, we need warrants. And so sometimes you will find yourself in the situation where a Friday night someone has passed, and then we are waiting until we can see a justice of the peace to get medical records in order to send the medical records to the pathologist so that they can have more information in terms of what they're looking at. And so these are some of the challenges in the communities is logistic challenges, and some of the information in a timely manner because of the distance. I apologize for that. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Foote. And trust me, I don't mean to rush you. As long as it is informative. We are running out of time and I have one more name on my list I would like to get to. Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Representative For Children and Youth, one of the categories of critical injury listed on page 95 of your annual report is emotional harm, is categorized as emotional harm. Can you elaborate further how you define "emotional harm" and clarify what specific aspects of an emotional harm are classified as a critical injury. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the member for the question. Emotional harm is a very broad category, and it speaks largely to psychological harm. What often falls in this particular category for us is if a young person witnesses domestic violence; if a young person's parent dies, that's emotional harm. It's not a harm that's physical, you can't

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see it, but it has a major psychological impact. So if a parent dies and that young person no longer has a parent.

Also, we classify teen pregnancy under emotional harm. If a young person witnesses a traumatic event, that can be a murder, an assault, anything like that would fall under that category. So anything really again that potentially could harm that young person psychologically over the long term. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Department of Family Services, on page 96 of the representative's 2023-2024 annual report it notes that a number of critical injury reports by the Department of Family Services did not qualify as critical injuries. Can you explain why there are difficulties in reporting and classifying what are to be considered as critical injuries. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, through you, I would like Mr. Colby O'Donnell to respond to that inquiry. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. O'Donnell.

Mr. O'Donnell: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think contributing to a lot of the inconsistencies in classifying that was just not being collaborative on what the definition of a critical injury was, comparatively between the representative's office and what the department was previously tracking. So I think as of late, and as of the last year or year and a half or so, we have collaborated a lot more and consistently and have adopted and adapted our criteria and the actual framework that the representative shared

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with us to be utilized as far as our classification tools.

So now that we are doing that, we are more consistent on what is being classified and what is shared by the representative, so we expect to see more consistency in that moving forward. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My last question, I'm not exactly sure who to direct it from the government's side. Perhaps someone can raise their hand, maybe, to the chair as to who would be best to respond.

One of my colleagues reminded me, Ms. Quassa, thank you, that at the very start of our term there was a bit of a protest here in Iqaluit by a youth regarding suicide. It was quite emotional, quite touching. Tugged a bit at the heart strings. And to get some action going there needs to be some classification, a crisis to make it more serious or taken more immediately, I guess.

Who would give the official categorization that suicide in Nunavut is in a crisis mode? And what or where can we go with that to help Nunavummiut, or especially our youth? I'm not sure who to direct that to, Mr. Chair. Maybe somebody from the government would be willing to best respond. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. And as I believe at the time it was mentioned there would be all-of-government approach to the suicide crisis as well, I'm going to go directly to Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the member. For declaring a crisis, I believe that would have to come from a political position, and then the bureaucracy would follow suit with action. I said earlier in one of

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my responses that when you met with a crisis you usually want to have some kind of action, or immediate action and some support behind that, and I believe through the suicide prevention plan that's in place, that is the action behind that. However, to your earlier point, the declaration of one I believe would be a political consideration to make. However, I do want to stress that the Department of Health has taken steps in developing the suicide prevention plan with a number of actions to start addressing the issue. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Mr. Simailak. Taima. As I am sure people are watching the clock that we are nearing our noon deadline, I'm going to make a chair's direction. I'm willing to go to 12:15. Ms. Brewster's name is p on the list so I'm going to set a hard shutoff at 12:15 so we can continue to get a couple of these questions off the table, due to our late start this morning. Ms. Brewster, please proceed.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you. I'll go ahead and continue on this line of questioning. I know that earlier we heard from departments that suicide is indeed a crisis and he'll go to the chief coroner just to very quickly explain the results of the last coroner's inquest where the jury did call for suicide to be noted as a crisis in Nunavut.

I've been trying to get those I think it's 31 recommendations. I haven't been able to find them on your website, but if you notice that your counts are higher it's because I check and I check and I check.

>> *Laughter*

So I just would like to go to the coroner to very briefly to discuss why it's important to act on a jury's recommendation. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Foote.

Mr. Foote: Thank you, Ms. Chair. Thank you for the question. I was just trying to determine whether I could make a point about that.

I would like to point out the recent inquest in Kimmirut into the death of George Arlooktoo, the jury among their 31 recommendations recommended that the government were to declare a suicide crisis within the territory because of the number of suicides and the idea that suicides should be a preventable death.

The point of an inquest is to make sure that the details around a death, the pertinent information is available to the public and that nothing is sort of hidden away, that everything is available for the public to see and for recommendations of how to hopefully prevent similar deaths in the future, how can we do that. And so the jury, being party to all of the information in the inquest, deliberate on not only the decision of based on all the facts what happened, but what do they as members of the community, feel there could be done. And anyone, everyone within society is someone that could be kind of pointed to. We all are part of the society, and if the jury think that there is something that could be done, they should be free to make recommendations to everyone and anyone as to what we could do differently.

And so this particular case was a rather involved case, not in terms of what happened at the moment, but what led up to the moment. And so their recommendations were fairly extensive, one being that they recommend that a suicide crisis be declared in Nunavut.

I will make sure that I get copies over our lunch break and make sure that everyone that wants a copy has one. We don't have it on our website yet, but I will be trying to get it out as much as possible. We will work on that. Thank you.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that response and that commitment. I look forward to seeing those recommendations.

I am going to parking-lot that issue again because I think it's really important to stay on the issue of child sexual abuse as a crisis. I really want to give the Deputy Minister of Justice an opportunity to speak to why she is not comfortable declaring a child sexual abuse as a crisis, because I know there are lots of reasons behind that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Ms. Ellsworth.

Ms. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for the question. I really appreciate that question, actually.

I understand that the numbers are really high, and even just with one, it shouldn't be happening. I want children and youth to be able to live vibrant lives, loved and safe, in safety homes and missed opportunities. However, as the Deputy Minister of Justice, I'm not authorized to say that there is a crisis. But I will, the Department of Justice will continue to provide programs and services to help children and youth and Nunavummiut. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you for that response. I appreciate it. I would just like to go to page 3 of Ms. Fowler's opening remarks. In the fourth and fifth paragraph Ms. Fowler stated that she understands that:

"...when the committee identifies the need for a government-wide action plan to address child sexual abuse and sexual violence in Nunavut there is an expectation that Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs will lead that work. Mr. Chairman, it would not make sense for

Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs to lead the work on files related to children and youth. Individuals with the appropriate knowledge need to be engaged on the files and need to be leading this work. That is why the work is being led jointly by Family Services, Health, Justice, and Education.”

Mr. Chair, the premier responded to the Auditor General’s report with a statement on May 30, 2023, and again in the fourth paragraph, the premier stated:

“Our response must be swift. With the full support of cabinet the government is unlocking the resources necessary to enable the department’s Family Services, Health and Human Resources to respond financially and with increased human capacity. The Department of the Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs will establish a Government of Nunavut audit and support function to develop a performance and accountability framework. Taking a whole-of-government approach, EIA will provide oversight of those departments for services related to the wellbeing of children, youth, and families.”

Ms. Fowler also stated that the identification of gaps helps will accountability. However, I’ve yet to hear anything about – and maybe I’m wrong. Can I hear more, Mr. Chair, from Ms. Fowler about the establishment of the Government of Nunavut audit and support function, and the performance accountability framework. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for the question. With respect to the audit function, EIA has worked through various interdepartmental committees that we chair to encourage interdepartmental coordination. All departments are working

together to support service departments in prioritizing efforts to Family Services. When established policies might impede prioritization of Family Services' work, cabinet has used their authority to provide direction for prioritization.

We have also been in discussions with the Department of Finance about the best way to structure internal audit, and have determined that the Department of Finance can provide the best ongoing support for this division. Audit planning is approved by the Central Accountability Committee, and that interdepartmental committee will continue working to ensure that the appropriate internal audit functionality is in place to ensure we can find performance concerns at our departments, before it goes to any other level. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I admit I got a little bit distracted while I was listening to that response. Just to be clear, is there a written framework for action that public servants can refer to? I know as a former public servant that paper stays put, and that I get my guidelines on what I'm doing every day and who I should be interacting with related to being accountable from a written directive, often.

Having an idea of what an approach is supposed to be that is transferred by word of mouth or by direction, given by a supervisor, doesn't necessarily ensure that I as a public servant am able to be fully accountable and be led by a policy and that kind of vision.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With respect to a framework, one has not been developed with respect to this part of the work. We have been engaged in conversations, as I

mentioned, with the Department of Finance. There is a division around internal audit and there was some early discussion about the potential for creating something within the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, and through discussion with this interdepartmental committee it was found that what we were trying to look at doing was duplicating efforts. Right now we are in a phase where we are looking at the roles and responsibilities of the internal audit function within the Department of Finance to ensure it can account for things like following through on auditor general recommendations and such. So work is ongoing in this area. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That statement was made on May 30, 2023, and if memory serves me correctly an elephant can be born within 22 months, a whole elephant. Why is this being put off? Why isn't it a priority? It's something that clearly has been identified as an important aspect of moving forward on this crisis. Why isn't it done? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Maybe for a point of clarification here, there are accountable measures in place for work that is being undertaken through Family Services. This internal audit was another mechanism that was being discussed to explore additional ways that government-wide we could ensure the public service is responding and reacting to recommendations that are made to the public service.

So this was by no means was to imply that there isn't accountability measures being put in place for the work around child sexual abuse, and I leave that to my colleague Mr. Ellsworth

if he wants to add any additional commentary.
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That still doesn't answer my question. The premier stated:

"The Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs will establish a Government of Nunavut audit and support function and develop a performance accountability framework."

When I hear that and when the public hears that, what we hear is that this is going to happen within Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs. What I'm hearing from Deputy Minister Fowler is that actually, no, the Department of Family Services is taking care of that.

That is not what was committed to the public. That wasn't what was committed to us as regular members, and to the public service, as well.

I'm not sure where to go with that. Maybe, Mr. Chair, you can help me out. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: I can read from the minister's statement that the premier made May of last year where it states:

"The Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs will establish a Government of Nunavut audit and support function and develop a performance and accountability framework", like the member had mentioned.

"Taking a whole-of-government approach, the Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs will provide oversight across departments for

services related to the wellbeing of children and youth and families.”

I think some of statements made may seem to be confusing or almost even misleading, that the premier stated that the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs would lead these initiatives.

So I think maybe, Ms. Fowler, if you want to explain how that responsibility was delegated to other departments, and what Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs is doing to oversee that work and make sure it’s done. Again, as I’m quoting from the premier’s statement:

“As children are involved our response must be swift.”

Ms. Fowler.

Ms. Fowler: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member and appreciate bringing this forward.

With respect to the audit function, as I indicated, through our internal conversations we found that there was a lot of alignment with an existing audit function within a division at the Department of Finance. What we are currently trying to do is ensure that that division has the right roles and responsibilities included for the scope of work, scope of responsibilities expanded to allow for inclusion of this. Part of the reason, and again this is internal to the departments at this point, this conversation – we didn’t want to duplicate efforts. So to create another entity within the Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs might not be the most appropriate way to go. So we’re still in the exploratory stage to see if we can expand the scope of responsibility within the Department of Finance in their internal audit and add components to it.

With respect to the performance accountability framework, work has not been initiated to date on this one. I referenced Family Services because I know that there are components within the work that they're doing to ensure that they are, we are being accountable for things that we're saying we are going to do. I think the determination of having this internal audit function was the first step before creating any sort of framework.

I hope this provides a bit more clarity, that we're still trying to determine where and how this will be best housed. I recognize that the premier did indicate it would be with Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, but it also wouldn't make sense to duplicate efforts with something that already currently exists within another department. So we are looking to ensure alignment in that direction forward. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you for that. Keeping to my commitment, I'm going to allow Mr. Ellsworth to provide closing comments, and other departments, please let me know if you want to provide brief closing comments before I go to the representative. Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee and thank you to the Representative for Children and Youth. I also want to express a deep sense of gratitude to the frontline community social services workers, the family resource workers, and others engaged in the child welfare realm.

These proceedings are very important in terms of holding departments accountable to not only their mandate, but to commitments they have made publicly and on record. I feel that, and I've said this before, I want to be held accountable. We are public servants. We are here to serve Nunavummiut. That is our primary function as public servants.

I'll be brief, Mr. Chair. I just again want to extend a deep sense of gratitude to the members present and again to the representative's office for holding us accountable. I look forward to our next appearance where I hope to share more progress that the Department of Family Services has made on its many commitments and initiatives to improve outcomes for Nunavummiut. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Ellsworth. Ms. Hainnu, would you like to provide some brief closing comments?

Ms. Hainnu: Thank you, Chair. I thank the members for being here and asking important questions. I thank Jane Bates and her colleague in being here. I think the many things that we've accomplished through dialogues, the information, child abuse action plan, the suicide prevention action plan, are all based on collaboration. I would like to highlight that in the last few years, in 2023, August 8, actually, 2023, we signed what used to be four separate work for Children and Youth agreements. Family Services had one with the office; Health had one with the office; Justice had one with the office, and Education had one with the office. To have a better commonality of objectives and goals, we have amalgamated them into one agreement so that we have an understanding and we are seeing each other's operations so much closer and disclosure and information sharing through the office we've achieved has improved.

I do, however, want to make a significant recommendation. I know I'm the receiving end, and I fully take them on. However, we are not the church that began the residential schools. We are not the federal government that established federal day schools or residential schools in communities. We are Nunavummiut, receiving our own services. It's a different day.

And to represent that, we are crimson red in our reports. Like page 50, Department of Government Services are represented in crimson red. I would like to propose that we be royal blue and white, so that it represents a change. We are recipients of our own service and programs. We are not big, bad, faceless government. We are of service to our *Nunaqqati*, the four-year-old coming into the education system I think about every day. Where will they be 30 or 40 years from now? And I take this responsibility seriously, and I do always appreciate your feedback because it does make our work better. We do go with the marching orders to our department.
Qujannamiik.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Hainnu. Ms. Bates.

Ms. Bates: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the Legislative Assembly and Standing Committee for providing the opportunity to appear here and to be held accountable for the work of our office. I've said it many times: It is truly an honour and privilege to be the representative.

I appreciate all the departments coming here today. I know that our office has the easier job here. And I do appreciate the unwavering commitment to make change.

I would like to acknowledge the staff as the Representative for Children and Youth office, Nivia, Philip, Miada, Dustin and Ross who are back at the office. The work that we do is hard. It's upsetting, at times, but thanks to those staff, I look forward to going to work every single day. They show up with so much passion and compassion and determination and the knowledge is quite incredible. It really does inspire me. So again, I cannot express my gratitude of the staff at the Representative for Children and Youth office enough.

And if you will indulge me, I would also like to acknowledge my mother, Eva Bates, who I know is watching back in Ontario. She called to tell me that yesterday, and I just want acknowledge. I want to thank her for all of her support over the years, and although I don't always ask for it, for her ongoing conveyance of knowledge and wisdom.

Finally, I would like to say we want to hear from you, the public, children, youth, families and departments. I want to assure all Nunavummiut that our office is always listening, and very, very closely watching what the government is doing, the actions and progress to do better. That is my commitment. That is our office's commitment. I remain very hopeful that together we can build a better future for everyone. Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Bates and I thank the committee members and all the witnesses. I know it was a little confuddled a little bit yesterday and this morning with the late start, but I do appreciate everyone's patience.

I will stand adjourned until 1:30. This afternoon with our next appearance with the same committee Standing Committee on Oversight, with the report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly on the 2025 Family Services report. So we'll see a few of you again here this afternoon. Thank you.

>> *Committee adjourned at 12:22*