

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



**December 6, 2023**

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[Original]

### HOMELESSNESS

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question today is for the Minister of Public Safety. He made comments to the media yesterday that have been haunting me. He said: People die all the time in car accidents, and we do not call a state of emergency. That might be true, but I cannot imagine how Adam Dickerson's mother and three children must have felt hearing that.

Housing is a provincial responsibility, and the safety of New Brunswickers is the responsibility of the Minister of Public Safety. Will he apologize to Adam Dickerson's family and tell them what he and his department will do to ensure that another preventable death does not happen—that another life is not lost—in St. Stephen?

**Hon. Mr. Austin** (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Minister of Public Safety, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Look, it is unquestionable that when somebody dies tragically, whether from an addiction overdose or in any other way, it is heart-wrenching for anybody, for all of us in here. What was tried to be said yesterday was the reality that we have issues in this province and, frankly, across this country. New Brunswick is not the only place that is dealing with homelessness, addictions, and mental health. We have it in every single province across Canada and in every state in the United States. This is a North American and, I would say, global issue that we are dealing with.

A state of emergency does not give any more resources to fix this problem than what we are willing and able to do today. To the member opposite and to the leader, I would say that it is shortsighted to say that it simply falls under provincial government. It falls on your federal counterparts. It falls on the municipalities. It falls on all of us as a province to fix this issue.

[Translation]

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am disappointed to see that the minister is taking on no share of the responsibility for this file. It is absolutely true that the federal government and municipalities are partly responsible. We are talking about a municipality asking for help; it is not asking for a technical debate on whether this is an emergency.

[Original]

They are looking for help, and I have asked the minister to confirm what actions he and his department will take to help the municipality of St. Stephen keep people safe and ensure that no other person dies. What actions will you take responsibility for, minister?

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**Hon. Mr. Austin** (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Minister of Public Safety, PC): I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we will do a whole lot more than what that bunch across the way has done in the past several years. I can tell you that.

We have 80 new RCMP officers who are out there enforcing the law, including in areas of St. Stephen. They are helping with enforcement for some of the crime issues in rural New Brunswick. We finally have a Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation who is working diligently to provide some safety and shelter for people who are on the streets. We have a Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services who is working on a 50-bed treatment facility for people who are facing these issues.

All these issues that we are facing today are based on Trudeau's policies and leftist agendas that are degrading our society. We are seeing that right across the country, so the blame has to stop between municipal, provincial, and federal governments. We have to work together on these issues and ensure that people have a warm place to sleep and food in their bellies.

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, our team offers our sincere condolences to Adam Dickerson and his family. Sadly, he is not alone. There are other New Brunswickers who have lost their lives here because of our challenges in dealing with the homelessness crisis as well as with mental health. But I am going to move on because there is another situation where other New Brunswickers' lives are at risk.

## HEALTH CARE

We are coming up on the one-year anniversary of the loss of MEDEVAC services to the people of Grand Manan. Some months ago, they were promised by Air Ambulance that it would expand and enhance services to Grand Manan. There was talk of a second plane. That plane has not landed once on Grand Manan. There was talk of pilots being recruited. We see that happening in Moncton, but no service has been delivered to the people of Grand Manan.

There are 100 people who use the MEDEVAC service each year to get access to urgent health care, and we are coming up on a time when the ferry service is going to be reduced. The people of Grand Manan are scared and at risk. They are waiting for word on how this is going to be dealt with. Could the minister tell the people of Grand Manan how he will ensure their emergency services?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, thank you very much. I appreciate this question. Certainly, the plans that I had envisioned for Grand Manan have not transpired. There are different companies that are involved, such as EM/ANB and Voyageur

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Aviation. That is well known. They are in negotiations with other components of the island in order to provide that plane on the ground.

It has taken longer than expected, but I will tell you this: There is still a comprehensive plan for emergency services and triage that occurs by the medical professionals on Grand Manan and on the mainland. That includes a plane from Nova Scotia's evac service and the Sea King helicopter. Then it cascades down from there. This is what is providing the care for the folks on Grand Manan at this point in time. We will continue to work with the various stakeholders, who will eventually see a plane on the ground, to provide emergency service for the people of Grand Manan.

[Translation]

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that there is a band-aid in place with services from Halifax, but I don't think it is reassuring for the people of Grand Manan Island.

[Original]

I cannot imagine that it is very reassuring to hear that we have a band-aid in place. A Sea King or a plane might come from Nova Scotia as needed. I appreciate your saying that you want to get a solution in place. Can you tell us the next steps that will happen and when the people of Grand Manan could expect to hear progress?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the pilots of the Sea King helicopter are not considered a band-aid solution. Those people are providing emergency services to the folks of Grand Manan and the folks throughout the province. Those are trained professionals who are providing that type of service. That is included in the triage of Grand Manan.

Specifically to the question on next steps, Voyageur is planning to be on the island to make a site visit. The member opposite has to recall that there was a runway built. That runway was just completed at the end of September. It is longer, which will provide for a different plane to be able to land and take off there. This, again, provides exceptional service for the folks of Grand Manan. The next step is that Voyageur and the municipal officials will meet next week. There will be a site visit. There will be more ongoing conversations, with the hope of ending very soon with a plane on the ground to provide additional emergency service.

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, minister, for that option. I hope that the municipality hears more information about this meeting that is to happen next week, because I do not think that it is something that it is aware of to date.

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### PENSIONS

Our team agrees that fairness matters. Fairness matters very much to New Brunswick workers and to all New Brunswickers. We also agree that the sustainability of New Brunswickers' pensions is extremely important. We think it is important that the government is looking out for the sustainability of pensions.

The Premier has made the argument that his need to take this drastic action with legislation, because of a failure to negotiate and build relationships, was based on the unsustainability of pensions. But we have learned, and the department has confirmed, that two out of those five pensions are sustainable and that other pensions that are not sustainable have not been touched because they went through an evaluation process with an independent commission. This is a step that was identified in the MOU. Can the Premier table for us a list of—

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Time, member.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. The fact is that when you go through the process with the actuaries, you determine the sustainability of pensions. It is not a matter of what the number might be today. I guess that the Leader of the Opposition is probably talking about pensions that are 100% funded. Maybe a couple of them are. I certainly know that some are. But that is what happens when you go through the program with the actuaries. You look at that and determine what is required in terms of a shared payment program, what is required in terms of benefits, and how it all works.

It is all reflected in the process of determining what that pension is and how it should be funded going forward. Some pensions need more funding than others because of the demographics and the number of people that the pension actually supports. Others need less. That is how the process works when the actuaries from both sides get together and analyze it. It is not one size fits all. We have said that all along. Every pension is looked at and assessed on its own merit and its own path forward for sustainability. That is how the process works. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, given that this is not an issue related to the sustainability of pensions, as the Premier suggested yesterday, and that every case is different, can he tell us what other pension plans are in a precarious state here in New Brunswick? Why did he choose these five pension plans if this is not an issue of sustainability? As he said, the process consists of finding actuaries. During the MOU process, actuaries had to be used, so why not maintain the process provided for in the memorandum of understanding that was



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signed? In addition, can the Premier tell us how many other pension plans in New Brunswick are not sustainable?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, with the five pensions that have been identified, there clearly are concerns surrounding sustainability, and some more so than others, as I just said. The memorandum of agreement (MOA) has been fully completed. We have gone through that numerous times. This is not a collective bargaining issue. This is a process that was agreed to be followed that was not followed, with no timeline in sight. In fact, the arbitrator reviewed the discussions that happened over two years. They resulted in no progress of any kind.

I think that we learned yesterday—I say that we learned yesterday as it became evident yesterday—that, certainly, the concern is how many employees in the system actually understand their pension, what security it may or may not have, and what this discussion around pension reform means for them personally. Every employee will get a letter that will state clearly: Here is who you contact, and here is an adviser you can speak to. This is so that they really understand. Mr. Speaker, we found that once people know and understand it, we can get it fixed.

[Translation]

## HOSPITALS

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Health admitted that decisions in the health sector are made by the Health System Collaborative Council, which is detrimental to the regions when the time comes to make the decisions needed to improve health care services. The example of hybrid operating rooms in Saint John and Fredericton made headlines. In fact, this is equivalent to amalgamating the two health networks. It was done by the Premier to ensure that political decisions are made by a superstructure composed of non-elected individuals that he himself manages. There is an absolute lack of transparency in the decisions.

So, for a government that has focused on local governance, it has done everything it could to supercentralize and make decision-making on health opaque. What does that mean for other hospitals, like the Dr. Georges-L.-Dumont Regional Hospital, for example, that have projects on the table? Will they have to wait until the projects in Saint John are finished first?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, speaking about our health care system, through the pandemic, we learned

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how well we work together. While we can have two completely independent networks, Vitalité and Horizon—independent in the sense of their operations—the best health care for all New Brunswickers happens when we find ways to complement each other's performance. That is what the whole process with the current boards and the collaboration board is about—making decisions in the best interest of the patients of New Brunswick.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, if you are told here in Fredericton or in Moncton that you cannot have your hip or knee operated on for the next two years, but there is a doctor in Bathurst or Campbellton that can do it, we need to coordinate those activities and give the patients an opportunity to get the best health care. Now, where it may be in the province. . . Maybe we can even put some security around timelines so that critical care is not optional. This is a requirement based on our utilizing the entirety of our assets, both our personal and our physical assets. We can be better in health care. We can be better together in terms of how we operate and—

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you.

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been obsessed with centralizing power within his control, and that is what he has done with the Health System Collaboration Council, a de facto merger of the regional health authorities. He is pitting communities one against the other to get projects done in their communities. It is not working. We have seen it with the hybrid OR model. It is not working. They are pitting Fredericton against Saint John—this, when they campaigned in 2018 and 2020 against the centralization of power within the Premier's control. They spent the past four years putting in this Local Governance Reform to give communities a greater say in the decisions that are for the benefit of their communities. The minister was against going from eight regional health authorities down to two in 2008. Now, he has one-upped them and he is merging the regional health authorities, a de facto merger. How can we expect decisions to be made for communities, by communities, when the council is already is not working?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is really unfortunate that the member opposite would take this tactic. We have moved it away from the political arm.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Order.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): We have actually said that we want the boards to make decisions on the best health care in the province, not pitting one community against another but looking at the health care system as a whole. Mr. Speaker, today, there is an issue on the table. When we nominated—



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(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Member, I asked you to. . . I would like to hear the answer. We have heard the question, and now I would like to hear the answer.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): We determined that our provincial lab would be at Moncton's Dumont hospital. There is an opportunity there because it set the pace during COVID-19. It actually did an admirable job. It did all the samples of COVID-19 from throughout the province. But do you know what it will require to move forward? Collaboration between Moncton's Dumont hospital and the general hospital so that they would share some duties. Mr. Speaker, is that wrong? Is it wrong that we would deliver better service together? It is not about a merger of any health authorities. It is about being better together and getting better results for patients.

## EDUCATION

**Ms. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education announced last week that he accepted a report and 11 recommendations from an executive steering committee that was put in place to improve the Anglophone education system. One of these recommendations is to increase the number of qualified teachers and specialized health service professionals in the Anglophone education system. To do that, the department will work with partners and the school districts—which, by the way, the minister wanted to eliminate in a dead bill on education last spring—to develop and implement a comprehensive retention and recruitment strategy. Our teachers are overextended, disillusioned, and frustrated and are leaving the profession. They need hope, encouragement, and appreciation. Can the minister give us details on how and when the new recruitment and retention strategy will be implemented?

**Hon. Ms. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I am fully aware of the stress that teachers in our schools are under. The COVID-19 pandemic put them all, as well as our kids, under terrible, terrible duress. Building a better education system is our goal. In the Anglophone education system, we have been regressing in the balances between classrooms and behavioural issues and inclusive education practices. The Department of Education wants to thank the executive steering committee and working groups as well as the thousands of New Brunswickers who engaged with us in this work. The primary goal of these long-term actions is to create inclusive, equitable, and innovative education systems that empower every learner to reach their full potential. These actions will be the foundation for positive change in the Anglophone education system, which is going to benefit students, educators, and families and build on the short-term actions that we announced in July and which are having positive impacts in our schools.

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**Ms. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her response. In the same announcement last week, the minister mentioned that he wanted to improve and expand French-language learning course offerings and learning opportunities for high school students and rural students. He also asked the department to explore the possibility of students entering French immersion with greater flexibility based on readiness. Can the minister give us details on what he means by “greater flexibility based on readiness”?

**Hon. Ms. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Thank you to the member opposite for the question. There are both long-term and near-term recommendations that the minister has outlined. The department is going to work with school districts to contract supply teachers based upon previously identified needs. Teaching positions are going to be added to support literacy and numeracy development in kindergarten to Grade 5. New behaviour intervention mentors (BIMs) are going to be added to the system. A working group will be established to look at how student profiles can be developed, and guidelines are going to be drafted. The department is going to analyze existing administrative workloads. NB Lead, a leadership strategy developed in collaboration with the department, the New Brunswick Teachers' Association, school districts, and the University of New Brunswick, is going to launch in the fall.

I am actually answering your previous question more here. An online professional learning hub has been created to provide access for educators and key partners to learning opportunities, and new modules related to de-escalation, co- and self-regulation, and culturally responsive classrooms are being developed. A Centre of Excellence for Language Learning is going to be established. We are working hard to give you a number—

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

[Translation]

**Ms. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, several of the 11 recommendations could also apply to the Francophone education system, especially with regard to the recruitment and retention of qualified teaching staff and health professionals, which all schools in the province sorely need. Francophone parents and staff in the Francophone sector are wondering what will be done on the Francophone side to match the measures announced for the Anglophone side. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

**Hon. Ms. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Once again, I am thrilled to stand in the people's House to answer questions for the member opposite. A province-wide action plan is going to be established, with the goal of improving regular student attendance and recommitting to a provincial culture of learning. The department is going to be working to develop a new classroom composition model and

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to determine a reasonable timeline to implement an improved, inclusive, and equitable system. A focus is going to be placed on middle school learners aged 11 to 14 by working to identify actions and programs. Course offerings and learning opportunities for French-language learning will be expanded for high school students and rural students, and the department will explore the possibility for students to enter French immersion with greater flexibility based on readiness. Solutions are going to be developed to ensure that students in kindergarten to Grade 8 are getting 30 minutes of physical education daily in addition to outdoor education opportunities. The Centre of Excellence for Language Learning is going to be developing a communication and support plan specifically for families and their communities.

[Translation]

### DAY CARE

**Mr. K. Arseneau** (Kent North, G): Mr. Speaker, there is a blatant lack of spaces in early childhood centres and daycares everywhere in the province. People call, and you hear about young families everywhere in the province, people who moved to a region to accept a job but who cannot go work because of a lack of spaces in daycares. There are people who want to go back to work, specifically women who want to go back to work after maternity leave, but who cannot because of a lack of spaces in daycares. Spaces in daycares for children aged 0 to 2 are nonexistent in rural regions. I will give you an example. In my riding, a very respected employer in this sector has had 123 different employees since 2010. It is a 27-employee business, but only 23 currently work there, because of a lack of staff. What is the province's plan to recruit and retain early childhood educators here in New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker?

[Original]

**Hon. Ms. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): This is so exciting, because I have rarely had the opportunity to speak this much in the three years I have been in office as the Agriculture Minister. This is fantastic, and it is in a wheelhouse in which I am very comfortable.

A new contract has been established with the early childcare facilities. There is a new cohort being released this month. Early childhood is an incredibly important part of a child's development. By ensuring that New Brunswick families can access quality and affordable childcare, we are making sure that our youngest learners have the tools they need to succeed right from the start. We know that there is a need for more early learning spaces. We know that the parents of New Brunswick are seeking those not only as their child prepares to enter school but also as their child is in utero. We have young couples who have just gotten married and are deciding to have families, and they are putting their kids on wait lists already. We know the need is there, and we are working toward developing that.

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Today, 1 500 additional early learning—

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. K. Arseneau** (Kent North, G): Ask again, yes, because that was not the answer I was looking for. When we talk about places in day cares, I understand that the government is trying to create some, but there are no workers, and that is the point I am getting at here. That is why I was asking about recruitment and retention. Because of the lack of foresight of this government, no workers are going to be able to work in these new places that will be created.

Right now, the salary for day care workers is topping off at \$24.47 per hour—\$24.47 per hour—while assistants in education, for very good reason, are making \$35 per hour. That makes complete sense, and day care workers should be earning the same kinds of wages. Will this government commit to raising the salaries of early childhood workers so that these workers are paid what they are really worth?

**Hon. Ms. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): To the member opposite, through the Speaker, to date, 1 506 additional early learning and childcare spaces have been made available throughout the province, and we are on track to creating 3 400 more spaces by March 2026. We have also been working and will continue to work with operators to fill 2 000 existing vacant spaces. As of October 2023, 1 488 of those spaces have been filled. We are implementing a strategy that targets the areas of greatest need in order to better meet the childcare needs of families. This strategy has been developed and refined based upon the feedback that we have received from families and stakeholders in the sector.

As for recruitment, we need to make sure that our young people who are currently in secondary education know the career opportunities that exist within the schools and education beyond teaching. The onus is on us to make sure that those opportunities are made abundantly clear to these young people so that they can see them as career opportunities for them in the future. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. K. Arseneau** (Kent North, G): Perhaps the minister will see a link to the agricultural sector here. It is very difficult to convince young people to work in a field where they will live below the poverty line, Mr. Speaker. So, the first thing this government has to do is increase the salaries of these early childhood educators so that their compensation reflects the value of their work.

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So, what will this government do with this file? Where are we going to bring the children? With whom are we going to leave our children, if we cannot help workers who are already making starvation wages doing an extremely important job? What will the value of all that be? So, will this government commit to increasing the salaries of early childhood educators? Also, will this government commit to facilitating the unionization of these workers?

[Original]

**Hon. Ms. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Education, I believe that our focus is on making sure that we have clientele in place to look after these children and to make sure that these children are receiving the most appropriate education possible. We will naturally be working with our colleagues to make sure that salaries are commensurate with experience and that the people we have working with our children are going to be taking care of our most precious assets to the best of their abilities. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

### STATUS OF THE ARTIST

**Ms. Thériault** (Caraquet, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture. Madam Minister, you have been in your position since 2020. You have been responsible for culture this entire time. Since 2020, you have said that you have been working on the status of the artist and that measures are in the works. Since it is nearly 2024, this is what I would like to know: When are you going to table a bill on the status of the artist? Thank you.

[Original]

**Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace** (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that question. I really enjoy having the opportunity to talk about our artists in the province because they have a lot to offer. We, as a department, work very closely with them. I just want to paint a little bit of a picture here since we are talking about art. It was in 2014, under the Progressive Conservative government at the time, when the Status of the Artist committee was formed. Sorry, I guess it was the Premier's Task Force. A lot of work was done with the group at that time. Then we had a change of government. The Liberals came in under Gallant. The leader is well aware of this, I am sure. But the work completely stalled. It was really in 2022, with this government, that we got this back on track.

I will say that we are working very closely with the transition—

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.



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[Translation]

**Ms. Thériault** (Caraquet, L): Thank you for the history of the file, but I already know it by heart. We are asking you what you are going to do. Currently, Madam Minister, artists do not have access to Medicare, employment insurance, or workplace safety insurance. They do not have access to pensions. They do not have access to sick leave or parental leave, but it suits you, for example, to send them to other countries to put on a show as representatives of New Brunswick.

What security are you providing to artists? I asked your deputy minister questions during a committee meeting in September, and she told us that a timeline was in the works. We have heard no news on the subject. I asked her if you had begun discussions with Ottawa, because this file involves federal-provincial cooperation, but we have heard no news in this regard. This leads me to believe that the wait and the silence indicate a lack of political will. When are you going to table the bill?

[Original]

**Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace** (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, PC): Thank you very much. I will certainly say that the member opposite has perhaps not heard about it, but the artists most certainly have. We are working very, very closely with artists. and we have a lot of momentum. I am very surprised, especially knowing how connected the member opposite is to the arts community.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that there has been incredible momentum to date. In fact, we are in the process of working on a policy framework right now that is going to do things such as set a definition for “professional artist”—that is something that we have never seen before—ensure mandatory contracts for professional artists—that has never been done before—and ensure that fee scales for artists’ work are set and certainly followed.

Mr. Speaker, there has been an incredible amount of work done with our artists. There is a lot of momentum. I thank the people on this transition committee. We are doing great work with them.

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister. Question period is over.

## EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

**Hon. Ms. Dunn** (Saint John Harbour, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Indigenous Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to a question that was posed by the member for Fredericton South with respect to Bill 27. In December 2022, Bill 27, *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*, was introduced in the Legislature by the member for Fredericton South. The bill seeks to amend the *Employment Standards Act* to add 10 paid

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days and to implement a financial support program to aid employers temporarily in adapting to the additional costs that would be associated with this. In January 2023, the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Law Amendments. The committee subsequently recommended that the department be directed to consult on the matter and return with the findings from these consultations.

I am pleased to report that the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour is actually undertaking that work at the present time. The deadline for submissions through the consultation process is December 11. We will have more to report. Thank you.

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for responding to the question that was earlier taken under advisement. I appreciate the consultation that was committed to. It has been delayed six months, I think, but it is coming to its conclusion very shortly. The fundamental question of all working people who do not have access to paid sick leave is this: Is it the minister's intent to table a bill in the spring to provide paid sick leave to New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Ms. Dunn** (Saint John Harbour, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Indigenous Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I think that it is imperative for us to understand that part of this process includes stakeholder engagement. It is something that we have committed to, so we are going to need to see the results of that stakeholder engagement in order to proceed. Thank you.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a question from the member of the Green Party that I took under advisement the other day with respect to sexual assault nurse examiners and any vacancies in the province. There is a provincial coordinator, and there are also a total of six regional coordinators covering the province. There are 13.2 full-time equivalents (FTEs) dedicated to the SANE program. Presently, there are 3.6 vacant FTEs. There is a 0.8 position in Zone 1, a 1 position and a 0.8 position in Zone 3, and 1 FTE position in Zone 5. In addition to the dedicated SANE nurses, there are also an additional 22 nurses who provide on-call support.

**Ms. Mitton** (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, thank you to the minister for coming back to the House after taking that under advisement. Part of my question was, Where are these SANE nurses? In the *Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in New Brunswick* report, there was a call for SANE nurses to be in every ER, so I am wondering how many ERs have SANE nurses. What will the minister do to ensure the training, recruitment, and retention of SANE nurses across the province, especially in rural areas?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much. These are located in the major trauma centres here in the province. The key point that I was trying to make is that it is a provincially coordinated program. I know that we had the member for Moncton Centre saying that having provincially coordinated programs was not the way to go here in New Brunswick. We have every zone and the major trauma centres covered, but I think that when you look at the other additional nurses who are available on call, you will see that this work is continuing.

The RHAs are the organizations charged with providing the response to a situation. We continue to recruit to make sure that there are additional RNs and staff available to help if a situation should arise. It is good to see that this program has expanded and that it continues to provide services in unfortunate situations where people can get those types of—

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

## SCHOOLS

**Hon. Ms. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to address questions posed yesterday by the member for Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston that I took under advisement. She had asked whether the minister could tell us where the school was on the list, referring to the Florenceville-Bristol school for Carleton North.

This new school in Carleton North will see four older facilities closed, which is a recommendation made following the sustainability study in 2019. This project was next in line on the Stable Departmental Infrastructure Priorities (SDIP) list, meaning that it was expected that it would have received funding through the 2024-25 capital budget. This project was prioritized a year earlier than planned given the province's strong fiscal position.

The member for Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston also asked about how the first priority of one of the seven school districts in New Brunswick became number 39 in line and how the third priority came to be number 29 in line. The districts are responsible for submitting their lists of priorities to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. District priorities are then evaluated against projects throughout the entire province through the QBL evaluation tool, which was developed in collaboration with the school districts. The district priorities are considered as part of several factors in the QBL evaluation. Using these tools and making the results public are important parts of making sure that we are transparent about how we make decisions regarding educational infrastructure.

Regarding the Tabusintac Community School project, the infrastructure addition to the school was prioritized due to the population growth in that area. This project did not result

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in any project being bumped on the SDIP list. The project was not on the list last year, as it was not requested by the district at that time. The project was part of the Anglophone North School District's (ASD-N) list of major capital projects submitted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The evaluation of that project showed a significant deficiency in teaching spaces.

The Cité des Jeunes project was dropped on the list. Projects not on the SDIP list are evaluated every year based upon the latest data and information available. Project rankings may change on an annual basis as they are re-evaluated, and the change in ranking may be because of a project's score changing or other scoring changes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for the clarifications. However, yesterday, I asked whether the school announced for Florenceville-Bristol was fourth on the department's list of priorities.

In fact, the department tells us that it is working on projects related to six schools this year. With regard to the projects in 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th place, this list will not change. If the department did not have more money to spend last year, did the list of priorities effectively remain unchanged? Of the priorities not announced in the capital budget in December 2022, was the Florenceville-Bristol school in fact in 4th place?

[Original]

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, member.

**Hon. Ms. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Mr. Speaker, I believe that I answered that question. I believe that I said that the project is next in line for the Stable Departmental Infrastructure Priorities. We are going to be able to close four other buildings that will be serviced by this new building. The project is next in line, and we have received funding through the 2024-25 capital budget.

Also, the aspersion that is regularly being cast is that we build only in Anglophone districts. Well, we have six major capital projects identified for 2024-25. We have the construction of an Anglophone kindergarten in Dieppe. We have the replacement of a Salisbury elementary school. We have the construction of a replacement for George Street Middle School in Fredericton, an addition to Tabusintac School, an addition and upgrade to École Saint-Henri in Moncton, and a new school to replace Forest Hill Elementary School and Liverpool Street Elementary School. Now, I am not a math teacher by training, but three out of six is 50%, and I think that is a pretty good number.