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Chair

Ms. Candice Hoepfner

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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● (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC)): I will call to order meeting number 37 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Before we begin and introduce our witnesses, I would ask the committee to take a look at the budget before you. We need a motion to move and adopt that budget.

Could I have a motion?

Madame Folco moves adoption. Thank you.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: We're very pleased today to have with us witnesses who are helping us with our study on adoption: the federal supports that are in place and that may need to be in place for adoptive parents.

We have with us today a representative from the Adoption Council of Ontario, Pat Convery, the executive director. As well, we have a representative from the New Brunswick Office of the Ombudsman, Child and Youth Advocate, François Levert, senior investigator and legal officer.

For the information of the committee, because we have committee business at the end of our second hour, I will cut this first hour a bit shorter so we can give first- and second-hour witnesses equal amounts of time. We have three witnesses for the second hour. We will probably end this first hour at about 25 or 20 to the hour.

Again, thank you so much for being here. Each one of you has approximately seven minutes. Then we'll have questions when you're finished your presentation.

We'll begin now with Monsieur Levert, *s'il vous plaît*.

Mr. François Levert (Senior Investigator and Legal Officer, New Brunswick Office of the Ombudsman, Child and Youth Advocate): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Madam Chair, Mr. Vice-Chair,

[English]

distinguished members of the committee, good morning.

Allow me to start by conveying the best wishes of New Brunswick's ombudsman and child and youth advocate, Mr. Bernard Richard, who was unable to travel to the nation's capital today. In his stead, I am pleased to have this opportunity, as senior investigator and delegate, to offer insight into some of our advocacy work and findings in the field of adoption in New Brunswick.

My area of expertise is children and youth involved in the criminal justice system. As the office's liaison with provincial community services and corrections, I have frequent encounters with young people subjected to custodial orders and probation undertakings and whose life stories involve shattered attempts at successfully establishing meaningful relationships within a family context.

● (0850)

[Translation]

In this context, my role as child and youth advocate is, by making recommendations, to ensure that the implementation of relevant policies, acts and regulations is consistent with children's rights and guided by their greater interest.

[English]

New Brunswick's adoption system falls under the responsibility of the Department of Social Development. Adoption is governed by the Family Services Act, and the department statistics indicate a consistency in the area of adoption of infants and private adoptions.

There has been a particular interest in international adoptions in recent years. However, department statistics also tell of a more disturbing trend, one in which our office is increasingly called on to intervene. The number of adoptions involving young people with special needs is slowly but consistently on the rise. These young persons are those who have impairments—intellectual, physical, emotional, or behavioural—that limit their ability to participate in the daily activities at home, school, and in their communities.

In 2009-10, for example, the number of families receiving subsidies for adopted children with special needs was up 9% from the previous year. The number of older special needs children placed or adopted is also on a rising curve, increasing to 806 youths from last year's 730. It must be noted that these youths are placed for adoption, not necessarily adopted.

[Translation]

This situation has raised two major concerns: on the one hand, the availability of adoption options and, on the other hand, the fact that, as a result of the current economic situation and accompanying budget realities, the availability of resources to support the needs of these young people and their families is precarious.

[English]

What is disconcerting is that while the increase in the number of child care residential centres is stagnant, the number of foster families is decreasing. Given that we have no indication of the number of potential adoptive parents of youth with special needs, there are even more reasons to be concerned.

Our office is often called upon to advocate on behalf of these young persons who find themselves living where they can—some couch-surfing, others simply living in shelters or on the street. An increasing number of these youth turn to illicit activities to survive and end up in the youth criminal justice system. Sadly, some go as far as sharing with me their appreciation of a closed custody setting, as it provides three meals a day, a roof over their head, an education, and activities that would otherwise not be offered to them.

Children with highly complex needs, those whose treatment requirements are beyond what provincial departments can offer, occasionally find themselves caught in this vicious circle. In some unfortunate cases, parents have to relinquish temporary custody of their child to the care of the province in order to access treatment. This also leads to the breakdown of adoption attempts, and the impact of these failures is measured in costs to the young person, the family, and society as a whole.

The options left, such as group homes, are also limited and not necessarily conducive to the delivery of successful, sustainable, and continuing treatment and services.

[Translation]

In view of these challenges, the wish to respect the distribution of powers is praiseworthy, but how does it measure up against the traumatizing experience of children who, for reasons beyond their control, are denied by opportunity to be adopted for lack of specialized services or as a result of the financial burden associated with clinical treatments?

[English]

In conclusion, I respectfully submit that assessing federal support measures available to adoptive parents and their adopted children should take into account the short-term as well as the long-term positive impact of a national strategy. This would involve a collaborative effort between provincial, territorial, and federal actors to develop and implement an adoption clinical support program for families, children, and youth who require it; a consultation process involving stakeholders, families, and young persons, who may assist in identifying the needs and options required to tackle the challenges that exist within the system; and finally, revisiting or establishing targeted funding transfers to offer increased support to potential or existing adoptive parents who struggle with the challenges and costs of caring for their child.

The well-being of children and youth should serve as a cornerstone for dialogue and concerted efforts between all jurisdictional levels. It would be consistent with our obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Also in that spirit, at the domestic level, New Brunswick's child and youth advocates, in partnership with provincial and territorial counterparts, have been calling for the establishment of a federal commissioner of children's rights.

Perhaps the work accomplished by this committee will lead to findings and recommendations that endorse the provincial and territorial advocates' positions.

[Translation]

Adoption is a path that enables both child and adult to grow, but the experience must be maintained and take into account potential long-term needs. Those needs may emerge later in the child's life, subtly but nevertheless to devastating effect.

● (0855)

[English]

People cannot be forced to adopt, but when incertitude stands in the way of potential adoptive parents' willingness or ability to provide stability, security, and comfort to a wanting child, I think this sends a very strong message.

[Translation]

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

[English]

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak before you this morning.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Levert. It was perfect timing. You had that timed out just perfectly. Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Convery.

Ms. Pat Convery (Executive Director, Adoption Council of Ontario): Okay, I'm feeling the pressure.

The Chair: It's very rare that someone's right in that time span, so don't feel any pressure. We'll let you know.

Ms. Pat Convery: Okay, here we go. Let's start the clock.

I want to thank the committee very much for inviting me to present on this important topic. I am Pat Convery, the executive director of the Adoption Council of Ontario.

ACO is a not-for-profit organization that has existed in Ontario since 1987. Currently, the ACO has a vision of connecting the voices of adoption in Ontario. We do this by providing information, education, and support to all who are touched by adoption in Ontario. The ACO also manages the AdoptOntario program, which is a ministry-funded provincial databank that works to connect families in Ontario with children in Children's Aid Society foster care for whom an adoption plan is being sought.

More information about all our programs is on our websites, and I've provided them in the document.

I've also brought two documents for the committee members that I believe will be helpful in your final planning for presentation of the recommendations. I apologize that I got things mixed up in terms of translations and how many copies.

The first is a *Grow Your Love* book, and I've brought several copies of it. This is a booklet that contains several stories of families in Ontario who have adopted children privately, internationally, and through the Children's Aid Society. This book was part of our adoption awareness campaign for 2010. We asked families to tell their stories, but also highlight how the government could do a better job of supporting families on their journey. At least four of these families have presented to this committee, so I thought this would give you some other information that might be helpful to you.

We also created a website for adoption awareness month, which is www.actiononadoption.ca. It has a fair bit of information about advocacy and what families in Ontario feel is important for federal and provincial governments.

The other document I brought is available in both languages on the Ontario government website. It is *Raising Expectations*. In 2008 Premier Dalton McGuinty appointed an expert panel to study and make recommendations on how the government could support Ontario families involved in infertility and adoption. The panel was headed by David Johnston, now Canada's Governor General.

The panel did a very thorough process. They made recommendations that were extensive but not expensive. I believe that these recommendations are applicable to all provinces in Canada and should be considered by this committee in relation to federal policy and actions. I have brought copies of the executive summary today, but the full report is available on the government website, and I've provided the link. The expert panel had hoped to present, but due to timing of the committee members they weren't able to present today or when they were invited.

Adoption practice in Canada is primarily dictated by provincial legislation and policy. It is primarily administered through provincial child welfare systems. It is my belief that this has been quite effective at the front end of the system. Regional governance related to the executing of processes to prevent child abuse and neglect and protect children in their communities has been strengthened by having a provincial perspective. Child welfare authorities have been able to develop programs that connect well with the need of the community and fit within the police, education, mental health, and court systems that are also dictated by provincial authorities.

However, when children are not able to return to their birth families and they become permanent wards of the government, the priority for their planning must shift. Although provincial authority for the care of children continues, the federal government must take responsibility for ensuring that the planning for these children and youth will lead to the stability of a lifetime-committed family.

Regional and geographic challenges of our provincial system have become barriers to children having the lifetime permanency of a family. Tens of thousands of children are wards of the crown. Across Canada, relatively small proportions of these children are adopted. They represent the most vulnerable youth in our society.

I know that this committee has already heard information to support acceptance of the fact that outcomes for youth who "age out of care" at age 18 or 19 are concerning. The consequences of unsupported and premature launch into adulthood for a group of young people who have already suffered significant trauma in their lives are predictably not good. Foster care is a temporary solution, and these children need the stability of a lifetime, legally committed family.

I have four recommendations on system support that I believe the federal government and this committee should consider. The first two relate primarily to support for families.

● (0900)

Number one is creating an interprovincial adoption protocol. Again, I know this committee has heard information on this. We need to view all children in Canadian foster care who are not able to return to their birth family as children of the country. We need to view all families in Canada who express interest in adoption as potential resources for providing our children with the lifetime committed family they need.

Currently, as a result of our provincial child welfare system, families are challenged to adopt interprovincially or even within a province in some cases. While each province has a high-level model of assessment and training of adoptive families, the province is not always willing to accept a family as being adopt-ready or approved when they move to another province. Families are often informed that they must repeat the extensive screening process. There are few mechanisms in place for sharing of family resources between provinces, with the limited exception of Canada's waiting children. Families often find that it is easier to adopt internationally than within their own country.

Secondly, we need financial incentives to support adoptive families. Again, I know this committee has heard significant information, but I would like to just briefly touch on it.

The first deals with changes to the employment insurance program. Our employment insurance program currently discriminates against adoptive families. I'm aware that you've heard this information. I'm hoping that this is something that will be changed in view of the fact that we have significant information that would suggest that with the extensive literature, research, and experience on attachment, parenting of special needs children, and adjustment of children to new environments, it speaks so clearly to the fact that adoptive families need the same or more time to help children not born to them transition into their families.

Secondly, tax benefits for adoptive expenses represent another opportunity lost if the federal government does not take advantage of this positive incentive. Currently, families who incur adoption expenses can claim them on their income tax in the year they adopt a child. We can come back to that one.

My other two recommendations.... One is the creation of a federal data bank. Little is known about who the children and youth are who are in permanent care. Canada has not done a good job of gathering this information. This has been a huge barrier to practice planning and supporting appropriate allocation of funds to permanency programs. We need to know who these children are, and I believe that the technology is available to support the tracking of these children. The AdoptOntario program, as an example, is supported by a sophisticated data bank that, when fully operational in Ontario, will support the tracking of children and youth. I believe that this would be helpful to look at in terms of the federal level.

Finally.... I'm out of time? Okay. I'm sorry.

The Chair: That's all right. Why don't you quickly mention it.

Ms. Pat Convery: Again, training of child welfare professionals in permanency planning competency.... I believe a major barrier to permanency planning for youth in care is that child welfare professionals are relatively unfamiliar with models of child-specific family recruitment that have been successful in other countries. Certainly I believe that we have models in place.

Currently, Adoption Council of Canada, Adoption Council of Ontario, and the North American Council of Adoptable Children are working on developing curriculums that would support adoption professionals in knowing the work that needs to be done, as well as providing supports to mental health and educational professionals, and for families who have adopted.

The Chair: Great. Thank you very much.

Ms. Pat Convery: Thank you, and I'm sorry.

The Chair: No, don't apologize. It's important that we have this information.

We're going to try to get in two rounds of questions. In the first round we'll do a five-minute round. Just for the witnesses, that will include questions and answers. Again, I'll be timing. If someone takes five minutes to ask you a question, you won't have a lot of time to answer. We're going to try to keep it to that.

We'll begin with Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much. That was very good and helpful testimony for us.

Just so I understand who your organizations are, do you both work for the provincial government? Are you both arms of the provincial government? New Brunswick is....

• (0905)

Mr. François Levert: Yes. We answer to the Legislative Assembly, so we're technically independent from government, yes.

Mr. Michael Savage: Are you part of the Department of Community Services or...?

Mr. François Levert: Not at all. Ombudsman and child and youth advocates should be separate offices, but due to budget restraints, the same person is holding both mandates. We are completely independent from government, although under the CYA, the Child and Youth Advocate Act, our practice is to work very closely and collaboratively, to a certain extent, with provincial departments, because in the end we share the same goals.

Mr. Michael Savage: I understand.

Ms. Convery, tell me your relationship, if any—

Ms. Pat Convery: The Adoption Council of Ontario is a not-for-profit organization. We have provincial funding for our AdoptOntario program, but otherwise we're totally separate.

Mr. Michael Savage: In terms of the situation we're dealing with, we've heard there are more than 30,000 children waiting for adoption in Canada. Is that a number that makes sense to both of you? Do you have a sense of how many there are in your provinces?

Ms. Pat Convery: We have 30,000 children in Canada who are permanent wards of the government. That means there is no more work being done with their birth family to reunify them and that their legal parent is the government.

Some of those children may have permanency plans, but from my perspective we could view all those children as being potentially adoptable.

Mr. François Levert: It sounds reasonable, from the statistics I've seen in New Brunswick.

Mr. Michael Savage: On the financial incentives, I want to give you an opportunity, Ms. Convery. You mentioned EI. One of the recommendations that somebody made last week was to forget about whether this falls under maternal or parental and set up a separate adoption leave system under EI, which makes sense to me.

I'd like your point of view on that. I'd also like to give you a chance to talk a little about the tax incentive side, which we rushed you through because of time limitations. You were talking about how currently you can claim it in the year of adoption.

Ms. Pat Convery: This would certainly seem like a fairly simple cost-effective solution.

In many of our provinces we have a private adoption system as well as a public adoption system, which is a huge benefit to the province. When they're able to, families who are motivated and interested in adoption will cover the costs by having private adoption professionals do their home study, attend private training programs, and cover some of the costs.

The actual costs can't be done as a tax benefit until the year they adopt, which could be several years later. It seems reasonable that as an incentive to families to consider becoming ready to adopt—because we need them more than they need us—this would make it more reflective of the actual amount families fund out and allow them to do it in the year they incur those costs. I think that would be a huge benefit.

Mr. Michael Savage: If it were to be retroactive by eight years it would help my sister in Ontario, who has adopted two children.

Does it make sense that we have this separate adoption benefit under the EI system, that we set up a whole new system?

Ms. Pat Convery: Yes, absolutely. Again, it's simple. It's just as shocking that there is such a discrimination against families who adopt.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Levert, can you talk a bit about special needs children and how they're dealt with in New Brunswick? A lot of them would come under your discretion, I would assume.

Mr. François Levert: Of course, we're at the receiving end. When there are problems, that's where families or youths themselves will end up.

There is certainly no shortage of willingness on the part of the department to help out, namely through subsidized adoptions. The problem is when the needs become so complex that the expertise is not available within the province. Unfortunately, then we have to send some children out of province, even out of the country, to Maine namely, at the Spurwink Treatment Centre.

That is extremely costly for the province, from a financial perspective. Obviously it's costly for the family as well, in terms of emotional costs and even for transit back and forth. We're looking at an approximate cost of \$500,000 per child that the province has to bear.

We are working in New Brunswick on a consultation for what we call a centre of excellence, and maybe I'll have time to elaborate through another question. We're looking at options in the way of reducing costs for keeping children with special needs in their communities, in their families, as much as possible. I think it's a well-known fact that the family environment is conducive to rehabilitation and successful treatment.

• (0910)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Madame Beaudin, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning to you. Thank you for being here.

First I have a question for you, Mr. Levert. Can you tell us how many adoptions there were in New Brunswick this year, for example, and internationally?

Mr. François Levert: You want to know the number of adoptions? Yes, of course. Thank you for the question.

I have some figures that were provided to us by the department. Among young children, as it were, we're talking about 13 or 14 adoptions a year, on average. As for international adoptions, there is one interesting fact here. There was an 84% increase in the number of adoptions over last year, from 38 to 70. However, with respect to the mentioned cases of children with special needs, we're told that the figure rose from 284 to 309 among the youngest group and from 730 to 806 for children 12 years of age and over. Based on the figures we have, we cannot say at this time whether they were successfully placed or whether they are awaiting placement. Unfortunately, I can't provide a specific answer to that.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: So you have no post-adoption service to assess or monitor the children?

Mr. François Levert: There is a post-adoption service in the province. Of course, to my knowledge, those services operate relatively well, or very well, but in some instances where the children have special needs to which, for one reason or another, we cannot respond in the family context, once again for various reasons

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: All right. I'm going to continue. The speaking time allotted to us is so short and I have another important question.

Mr. François Levert: Please go ahead.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Currently, as an adoptive parent, a person may claim a federal income tax credit for eligible expenses. You're aware of that?

Mr. François Levert: Of course.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: There is a credit for certain expenses actually related to the adoption, that is to say before and after: legal fees, travelling expenses, and so on. Would you like tax credits to apply to other expenses, such as all matters pertaining to post-adoption services, that is to say to help children with special needs, when parents have to call upon major professional resources? Would you like that to be added to what's already being offered by the federal government?

Mr. François Levert: Are you speaking to me?

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Yes, or perhaps Ms. Convery can answer me.

[English]

Ms. Pat Convery: Certainly that would be a huge benefit. Every province is looking at how we can provide post-adoption subsidies and trying to determine what they would look like. Something like that is a reasonable incentive. It would be wonderful for families to have incentives at the federal level.

[Translation]

Mr. François Levert: If I may add a response to that—

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Yes, yes.

Mr. François Levert: This may be more related to the parents, but it would also be good for there to be an investment in a strategy between the various levels of government. That would be allocated funding, and that's what I mentioned—

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: You would ultimately like there to be better cooperation with the federal government.

Mr. François Levert: That's it.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: All right, perfect.

Would you like adoptive parents to be considered on the same footing as biological parents and to be entitled to the same services? A number of people have requested the 15 additional weeks of parental leave and that maternity weeks be added as well, to make up 50 weeks even if it's only leave. Would you like that?

[English]

Ms. Pat Convery: Yes, it's discrimination for them not to have that.

● (0915)

[Translation]

Mr. François Levert: That would definitely be a measure that could make these parents, who are facing certain challenges, more effective in meeting their children's needs.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Perfect.

Do I have any time left?

[English]

The Chair: You have less than one minute.

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: I need five.

I want to understand the adoption process in New Brunswick. Are there services? How does that work when a child can be adopted or when parents want to do it, on the one hand? On the other hand, when the children come from foster families, is leave already offered to adoptive parents or is that different from an international adoption, for example?

Mr. François Levert: That's a very good question. I must confess I don't know the details. As I mentioned at the outset, when people knock on our door, nothing is working. So we of course have to trace the path, the background to the file.

However, I know that the adoption system in general is very well structured. Services are offered, at the pre-adoption, adoption and post-adoption stages. I believe support is provided through social workers and grants, as necessary. In the case of international adoptions, I believe there is a similar monitoring process, but it is somewhat different from that for an adoption in the province.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Perfect, thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Martin, you have five minutes.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you very much for coming today and putting some very viable and good information on the table.

Mr. Levert, your suggestion that we have a federal commissioner of children's rights would be a good thing to explore, given that we've signed on to international covenants on the rights of children and have a responsibility, I believe, as a country to live up to the spirit of that agreement. Maybe you can talk a little bit with us about how that would work, the federal commissioner of children's rights.

Mr. François Levert: Thank you for the question.

The Canadian Council of Provincial and Territorial Child and Youth Advocates has in fact been advocating for the creation of such a commissioner. If you are familiar somewhat at the international level, France, for example—whom we have dealt with in trying to model what a commissioner could look like—has its own republic commissioner for children and youth. This person would likely be tackling issues that have national challenges that fall under the federal jurisdiction, issues such as youth criminal justice reforms.

We know that Bill C-4 is before the House at this point in time. Maybe provincial child and youth advocates can—if I can use that example—weigh in in terms of being the custodian or managers of the justice system within their own respective jurisdictions. However, the spirit of the act and the whole functioning of the judicial act is done across the board uniformly.

So a federal commissioner would certainly be useful in weighing on some issues that have a broader impact across all jurisdictions. How it would work specifically—certainly in issues such as this one—is this person could be weighing in on the rights and interests of all children across the spectrum. Other issues can include anything related that falls within health concerns under the federal jurisdiction or any international relationships with other countries in terms of adoption or otherwise.

I think that the Convention on the Rights of the Child—if I may use that specific instrument—has a broad impact on a number of programs that are offered through our social safety net. We as provincial advocates have limited jurisdictions. For example, we do not have any jurisdiction over judges, over lawyers, over private matters, over legal representatives, over medical experts. The commissioner's job would likely be one who could exercise his role through the power of recommendations such as we do: guiding, assisting the federal government in either developing or improving public policy.

That is mainly one of the roles we play in the province. I spoke to this effect, about working collaboratively with provincial departments in improving their system and being creative and thinking outside the box, if I may use the expression, in terms of developing public policy.

● (0920)

Mr. Tony Martin: Ms. Convery, you again—somewhat flowing from that—spoke about the regional barriers that become problems in many ways to adoption. You talked about adopting a protocol across the system.

You also made a comment, which I find interesting, that sometimes it's easier to adopt internationally than it is domestically. Perhaps you could expand on that a little bit.

Ms. Pat Convery: Certainly. That's the experience of many families, and part of it is that internationally with other countries, we seem to have guidelines and protocols. We have more legislation, even, that guides that.

So interprovincially, in my experience—I've worked in three provinces in Canada—each province has an extremely good assessment model, and most of them have a really good training model. But to move within provinces.... Again, there is just not the federal leadership in developing a protocol, developing guidelines to support that.

So when we have families—we see it certainly with the military families—who are really at a loss in terms of.... I just had a call the other day from a family who will be in the military here in Ontario for six more months. Should they get started here, should they wait until they move? And this is a family who is potentially a good resource for children in foster care. That's their interest in adopting. And it's a year out of their life when it just seems that we should be able to work within that.

So for children who are in a province where the best family may even be a family member in another province, we can't easily support those transitions. And when families move from one province to another and have gone through that process, if we could look at federal leadership in developing some protocols between provinces, that would give us a lot more resources for children in care.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll go to Mr. Watson, please.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today at our study of federal supports for adoption.

So many questions, so little time. I will ask you to be as brief as possible, and it will allow me to get through as many as possible.

Mr. Levert, you said there's a particular interest in international adoptions, at least with respect to New Brunswick. Do you know why?

Mr. François Levert: I'm basing my comment on statistics being raised to 84%. Why? Perhaps the adoption process is easier than domestic. I've heard nightmare stories within the domestic adoption system.

Mr. Jeff Watson: The number of foster families is declining in New Brunswick. Do you know why?

Mr. François Levert: Perhaps the challenge is the lack of resources.

Mr. Jeff Watson: What are the five- or ten-year trends in the number of children in foster care? Can you tell me, statistically, with respect to the province of New Brunswick? Is that going up, down, is it static? Does the province know?

Mr. François Levert: Statistically, I would probably base my answer on the past five years. From what I know—and I'm not a statistics expert—I think the average is slowly on the rise.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Are these statistics collected by the—

Mr. François Levert: Social development, yes. They were provided every.... If I may, just quickly, every year we have a report that comes out through our office, called "State of Our Children and Youth". These statistics appear in this report, which is available online and provided by the department.

Mr. Jeff Watson: So the province tracks or you can statistically judge the trend for adoption as well, not just the number of kids in care.

Mr. François Levert: Until the file is closed, until the adoption is complete, so that means we have no statistics on adoptions that have failed, and that is of concern.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Do they track the number of kids exiting foster care?

Mr. François Levert: They probably do, but I'm not able to answer that question.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Can you tell me what the average cost of adoption is in New Brunswick?

Mr. François Levert: That's a good question. I know what the cost of incarceration is—that's my area of expertise—but I can't tell you the cost of adoption.

Mr. Jeff Watson: What is the cost of incarceration?

Mr. François Levert: It's approximately \$115,000 per child.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you very much. That could be interesting to know.

You've recommended a national strategy. Would you agree that the focus of that would be moving children from foster care into adoption—

Mr. François Levert: It would be the hope.

Mr. Jeff Watson: —and raising the capacity of other jurisdictions in how they deliver their services?

Mr. François Levert: The best practice is sharing, I guess.

● (0925)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Is there a province that stands out in terms of best practices, in your opinion?

No? Okay.

A voice: New Brunswick, of course.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Many will say Quebec.

Ms. Convery, I have a number of questions for you.

How many children's aid societies are there in Ontario?

Ms. Pat Convery: There are 53 children's aid societies.

Mr. Jeff Watson: There's no centralized agency with respect to adoption in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Pat Convery: No, and one of the recommendations of the expert panel was that there be a provincial centralized agency.

Mr. Jeff Watson: So there are 53 separate jurisdictions in Ontario alone delivering adoption.

Ms. Pat Convery: Yes.

Mr. Jeff Watson: How many children are in foster care in Ontario? Do we know?

Ms. Pat Convery: We have about 17,000 children in foster care, and that number is declining, so it's less this year than the year before. It's not a huge number, but certainly that's....

Mr. Jeff Watson: What is the trend with respect to adoption? How many?

Ms. Pat Convery: At this point, about 8,500 of those 17,000 children are crown wards. In terms of adoptions, since the release of the expert panel report, our adoptions went up 21% last year. We had about 1,000 adoptions. The year before 869 adoptions were started. We also are seeing an increase in other permanency planning options, which is guardianship and kinship care, but we certainly still have a huge number of children.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Would you like to see this committee recommend that the relevant ministers, federal, provincial, and territorial, meet to begin a dialogue on a national strategy?

Ms. Pat Convery: Absolutely, yes.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Ms. Convery, you brought up EI benefits. Parental leave, as we understand it, is not just in terms of policy; jurisprudence has weighed in on this as well. Parental leave is for issues of care and attachment. The maternity benefit was established in recognition of unique physiological characteristics of biological parenting—birth, if you will. That's why, for example, a mother who gives birth to a child but gives up that child for adoption gets the maternity benefit.

Presumably, to establish a similar adoption transition leave, for lack of a better name for it—that's what I'm calling it—we'd have to establish unique psychological or other characteristics for adoptive parenting, not attachment issues related to the child. Can you tell us some of the challenges an adoptive mother might face that would require additional time?

The Chair: Be very brief, if you could. Thank you.

Ms. Pat Convery: I was going to say, very quickly, that there's plenty of literature that would support that, certainly in terms of the fact that adoptions often happen within a very short period of time. So it means leaving work within, sometimes, a couple of weeks. Then often there are multiple adoptions. You would adopt a sibling group of children. The children themselves have needs. There's plenty of literature on the impact on the child of the transition and the impact on the family and attachment.

Mr. Jeff Watson: What are the impacts on the mom? That was the question.

The Chair: You'll still get a chance.

I think we have time for a very quick three-minute round. We'll try to get as many in as possible. It will be basically one question and one answer in three minutes.

Madam Minna, did you have a question you wanted to ask?

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning.

I wanted to focus a little bit on the crown wards, the older kids, as they age out, I guess. I'm remembering a consultation I was part of in 1994. We were doing a social security review, and in Toronto we had presentations by young people who essentially looked at us and said, "You are our mothers and fathers. We don't have anybody else."

Do you kick your kids out at age 16? No, you don't. Well, those kids are kicked out.

How many crown wards are there in that age group in Ontario? Do you know?

Ms. Pat Convery: In Ontario, 5,000 of our 8500 children are over the age of 13, and that's why I see them as being the most vulnerable group. I think other provinces, from what I've seen of their stats, would reflect that as well.

Hon. Maria Minna: How do you see this? Do you see this as a provincial jurisdiction, where the province needs to ensure that there are families or that they keep them on for longer, or is it a federal-provincial mix?

Ms. Pat Convery: I think we need federal leadership to have policy that directs that every child who is a permanent ward of a province has to have permanency planning that is continuous. Many of those children aren't even being considered. So you need recruitment strategies for families. Resources need to be put in place to prepare families and find families and find permanency for those children.

Hon. Maria Minna: If families are not found, at what age should they be aged out in terms of real support?

Ms. Pat Convery: Well, certainly we would recommend a higher age, and I think every province has talked about that being raised to the twenties, which is more reflective of youth in our society.

Hon. Maria Minna: I see.

Mr. François Levert: I think in New Brunswick the act provides for up to age 21, actually, in certain circumstances.

Hon. Maria Minna: It is 21. So they've already upped theirs.

● (0930)

The Chair: Is there anything else you want to add? If not....

Hon. Maria Minna: You mentioned that there were 53 adoption agencies in Ontario. Is there no central agency for adoption in the province of Ontario?

Ms. Pat Convery: No. We have a portable system in that we have one adoption home study assessment tool that is used throughout the province in the private, public, and international systems and one training program. So we do have a fair bit of collaboration. Each individual agency is provincially funded.

Hon. Maria Minna: There's not a provincial body that coordinates.

Ms. Pat Convery: Not that coordinates that.

Hon. Maria Minna: I see. That's interesting.

The Chair: When you talk about these 5,000 children who are 13 years old and older who are not being placed, some of them may have disabilities, such as fetal alcohol syndrome and other kinds of illnesses. Would it be correct to say that they grow up, they become adults who are disabled, who are living in poverty, and it definitely affects all of us and ends up under federal jurisdiction because of the consequences? Is that accurate?

Ms. Pat Convery: Yes.

Mr. François Levert: Yes, it is.

Ms. Pat Convery: Again, the expert panel report, as far as Ontario goes, really did a lot of work on highlighting that issue and giving information about that, which I think would be helpful.

Hon. Maria Minna: Sorry, what was the expert panel report?

Ms. Pat Convery: Yes. It's *Raising Expectations*. This is the expert panel report on infertility and adoption.

Hon. Maria Minna: Right, of course. I remember now. My apologies.

The Chair: Yes, that's a good one, if we could get that one translated and brought to all of us.

Ms. Pat Convery: It's online in French.

The Chair: It is. Good.

All right, Mr. Vellacott, you have three minutes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions will go mostly to Pat, and they're along the lines of claiming adoption expenses. In particular, I understand that in the domestic adoption scene, with the \$10,909 allowable, in terms of the deduction.... It's under that, significantly under that, in terms of the domestic. It may be well over that for the international. That's my understanding. But it is under the \$10,909, what people claim for a domestic adoption scenario.

I was wondering if in fact you had some kind of scenario where you allowed people, post-adoption.... If they have special needs, with fetal alcohol syndrome or attachment issues and those kinds of things, and they've had to travel for that and pay for that, and maybe go to the next province, as some of the witnesses said they did, would that be something we could look at seriously, at least up to that \$10,909? Or maybe we want to do a separate file altogether? We could tweak it and adjust the regulations on that. Is that something that might be workable?

Ms. Pat Convery: I think so, particularly if it was something that could be claimed on a yearly basis. It would be expenses incurred in that year related to specific activities, and the example would be post-adoption where you have special needs. Children who come out of foster care, their special needs are identified. They're often identified prior to placement, so families know they're taking on these challenges. But there just aren't resources available. So that would be a huge benefit to adoptive families.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: So with adoption expenses, you're not just locked into those precise things, like "year of" once the sign-off is over. But it might allow a window of time, retroacting back a ways and going forward some, until you've either used up your \$10,909 or we're into a separate envelope for this. But that's something the federal government is already involved in.

I'll just sign off my time. I want to pass it to our well-beloved, special adopted son, Jeff Watson. I know he has done a lot of research, and he knows this stuff first-hand. I affirm his discrimination comment, but I think we have to be careful. The judgments have been clear in the courts that it's some biological issues as opposed to the others, so I don't want to be calling it discrimination; I'd prefer other things. I would be supportive of some other kind of fund, using a different name.

Jeff?

Mr. Jeff Watson: On the idea of a national strategy, would you be recommending the provision of data to the federal government—to a department like HRSDC—to do research, monitor trends, measure outcomes, and that kind of thing?

Mr. François Levert: Yes.

Ms. Pat Convery: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Jeff Watson: That's it. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): First of all, thank you for coming to inform us about this entire situation.

I'm going to get right to the point. I believe you are two individuals with very important responsibilities, each in your own field, in your respective provinces. Mr. Levert, you mentioned that consideration should be given to the fact that there are two levels of responsibility, of jurisdiction; Mr. Convery, you raised the point that there should be leadership, but that it should come from the federal government.

Among the recommendations that you're making to us here, the recommendation that employment insurance should be used to improve parental leave often comes up. We have been working toward that end for a good long time. The only province that has currently managed to improve it and to extend maternity and parental leave to 50 weeks is Quebec. Quebec managed to do that when it repatriated that jurisdiction.

Wouldn't that be a desirable prospect for the other provinces?

• (0935)

[English]

Ms. Pat Convery: I wouldn't know enough about that part of employment insurance to have an opinion. I'm sorry.

It's something I think should be looked at. Quebec has shown leadership in that area and on their focus on children.

[Translation]

Mr. François Levert: To my mind, to the extent Quebec's example can be used at the national level, there is definitely reason to sit down and explore the mechanisms that have been put in place and the process adopted to repatriate this jurisdiction, as you say, but also ultimately to improve the welfare of the children and the families.

Mr. Yves Lessard: One of the major concerns is that fewer families are currently adopting. You were asked that question earlier, and you offered some hypotheses. Are there any incentives to adoption that you think the federal government should offer in order to encourage families that might be able to adopt a child?

[English]

Mr. François Levert: Did you want to go first?

Ms. Pat Convery: It's up to you.

[Translation]

Mr. François Levert: I'm going to take the liberty of answering first before I forget what I was going to say.

Financial incentives are always cited as a way of meeting the needs of the child or the family, or both.

In our recent consultations of families of adoptive parents, one of the factors that emerged and that does not come under a financial statute is the need for practical support with regard to the programs offered. Does this mean a reduction or a tax credit? Perhaps.

However, to the extent the money or funding is provided indirectly by creating support systems, clinical or otherwise, I believe that the parents of young people, particularly those with special needs, very much acknowledge the value of these programs that enable them to enjoy certain advantages.

This is also a long-term investment, unlike a credit that is granted every year. I say that without downplaying the importance of the tax credit. These kinds of programs would be welcome, to the extent that the child could be kept in a family environment, while enjoying a social safety net.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Did you want to add something very briefly, Ms. Convery?

Ms. Pat Convery: Briefly, I would say that in actual fact there are a lot of families in Canada who are interested in adoption. I think another federal initiative in supporting the provinces is around recruitment awareness and education of families. We need to find families for the children who need them.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have, unfortunately, as we have another set of witnesses coming in.

I want to tell you again how much we appreciate you being here and the information you've provided.

We will suspend for one minute to bring in the next set of witnesses.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (0940)

The Chair: Order.

In our second hour—which will only be going until 9:30, because we have committee business—we are pleased to have with us via video conference Susan Smith, program and project director from the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.

We are also very pleased to have with us Cindy Xavier. Welcome. Cindy is from the Adoption Support Centre of Saskatchewan.

We have also representation from the province of New Brunswick, and we're glad to have you here as well. They are from the New Brunswick Adoption Foundation. We have Suzanne Kingston, executive director, and Bernard Paulin, a board member.

Ladies and gentlemen, each one of your groups will have approximately seven minutes to present.

Can you hear me, Ms. Smith?

Ms. Susan Smith (Program and Project Director, Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute): Yes, I can.

The Chair: We have a very short amount of time. I'd like to keep it under seven minutes per presentation.

We will begin with Ms. Xavier, from the Adoption Support Centre of Saskatchewan.

Ms. Cindy Xavier (Executive Director, Adoption Support Centre of Saskatchewan): Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I believe that we all have the same philosophical viewpoint when it comes to supporting parents. Fundamentally, when parents are properly supported, their children have a better opportunity of thriving in their given environment. It does not matter whether a child comes into a family by birth or through adoption or foster care, parents and guardians of these children all need to have the resources and tools to meet the needs of the child.

Today we have outlined three important areas in which we believe the federal government could play a role in supporting adoptive parents, and in turn the children who come into their families.

Firstly, we ask that the committee make a recommendation to amend the Employment Insurance Act and Canada Labour Code to provide adoptive parents with the same benefits that birth or natural parents enjoy. We are not asking for adoptive parents to have access to the maternity benefits program of 15 paid weeks, as was done in the cases of *Schafer v. Canada* and *Tomasson v. Canada*. Nor are we asking for a 15-week extension for the parental leave program. What we are asking is that the federal government recognize the needs of adoptive parents to be as valid and substantial as a parent who gives birth. We are asking the committee to recommend creating an adoption leave benefit program for the primary caregiver of a child who comes into a family by adoption.

We feel that the current employment legislation discriminates against adoptive parents. Adoptive parents face many challenges in their journey to build a family. These challenges can have significant mental, physical, and emotional effects for the adoptive parents. However, these are largely misunderstood by the general public. Post-adoption depression is well documented but rarely talked about, much like post-partum depression was in the past. Adoptive parents face numerous challenges in meeting the medical, emotional, and psychological needs of children who may come to them having had severely damaging experiences. Some of these parents' testimonies are in the supporting document that we have provided to you.

We want to see families succeed, and we want to minimize adoption disruptions that further traumatize children and their families. We believe that an adoption leave benefit would provide adoptive parents with more opportunity to successfully parent their children.

Secondly, we are asking the committee to review the current information processes and legislation around citizenship and immigration for adoptive families. We are asking for an amendment to Bill C-37 to allow adoptees who are Canadian citizens born abroad to pass their Canadian citizenship status on to their children. This is a freedom and right enjoyed by every other Canadian citizen who gives birth and passes their Canadian citizenship on to their biological children.

We also ask that the committee recommend a review of the current information and delivery through Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Navigating the website is confusing. There is no information for adoptive parents regarding the status of countries where adoptive parents may look to adopt. Accessing consistent and concise information through the call centre is difficult. This is compounded when the adoptive parents speak another language and French or English is a new language to them.

Thirdly, but most importantly, we urge the committee to recommend that the federal government establish a higher level of service to children in care by mandating that provinces consult with the children in their care when alternative family options such as adoption are being considered. Every province across Canada is experiencing a child welfare crisis. Foster care overcrowding has been the priority in reports, reviews, and discussion papers across Canada. In 2008, the Saskatchewan children's advocate report, under the direction of Marv Bernstein, highlighted many of the critical issues for the children who reside in the Saskatchewan foster care system. Since that time, we have had a number of child deaths of the children in care in Saskatchewan. Children who cannot return to their birth family or community are still remaining in foster care for a far longer time than necessary. The longer children are in care before they may be joined with their adoptive family minimizes the chances of success and increases the risks of adoption disruption.

Children have a right to have a voice. Children have a right to have a say in what they want when returning to their birth family or community is not an option. Children have a right to timely permanency and stability when other options are not possible.

Thank you for your time.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the New Brunswick Adoption Foundation.

I'm not sure, but is Mr. Paulin or Ms. Kingston presenting?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Paulin (Board Member, New Brunswick Adoption Foundation): I'm going to start.

Good morning, Madam Chair. The two of us will be making the presentation, so I'll be quite brief.

Back in 2001, I was at the department. Today I am a volunteer. In 2001, we had 1,200 children under our care, 800 of whom were legally available for adoption. There was an eight-year waiting period for parents wishing to adopt young children. The number continued to increase. The idea arose of establishing the New Brunswick Adoption Foundation.

[English]

The New Brunswick Adoption Foundation was created in 2002 to raise public awareness. Senator Erminie Cohen became the chair of the foundation. She became the best advocate for children in care waiting for an adoptive family. A major public awareness campaign was launched under her leadership.

Since our creation, the adoption rate in New Brunswick has increased by 400%. Prior to 2002 there were only 25 kids on average adopted in New Brunswick. Now there have been over 800 children placed in adoptive homes.

I must say that at the time I was DM of the social development department, the political arm of the department was quite on board. And every time Premier Lord gave his annual state address, he gave an update on adoption. Also, Senator Percy Mockler talked about adoption at every opportunity he had. It was a priority from the top down.

Despite the success, we have come to realize that more is needed. There are still hundreds of children in care in New Brunswick, many of whom are reaching adulthood without permanent family.

I want to tell you a short story. There was a little seven-year-old boy who was asked to make a wish list a month before Christmas. At the top of his list was permanent parents. He had all kinds of hockey equipment. A year later, a home had not been found. He was quite disappointed. He said, "What about if I shorten my list? I would give all of my hockey equipment to have permanent parents. That's what I want." Now, obviously, he's been adopted.

If you think for a moment about your own experience as a child or young person, and even as an adult, it's difficult to imagine how any of us would be where we are today without the love and support of our family. But we have kids in the system who don't have these kinds of opportunities.

What is needed? Families who have adopted, or are considering adoption and are waiting to adopt, need peer-to-peer support.

[Translation]

I repeat: these families need peer-to-peer support.

[English]

The New Brunswick Adoption Foundation is about to embark on a pilot project, a peer-to-peer support network for adoptive families. The aim of the pilot is to set up a program in the Moncton region of New Brunswick. Through the work of an experienced adoptive parent as coordinator, a volunteer network of experienced adoptive parents will be developed as well. The aim is to provide support to people considering adoption or in the process of adopting, and to families who have adopted.

Research on similar programs has illustrated not only that people value the support, but also that the support can proactively prevent disruptions to adoptions. As one parent who participated in a similar program stated, "For the first time I have come close to considering disruption. I am fighting to keep this adoption viable, and that is due to the support my parent-to-parent network provides. Otherwise, it would be too tough."

Our vision is to expand this network throughout New Brunswick. The adoption foundation will play a big role. Although this program is based on similar models in the U.S. and British Columbia, it is also inspired by the family resource centre programs funded through Health Canada's community action program for children, or CAPC, which I imagine some of you know.

We recommend that a fund for a similar program be available for communities across Canada.

I will turn now to Suzanne.

● (0950)

The Chair: You have just a minute and a half, Ms. Kingston.

Ms. Suzanne Kingston (Executive Director, New Brunswick Adoption Foundation): Okay, I'll talk quickly.

Adopted children and their families need access to services. Children who are yet to be adopted need these services available to increase their chances of adoption.

Given that so many kids who are in care have very special needs, which other witnesses have referred to, there are three areas around those support systems.

Families need funds to pay for services. Although subsidized adoption programs can help, concerns and challenges often emerge post-adoption. We need federal funds to allow for those subsidized adoption programs to be more flexible and responsive.

We need specialized services. Similar to what other witnesses have referred to, often the services are not available in their communities, in their provinces, or even in their countries. So we need to make sure that there are services available for families who have kids who have been in care. Fetal alcohol syndrome is not uncommon; attachment issues are typical. Identify the key special concerns that many of those children have.

We need adoption-competent professionals. Professionals working with children and their families need to understand the unique needs of children who have been adopted. Federal funds to provide adoption competency training is needed.

Third is a bill of rights for children in care. The system is no place to grow up. Despite this, thousands of children across Canada are growing up without a parent advocating for them. Although the best interests of the child theoretically guides the workings of the systems that affect children, we know from experience that too often systems move too slowly.

A published editorial last year in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* states:

Children who have a government as their parent, no matter how well intentioned or necessary that arrangement is, are often damaged by it.

Children in care need special protection. We would like to propose the development of a bill of rights for children in care. We are recommending that this be led by the federal government. For example, we envision rights that state the right to a permanent family, that children are safe in care, and that the processes work quickly.

Four, we also are asking for federal leadership on interprovincial adoption.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you.

I know we had to rush through, but I think all of us have this presentation. It definitely will be part of our report. So thank you very much for preparing that.

We'll now go to our last presenter.

We have Susan Smith speaking to us. Are you actually in Raleigh right now, in North Carolina, Ms. Smith?

Ms. Susan Smith: Right, I'm in North Carolina. Hello.

The Chair: Good. Well, it's really good to have you with us here today.

Can you please give us your presentation? Thank you.

Ms. Susan Smith: Okay. Thank you very much for asking me to speak. This is a subject I've done research on most of my career and it's very dear to my heart.

I work now for the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, and recently authored a paper that's on our website.

Do you have the powerpoint slides that were made as a handout for you all?

The Chair: For us to hand them out, they have to be in both official languages, and I don't think we have them translated at this point.

Ms. Susan Smith: Okay.

When you get them, there is a link to this paper, which gives a lot more detail about what I'm speaking on today.

I wanted to make four primary points in the few minutes that I have. One is that in the U.S., as in Canada, child welfare is a matter of family law, and has therefore been left pretty much to the states. But at the same time, the federal government, beginning in the 1970s, when they realized that more and more kids were coming into foster care and growing up in foster care and that there needed to be some reform to address this problem, began taking various measures to promote adoptions from foster care. Today, adoptions from the child welfare system are approximately two-thirds of all the adoptions in the U.S. not by step-parents and individual families. So they very much represent the lion's share of adoptions in the U.S.

There's a graph in the handout, which I'm just going to hold up, that shows that in 1988 we had 15,000 adoptions across the U.S. from foster care. Today it's 57,000. So in a matter of a couple of decades, adoptions from foster care more than tripled in the United States. This was the result of a number of different initiatives the federal government took. The first one was an interstate compact to encourage interstate cooperation in foster care and adoptive placements across state lines. This was something that states had to choose to participate in, but about ten years after it began, and by the 1970s, all states had agreed to participate in this interstate kind of agreement.

Another thing the federal government did was to set the expectation that after children were in foster care for a certain amount of time with no progress, the state would work toward a permanent family for these children through adoption, and they provided incentives to states to increase their adoptions from foster care.

They have done other things to provide supports, but even though we've done a great job in getting more and more kids adopted, another thing that is really needed in our country is supports to families after adoption, and some of the speakers have already referred to that.

Today we know that outcomes for adoptions from care are positive, that over 90% of adoptive families are satisfied with their adoption experience and would choose to adopt a child again knowing what they now know. But at the same time, there are many challenges for these families. We know from a very large national study of children, both adopted and not adopted, that about 45% of children adopted from foster care are going to need ongoing mental health services. And it's very hard for many of these families to find help, because in the usual scheme of things, mental health professionals look at parents as being responsible for issues their children are having. Any family adopting a child who comes with severe neglect and abuse issues from their past will have to confront these challenges. So there needs to be specialized help to help families understand the needs of their children and understand how to address them.

Finally, I think many times this makes people nervous, and they think, "How can we afford this?" We know that adoption is cost-effective. There have been studies in the U.S. that show that the government, on average, saves \$143,000 per child for every child who's adopted out of foster care. And the numbers of children in

foster care have gone down by about 100,000 over the last ten years in this country, largely due to increases in adoption.

So it's in the best interests of children, and it's in the best interests of governments, but it's complex.

One of the things we still need to do a lot of work on is post-adoption services for these families, both supportive services, like the parent-to-parent support that was referred to, and therapeutic interventions. Many families will not need these services. Some families will just need a little along the way, and about a third of these adoptions will need pretty much ongoing support.

● (1000)

One of the other things I want to recommend is a national database. The U.S. mandated that states report information on children entering and exiting foster care. This database has been very helpful in gauging where we are, what improvements have been made, and what still needs to happen.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will begin our round of questions.

Just for the committee's information, we probably won't need the full 15 minutes for committee business. So we can probably question right until almost 20 to the hour, and then we'll leave a few minutes for anything that might arise.

We will do a five-minute round, and then we should be able to get a three-minute round in as well.

For the witnesses, the five minutes include your answers.

We'll begin with the Liberals and Madam Minna, please.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, and welcome to our neighbour from south of the border.

My first question is for you, Ms. Smith. You've been very interested in children who are older. At what age do you "age out" those children who are not adopted, or is it different from state to state?

Ms. Susan Smith: In most states it's 18, although some have raised it to 21 in certain circumstances. The federal government has recently stated that it would provide ongoing support for children in care until 21.

Hon. Maria Minna: So you're pushing for 21. That's interesting.

You also mentioned that after a certain amount of time without adoption as children get older you work to find them permanent homes. Can you explain exactly what happens there? How do you do that? At what point do you say this isn't moving, and then what do you do exactly?

•(1005)

Ms. Susan Smith: In the middle 1990s under Clinton there was a law passed called the Adoption and Safe Families Act. It stated that if a child had been in care continuously for 15 months of the past 22 months—I think that is how it was stated—they would go to court to consider termination of parental rights. So previously, children could drift along for four or five years from foster home to foster home with no parental progress toward permanency. Then they set a time limit and said that after a year and a half, if the parents weren't making progress they would go to court, consider terminating their parental rights, and free the child for adoption.

When I showed the graph there was a real increase around that time. Following the middle 1990s it doubled. That was largely the basis for that.

Hon. Maria Minna: You are actually freeing children up for adoption at a much younger age than previously.

What was the reaction to that in terms of any rights? I'm just curious about parents who may have been in trouble and had problems. A year and a half or two years isn't that long a time. Was there any backlash, legal or otherwise?

Ms. Susan Smith: There was some. The courts have done a lot of work on this issue too. There have also been some social work approaches through what's called family group decision-making. As soon as a child comes into care they sit down with the entire family and explain the timeframe they're working within. They are very explicit about the things that need to be addressed in the year-and-a-half period.

Concurrent planning is another approach that has been used to address this. They work early on to get the child in a placement that can become permanent if the child is not able to return home. The family is asked up front if they have a responsible relative they would want to take care of the child if they cannot continue to parent. They work really hard to get the child early on, instead of waiting until he is three or four to say maybe they should move him from the foster home, where he has bonded with the foster parents, to an aunt's house. They try to do that early.

There have been social work responses to improve the prospects for children, as well as legal responses.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Lessard, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Chair, I want to thank our witnesses for being here this morning to share their expertise.

First of all, I will speak to Ms. Xavier—

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Smith, do you have translation? Can you understand Mr. Lessard's question?

Ms. Susan Smith: No. I thought I was hearing before, but I didn't realize someone asked a question. It's too faint.

The Chair: Okay, so we need to correct that.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: My questions are for the people who are here, for Ms. Xavier and Mr. Paulin, among others.

[English]

The Chair: It's still important that Ms. Smith have the translation.

Ms. Susan Smith: I can hear you.

The Chair: Okay. We'll continue, and if you have trouble please let us know.

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Ms. Xavier, do you understand French? You have your earpiece?

[English]

Ms. Cindy Xavier: I can hear you, yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: All right. I'll begin by speaking to you.

You said you would like children who are adopted internationally to obtain citizenship at the time of adoption, just as citizenship is obtained at birth. I understand that that would be in order to avoid the entire bureaucratic process. I would like to know whether there are other underlying reasons for that. That's the first question I'm asking you.

My other question is about leave. Unless I am mistaken, you said you did not want leave through the employment insurance system, but that instead you would like an adoption leave benefit. What do you mean by that? Why draw that distinction?

•(1010)

[English]

Ms. Cindy Xavier: To answer your first question, we want to expedite things for families who have adopted children internationally, in terms of them gaining Canadian citizenship. However, in addition to that, children who have been adopted from abroad cannot pass that Canadian citizenship on to children they may have biologically. So that is an issue for some parents who know that their children will be Canadian citizens, but their grandchildren may not be.

On the second question, we're asking for an amendment to Bill C-343 so there will be an adoption leave benefit equivalent to the maternity leave benefit of 15 weeks. It would be specific to the needs of the adoptive parents, and whichever parent is the primary caregiver would be the one to take the leave.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: So that would be a benefit that would be the same for everyone, and all parents could obtain the length of leave they wanted. Is that correct?

[English]

Ms. Cindy Xavier: Right.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Now I would like to ask Mr. Paulin two questions.

You mentioned a top-down strategy. You provided few details on that subject. I'd like to know more about that.

You mentioned peer-to-peer support. Who are these peers you refer to?

Mr. Bernard Paulin: To answer your first question, Mr. Lessard, I would say it's come from below, but the top has also intervened. This is an initiative that came from the department at the time, the former department of family and community services, now called the department of social development. They realized that there were a number of children available for adoption who were not adopted. On the other hand, we had a waiting list of 800 candidate parents who were waiting to adopt children. Something wasn't working.

At the time, the initiative was "sold" to the government under a business plan. We managed to show that, if we were granted 25 social workers for adoption purposes—because we didn't have a lot—and their salaries, with the saving that would be made on the adoptions—that wasn't the main objective—we were going to manage to achieve our goal. We guaranteed that, within three years, if we hadn't managed to pay the workers' salaries just by having more children adopted, those worker positions would be handed back to the public service. We won that bet and the benefits for the children were enormous.

However, the strategy has to be constantly renewed. The message constantly has to be sent and the public's awareness raised. What was special about what we did with adoption is that we established a network with the business community. The government makes a small grant to the foundation, but the rest of the money comes from the business community.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Is it these members whom you characterize as peers?

Mr. Bernard Paulin: No, the peers are parents... In New Brunswick, when people adopt—

[English]

The Chair: Your five minutes are up. If you want to finish that thought, it would be great.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Paulin: I'm going to be brief.

Peers are other adoptive parents who help each other. They don't know each other. Someone has to promote—

[English]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: *P-A-I-R-S.*

Mr. Bernard Paulin: Pardon me?

Ms. Raymonde Falco: *P-A-I-R-S.*

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Paulin: That's it.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

Thank you, Madame Folco, for that very precise intervention.

I'll go now to Mr. Martin, please.

Mr. Tony Martin: Thanks very much to all of you for coming today.

Ms. Smith, you spoke this morning about a central role being played by the federal government in the States in providing incentives to states to up the number of children being adopted. You talked as well about the national government supporting adoptees until age 21. Can you speak a little more specifically about the incentives and the support by the federal government to states to support adoption activity?

• (1015)

Ms. Susan Smith: In the mid-1990s, under the law I referred to before, the federal government agreed to pay money toward child welfare in each state that increased their adoptions. Each state had a baseline for the number of adoptions, and when they increased by a certain percentage, the federal government would give them a bonus in their child welfare budget. They had already started increasing, but that made them soar.

The federal government contributes some money towards the monthly subsidy given to kids in foster care. It used to be that they did not contribute to the adoption subsidies that states provided. They realized this was a disincentive for states to get kids adopted, because they were getting money from the federal government if they were in foster care, but once they got adopted, they got nothing.

That changed in the early 1980s. The federal government gave some money for some children, not every kid in care but those who came from poor families. Each state sets the age at which kids age out of foster care. But there has been recognition that at 18 many of these kids are not ready for independence. Most of them still need families. Some states have decided to allow kids who are still in school to remain in care. Some have decided to allow kids who are developmentally delayed to remain in care for another three years.

Many of them weren't getting money from the federal government to help with this cost. In recent years, the federal government has in some circumstances begun to provide some financial assistance to states to keep kids in care that aren't ready for independence at 18.

We're still far from saying that all kids can stay in care. In states that allow some children to remain, they often have to be in college or vocational training to stay in foster care for a few more years.

Mr. Tony Martin: You spoke about post-adoption services and therapeutic intervention. Who pays for that?

Ms. Susan Smith: Every state has a different program. Some services are available in some states and not in others. So far, the federal government hasn't contributed anything toward that. We're trying to get more of a federal mandate for post-adoption services, because they're essential.

Each state government provides something to adoptive families. It may be information and referral to services that are paid for by Medicaid in this country. In some states, they have well-developed therapeutic intervention programs. In some states, like Illinois, where I taught for most of my career, any adoptive family could receive these services. It didn't matter whether you adopted from foster care, internationally, or an infant. They had a program of about 18 months of intensive therapeutic intervention that was available free of charge to struggling adoptive families.

So it varies from state to state. There are many more needs than what are met right now.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Ms. Xavier, can you tell me the five- and ten-year statistical trends for the number of children in foster care in Saskatchewan? Are they increasing, decreasing, staying the same? Can you give me a snapshot of what's going on? Do we statistically know that?

• (1020)

Ms. Cindy Xavier: I don't have, before me today, specific statistical numbers, but I can tell you what I know. The number of kids in care is increasing. The number of foster homes for those kids is decreasing, in spite of some tremendous efforts on behalf of our Saskatchewan Foster Families Association and ministry.

Mr. Jeff Watson: And what about the number of adoptions?

Ms. Cindy Xavier: The number of adoptions is increasing. That has happened over the last two years.

In the brief that I gave you there is a reference to the "Breach of Trust" report, which was submitted by the Saskatchewan children's advocate. Since that report, there has been an intensive Saskatchewan child welfare review, and along with that a more intensive effort on the part of the ministry to move kids who are—

Mr. Jeff Watson: And it's centralized in Saskatchewan?

Ms. Cindy Xavier: Yes, it is.

Mr. Jeff Watson: What is the average cost of an adoption in Saskatchewan?

Ms. Cindy Xavier: The average cost of adoption? I do not know. Sorry.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Okay.

Ms. Smith, how many jurisdictions deliver adoption in the United States? Is it each state individually, or within states is it county by county? Give us a snapshot of what that looks like.

Ms. Susan Smith: Each state differs. In some states, like California, it's county-based and each county sets its own subsidy, its own policies, etc. There is a state adoption program administrator in every single state, and the federal government brings them together to discuss issues, problems, and solutions.

But the states vary, and within the states certain native American tribes have their own child welfare systems. And then there is Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Those are U.S. territories. So some states are county-based, some are state-based, and there are the tribal entities and territories. I don't know how to count it.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Let me come back to our Canadian witnesses for just a second. I'll be right back with you in a moment, Ms. Smith.

Ms. Xavier, I just want to clarify something. Your brief notes that you support an adoption leave benefit. I believe Mr. Lessard asked whether you would support increased parental leave, which is different. I just want to clarify what your position is—an additional benefit beyond parental that would be specific to adoption?

Ms. Cindy Xavier: To adoption, yes.

Mr. Jeff Watson: That would presumably have to be based on how the courts have ruled on maternity on unique characteristics to adoptive moms or adoptive dads.

Can any of our witnesses talk about some of those, including Ms. Smith? What are some of the psychological stressors or other issues—not attachment issues with the child or care of the child, but issues the parent will face in adoption?

We'll start with you, Ms. Smith, and maybe the panellists can weigh in on that.

The Chair: All of you have about one minute, so just take 30 seconds.

Ms. Susan Smith: One of the first challenges is understanding the needs of your child and being able to meet them as the child develops. This runs the gamut from emotional conflicts the child has related to being separated from a birth family to various kinds of developmental challenges based on—

Mr. Jeff Watson: Ms. Smith, I'm asking about what the parent faces. Are there rejection issues for moms? What types of issues do they face, not what their child faces?

Ms. Susan Smith: I think parental stress is the biggest one. Any parent who has a heavy role in caretaking when you have a child.... I've interviewed adoptive parents who say "We have five adopted children with special needs. It's a rare week when we don't get calls from the schools telling us to come and get one of our children."

There is ongoing stress. There is not knowing if you're doing the right thing. There is a feeling of hopelessness that you can't give your children what they need. It's a matter of emotional overload for some of these parents. That component has to be factored in.

•(1025)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Are there parents who fail to attach?

Ms. Susan Smith: Parents who fail to attach? Attachment is not yes or no; there are degrees. And there are parents, when they have children, who keep doing a push-pull, who will seek affection and then reject it, who reach a point that they don't understand this, and feel it's their fault. They in some ways feel that they've failed, and then they don't want to invest any more. There are struggles in parents related to attachment, especially with kids who resist it.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We're going to try to do a very quick three-minute round, so again it will probably be one question and one answer.

Mr. Savage, did you have a question you wanted to ask?

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

Thank you all for coming. It's been very helpful.

I wanted to ask Ms. Smith a question. You talked about the interstate agreement on adoptions in the United States and how that helped. Do you have some advice for Canada? We're hearing up here from a lot of people that it's easier to go outside of Canada to adopt than to adopt inside of Canada because of provincial issues. Do you have any advice about how we might implement a better system?

Ms. Susan Smith: Sure. You can take a look at the parts of this agreement and decide which would work for you and which might not. Generally, if you have a child in Idaho who has an aunt in Tennessee who is willing to parent that child, but you can't do a home study from Idaho to Tennessee, as a courtesy, the state and the family state will do the home study, and once a placement is made, they will provide ongoing supervision for that placement.

Every state does it for every other state. For some of them, it's just a matter of being across the border. There are states that are side by side, and there are certain arrangements. In 2006 the federal government passed an interstate bill that set some time limits. They said you had only two months to do the home study. You know, with some states it would be at the bottom of their list of things to do, and it might take six months to get this home study done. Basically, the federal government stepped in and said we need reasonable timeframes for this.

That compact was the first thing the federal government did in the early 1960s. It's kind of like a treaty for which you develop this agreement, and states have to say yes, we will participate in this. State by state, they signed on.

Mr. Michael Savage: Chair, that's something we should probably have more information on. Maybe we could get our researchers to get some information on that interstate agreement in the U.S.

The Chair: Yes, I agree.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you for that, Ms. Smith.

I wanted to ask Ms. Xavier a question. You said you'd like to see changes made to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration call centre and website for prospective adoptive parents. You talked about more inter-country information being posted. Can you chat a little bit about what you'd like to see on there that isn't on there now?

Ms. Cindy Xavier: Yes. In fact, through our organization and even at the ministry level, when we're giving information to parents, we actually more often.... Besides the Citizenship and Immigration piece, which they need to understand from our country's side, the U.S.-based website is very comprehensive when it comes to information about the countries and the relationships between the countries and our provinces and country. Those are always flexing and changing. It's very difficult to keep up with those, in addition to actually understanding the entire process.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vellacott, you have three minutes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I think Cindy was champing at the bit to answer the question that Ms. Smith had responded to about the unique things that adoptive parents face, so I want to give her an opportunity in a moment for that as well.

Can you tell me again so I can understand—you know I'm from Saskatoon—if the Adoption Support Centre of Saskatchewan is funded by the province?

Ms. Cindy Xavier: Yes, we are. We are a registered non-profit charity, but we are funded through the Ministry of Social Services.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Are you funded entirely by them?

Ms. Cindy Xavier: Yes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: In our province it's mostly a public adoption system, and there are what, two or three private adoption agencies?

•(1030)

Ms. Cindy Xavier: We have no private adoption agencies. It's entirely public.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: We have none at all now. We did in the past. I know there was a Christian adoption agency up in Saskatoon. And they folded because....

Ms. Cindy Xavier: We had one—Christian Counselling Services. It was more a question of money than anything. Most people who went to them were looking for infant adoption, and my understanding is that they were not able to keep up their services for lack of funding.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: As you're funded by the province, you may want to be careful how you respond here, of course, but would you say it is a good thing to have some of those other players out there instead of having the monolith of a public system only? It would seem to me that it was. At least I know that in conversations I had with people who approached Christian Counselling at the time—

Ms. Cindy Xavier: When it comes to private adoption, yes, it is. Our biggest adoption problems and disruptions occur through private adoption due to a lack of information and appropriate counselling and timely planning. So definitely, yes, I would change the strategy and the formula and how they operate it...but it definitely would be beneficial.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Okay, and then you can respond.... I call Jeff our well-beloved adoptive son here, who has a great heart for this area of ministry.

Can you tell us a little bit in terms of the unique things that parents would face in adopting? Things don't always go normally, I guess.

Ms. Cindy Xavier: Exactly.

You do have an additional information piece through the EI benefits. If you look at some of the things the parents are talking about there, we want to minimize adoption disruptions. When children who have had extremely severe experiences come into families, those families don't always understand. They are trying to meet those needs. So not always do families attach to their children. Sometimes that's a long process.

Families, particularly mothers, struggle with guilt, infertility, grief, loss, not being able to attach to a child who is not biologically related to them, with that child's physical and mental needs. So, for example—and I'll be direct—your child wakes up in the middle of the night and is urinating in a corner and you need to find out the underlying reason for that. Now, that's the need of the child, but how do the parents cope with that? You're dealing with lack of sleep, you're dealing with a child who won't sleep so therefore you're not sleeping. And I could go on forever.

There's a lot of research out there for the impact that adoptive parents experience in the adoption process.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Beaudin.

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Thank you.

Good morning to you all. In fact, I only have one question since I only have three minutes.

My question is for you, Mr. Paulin, I believe you were deputy minister in New Brunswick.

Mr. Bernard Paulin: A few years ago.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: As a former provincial deputy minister, how do you think a provincial jurisdiction could improve this type of file? Also, what's being done well? Could you tell me a little about how we could intervene?

Mr. Bernard Paulin: That's a good question. When I was deputy minister, we held what we called FPT meetings, federal-provincial/territorial meetings. Child welfare-related topics were never on the agenda. Child protection was, but child welfare and adoption were never discussed. At one point, there were what was called child welfare services directors, or directors of child welfare. That's virtually disappeared now; they now have virtually no role to play, and that's not very important. The only point at which adoption or

child welfare became an issue was when there were child deaths. Whatever the case may be, adoption is never really in the news, unless someone organizes a major information and awareness campaign, as was done in New Brunswick in 2002.

Going back to the federal-provincial/territorial meetings, when the deputy ministers met, that topic was never addressed, so it could not be expected that... The deputy ministers normally submit topics for discussion to their superiors for the federal-provincial/territorial meetings which the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada attends. In the three or four years when I was at the department, those topics were not put on the agenda, but social services, yes.

So that was a problem that was not discussed. There were very few discussions on the topic. So I'm very pleased that these issues are now being addressed by a parliamentary committee. I would have liked that to happen in my time, but it's never too late.

Some voices: Oh, oh!

• (1035)

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: You do have a few seconds, Monsieur Lessard. Could you make it very brief? We have committee business.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: This will take me 30 seconds.

I'd simply like to supplement the question that my colleague asked about federal responsibilities. Do you want to target one or more things in particular that should be improved or changed?

Mr. Bernard Paulin: Yes, I would like to target parental leave. A parent is a parent. In my opinion, whether these people are natural parents, biological parents or adoptive parents, they are parents and they have full responsibility. There should be no difference. Whether it be employment insurance, parental leave or all the other programs, the same benefits should be granted.

I know of situations in which adoptive parents are real parents. There are no second-class parents; these are full-time parents. Often, as Ms. Xavier explained earlier, there are many other challenges that what are considered normal families don't meet. In fact, adoptive parents should get more assistance than others.

Some voices: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. We appreciate that, and the passion with which you delivered that.

Mr. Bernard Paulin: I am a parent of adopted children.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I want to say a big thank you to all of you. Ms. Xavier, I just spoke to you on Monday, and you hadn't even heard about our study. So I want to thank you for coming on short notice. I'd like to thank the rest of you for being here. Ms. Smith, thank you so much for being here.

We will break for about 20 seconds and then we'll resume. We have a bit of committee business. Thank you again.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-

The Chair: We have a bit of committee business to take care of and we have a short amount of time to do it. I think we should be able to get through it.

We have a notice of motion from Mr. Lessard. Did you wish to move that motion today, Mr. Lessard?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Chair, with your permission, we could postpone this business until next Tuesday in view of the fact that some questions have been raised regarding the scope of the motion. So we want to complete our business in that regard. If the committee has no objection, we could complete that business next Tuesday.

[English]

The Chair: That would be fine with me.

Mr. Komarnicki, did you—

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Yes, and I'd like to put it to Mr. Lessard. I presume we're going to be dealing with some recommendations coming from the analysts with respect to the long-form census. I'm wondering if this motion shouldn't be delayed by Mr. Lessard until that date, and we should deal with it along with everything else we're doing, rather than as a separate motion. If he's open to that suggestion, I would ask him to not just delay it until Tuesday but until the day we're going to be doing the long-form census.

• (1040)

The Chair: Just for your information, right now we are anticipating we would be looking at those recommendations on the ninth, so that would be Thursday.

Mr. Lessard, if that would be acceptable to you, we would deal with your motion on Thursday, or if you prefer, we can do it Tuesday.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I believe that Mr. Komarnicki has made a very good suggestion, since we're indeed going to assess the file as a whole before making a recommendation, provided we allow ourselves the time to examine it properly.

[English]

The Chair: I think right now we have the full meeting, so a full two hours.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, and I thank Mr. Lessard for the motion. I thank Ed for his comments. I think it makes perfect sense to look at all this as part of the discussion of the report.

I understand there's a concern that Mr. Lessard's motion may be ruled out of order. Is that the case?

The Chair: As it was written there were some concerns with it, yes, from the advice of the clerk and some other advice I received. It was just a couple of things, so it would probably be out of order as it was written.

Mr. Michael Savage: But it could be adjusted without a problem?

The Chair: The rules are very clear that we have to stay within our jurisdiction and the mandate of this committee, so we have to be careful that we're not giving instructions. For example, Stats Canada is under the industry portfolio and it's not within our mandate. That was one of the concerns. As well, right now the Statistics Act dictates that we have to have a census every five years. So those are a couple of concerns.

What I would suggest, and obviously you will do exactly as you feel on the right way to proceed, but I know Georges would be happy to take a look. He was the one who initially brought to my attention some of the components that were not in order. So I think we would be able to go ahead and still have it in order.

Mr. Michael Savage: With Christmas coming and the Christmas spirit that always envelops this committee, there's going to be a lot of cooperation between now and the holidays, but there isn't a lot of time. So I don't want to spend a lot of time debating a motion that's not in order. I think we should try to make sure we have stuff before us that we can—

The Chair: Right. Mr. Lessard and I had a private conversation on Tuesday about this too, and I think we all agree we want to be looking at a motion that's in order.

Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I believe we're doing what we had agreed not to do now but rather on Tuesday, that is to say begin debate on the subject.

[English]

The Chair: Right.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: There's no problem because we have a difference of opinion, with all due respect to the clerk's opinion. I also believe that Mr. Etoke will acknowledge it, this is not a formal opinion; it's a question that was raised. So I think it deserves to be examined. We believe our motion is admissible. We will obviously have to debate it first.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. We won't debate it now.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: We have not only the arguments, but also the documents to show that it is admissible.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Yes, you're correct, Monsieur Lessard, the motion isn't moved. We have no motion on the table. We won't discuss it further.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I wanted to raise this morning the reality that we have a direction from the House to revisit Bill C-304, Libby Davies' housing bill. I don't think it will take long. There's an amendment that needs to be made to keep it in order, and I don't think it would take long. I'm therefore suggesting that we schedule that before we rise for the Christmas break.

The Chair: All right.

To give information to the committee, we do have sixty sitting days to deal with that bill. I want you to be aware of that, because I know time is short and we do have a work plan established.

Madam Folco.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

We did discuss this, but I don't know how far it has gone. We discussed the possibility of inviting people from CIC again, and I wonder what has happened to that idea.

The Chair: Yes, absolutely we will be inviting them again, as well as the foreign affairs officer. Certainly we do want to bring them back, because I think there have been some other issues raised, so yes.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We'll be submitting this to the clerk directly, but I might as well raise it at the table, since we're talking about potential witnesses. We haven't heard from finance officials on tax measures or the expansion of definitions or carry-forwards, or other issues like that around tax measures related to adoption or medical or disability services that may play into this issue. I think it might be worth while to hear from Department of Finance officials on that.

●(1045)

The Chair: Yes. We actually hadn't considered that, so perhaps you could make that as a submission.

Mr. Komarnicki and then Mr. Martin.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I certainly would ask Mr. Martin to consider having that amendment go forward as soon as we get back in the new year. But having said that, I wonder if the clerk could get for this committee, for whenever it comes back, the motion that was passed in the House, the Speaker's ruling on the first bill, including his reasoning behind it, so we would have some opportunity to look at it and consider that as well.

I raise that as a preliminary point.

The Chair: Yes, in preparation for that.

Mr. Martin, did you want to add something?

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes, in that spirit of cooperation Mr. Savage spoke of earlier.

I didn't want to have to do it this way. It may not be the appropriate way, but I would move a motion to the committee that we deal with this direction from the House on Ms. Davies' bill before we rise for Christmas.

The Chair: All right.

We would require a notice of motion, and even though we are talking right now.... I know you brought it forward, but it isn't part of our orders of the day. So could you please provide that motion and then we can deal with it at the next meeting? We'll allot time to deal with it. If you could please do that, it would be appreciated.

If there's no other business, this meeting is adjourned.

Thank you.

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