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# Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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Thursday, November 19, 2020

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Chair: Ms. Marilyn Gladu





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• (1100)  
[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number five of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of September 23, 2020. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

With regard to the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all the members, whether they're attending virtually or in person.

Today the committee is meeting to study the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name, and when you're ready to speak, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Interpretation in this video conference works very much like it does in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen to pick English, French or floor, which is for whatever is being spoken. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly for the interpreters. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses who have come for our first panel.

We have, from the Bay St. George Status of Women Council, Sharon Williston, who is the executive director; from the Conference for Advanced Life Underwriting, Cindy David, who is the board chair; and from YWCA Canada, Maya Roy, who is the chief executive officer, and Anjum Sultana, who is the national director of public policy and strategic communications.

Each group will have five minutes for opening comments, and I will be gentle when I cut you off after five minutes. Then we'll go into rounds of questions. I will try to be sensitive, but each member will have six minutes for the first round. You'll hear me say, "That's your time", and that's how you'll know we're moving on to someone else.

With that, we'll begin—

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

Sorry, but I'm getting some garbling when you speak into the microphone. I want to know if other members are getting the same.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Yes, it's the same for me.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** It's the same here.

**The Chair:** I'm open to suggestions from the IT folks. Maybe it's a volume thing.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Stephanie Bond):** Could we suspend, please?

**The Chair:** Sure. We'll suspend briefly.

• (1100) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1105)

**The Chair:** Let's resume.

We'll start our panel discussions with Sharon Williston, for five minutes.

**Ms. Sharon Williston (Executive Director, Bay St. George Status of Women Council):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

As you announced earlier, I work with the Bay St. George Status of Women Council as their executive director. I've been in the role since January of this year. It was certainly a baptism by fire come mid-March when a lot of things changed here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I want to describe a bit of the geography in our area so you can have a full understanding of what women are facing before and during COVID.

As an example, I'll use transportation. There's no such thing as a city bus service within our area. Folks have either their own vehicles or depend upon taxis or the generosity of friends and family to help transport them to where they need to go.

The area is quite large. Out on the Port au Port Peninsula, for someone to come into our area to access services, they're looking at a little over an hour's drive. With the more remote areas as well the access to reliable cellphone service and Internet service leaves much to be desired. There are many areas where there is no service whatsoever for these two ways to connect. When you're looking at isolation, you see it escalates things even more. These things, of course, have a huge impact on being able to access community supports since COVID-19. We have done our best to be able to continue to provide programming through Zoom and other Internet platforms. We have also gone out to a community on a few occasions to offer in-person workshops, but at a reduced rate, needless to say.

What we're seeing and hearing from the women is that the impact of the isolation has been one of the hardest things. For women who live alone, the inability to connect with community services and to socialize in groups has had a profound impact on the anxiety and stress levels they've been experiencing. Where possible, we have been able to partner with other organizations in providing cell-phones, tablets and the like, so they're able to connect through the Internet or through cell service. Once again, going back to those women who are living in areas without those services being available, the isolation is profound.

Many women found themselves in the situation where they were at home and, all of a sudden, overnight, became a teacher to their children. The stress levels went through the roof for many women because they were working from home, educating their children from home, and trying to make sure of the level of cleanliness that was required with COVID-19 for anyone going in and out of the home. They had to wear so many different hats that they felt they weren't able to do justice to any of them.

Once again, looking at that stress level and that anxiety level, we're seeing an increase in the number of referrals that we're doing to various supports such as CHANNAL, the Canadian Mental Health Association, mental health and addictions services, and so on.

When we look at domestic violence, we see that the RCMP and RNC within our province have reported that there was an actual decrease in numbers. That doesn't mean there was a decrease in cases. Oftentimes it was not safe to report. Being in isolation with your abuser it's very difficult to be able to make those phone calls. Also, with having little to no access to affordable housing, many landlords were not renting to new tenants during the first few months of COVID, and that escalated things even more.

What we have seen here through our sector is a lot of women moving in with friends and family members, so those numbers are hidden in regard to how many are actually leaving those long-term relationships. We've noticed a spike in the number of women who have been leaving long-term relationships, 15 years or longer, and starting over. We're seeing these numbers through the number of requests that we have received for home-starter kits, for accessing furniture through us, and other referrals through Newfoundland and Labrador housing, our housing support worker with Community Education Network, and so on. We know that the numbers are there and they are indeed increasing.

• (1110)

In regard to food insecurity, Food First NL had reported earlier this fall that the costs of food in our province had increased by approximately 22%—

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Madam, Chair, I have a point of order.

I'm sorry for interrupting, but the sound has a lot of noise and we can't really hear properly.

**The Chair:** Yes, the technicians are working on it.

Do you want to continue or do you want to suspend for a few minutes while they work on it?

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** There's a lot of disturbance.

**The Chair:** Yes, I think we should suspend again.

Just hang tight while the technicians get on it, because it's important that we hear the testimony.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.):** Yes, Madam Chair, I think that is good idea.

**The Chair:** Good. Let's suspend. Hang tight.

• (1110)

(Pause)

• (1115)

**The Chair:** It's fixed, so let's proceed with Ms. David, for five minutes.

**Ms. Cindy David (Chair of the Board, Conference for Advanced Life Underwriting):** Good morning and thank you, Madam Chair, vice-chairs and committee members.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that the land I'm speaking from is the unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh.

I am the chair of the Conference for Advanced Life Underwriting. You might wonder what that means. We basically represent a big section of the financial services industry. We're the only professional association dedicated to leadership and advanced planning solutions and advocacy to promote the financial health of Canadians. Our more than 600 members represent the top tier of insurance and financial advisers, as well as accounting, tax, legal and actuarial experts.

Ours has traditionally been a male-dominated industry, but this is changing. We've seen an increase in the number of female advisers, up to about 18% from 11% to 13% eight years ago, depending on which section of the industry you look at. While we have some way to go, women clearly are on a fast track for leadership in our industry. My appointment this year as the third female chair of our organization in almost 30 years provides some additional encouragement for this, as do the other three female directors on our board.

We are concerned about the advancement of women in financial services overall. You'll hear a lot of evidence about the outsized impacts of the pandemic on women, but it's the many women, whether they're clients or people trying to get into the financial services industry, who start in retail, hospitality and health care who have been most affected.

Because of the sections of industry that women tend to work in, this means they've had to continue to work amid health risks for themselves and their families so that the rest of us can have access to essential services. Added to the reality is that women take on the lion's share of child care, home-schooling and elder care needs, all of which have obviously soared during the pandemic.

There's no question that women have been the hardest hit, especially those who have precarious employment and/or are low-income earners. They have the least ability to cushion the impacts and make adjustments to ride out the pandemic.

At the same time, it's important to recognize the impact that COVID-19 is having on the advancement of women across the economy. A recent study we conducted with CALU found that our female members have had a significantly greater impact on their businesses than our male members. These women are among the most senior and successful advisers in Canada, yet they too are affected by a gender imbalance that sees child care, home-schooling and elder care fall disproportionately on their shoulders. That's true for people in our industry as well as for our female clients.

We're a big proponent of educating women on investing and on the creation of successful businesses. We would like to see a lot more women create new successful businesses that allow them to fulfill their potential to create, innovate and drive economic growth. That's also true for our youth. We want to make sure that we not only take care of women as we try to survive this pandemic and succeed through it, but also remember that we have a second generation of female youth we would like to train, grow and nurture so they can be a big part of the business economy.

- (1120)

Everybody is noticing the cost of child care. It's a key hindrance to enabling a woman's advancement. The same is true for elder care. A national seniors strategy is something that has been on our agenda for quite some time. We feel that addressing elder care would free a big section of the female economy to be able to work and contribute.

**The Chair:** Very good. That's your time.

Now we're going to Ms. Roy for five minutes.

**Ms. Maya Roy (Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada):** Thank you, Madam Chair, vice-chairs and committee members.

[Translation]

My name is Maya Roy and I'm the CEO of YWCA Canada.

[English]

We are the largest and oldest gender equity organization in Canada. We work with 300 communities across nine provinces and two territories, with 34 shelters on the ground and 2,000 units of affordable housing.

Regarding the impact of the pandemic, the previous witnesses spoke very well to the lack of transportation and lack of Internet access.

In our shelters we have seen demand increase anywhere between 20% to 40% across the country. We have also seen an increase in human trafficking and cases of sexual exploitation in communities such as Niagara, St. Catharines and Halifax. We've also seen a very troubling turn in rural, remote and northern communities. For example, with the lack of Internet access, we have seen abusers refuse access to data or phone to women and gender-diverse people in the pandemic. As previous witnesses have stated, being in lockdown with your abuser can potentially be a death sentence.

Another issue we've seen sometimes is the conflicting public health measures and messaging. For example, women fleeing violence in the Northwest Territories are asked to check with public health first before leaving an abusive relationship and they're asked to call a phone number. When our front-line staff connected with this particular phone number, the lack of trauma-informed response, the lack of training, meant that government officials didn't necessarily have the assessment skills to assist a woman to make a safety plan. We were quite concerned.

It's very important to have a gendered trauma-informed approach to public health messaging, especially as gender-based violence is on the rise across the country. The United Nations refers to this as a shadow pandemic.

It's also given us an opportunity as a feminist organization to start to innovate and test new solutions. For example, tech companies such as Uber stepped in to provide in-kind rides for essential workers as well as women leaving abusive relationships to get to the shelters. It's very important if we're not investing in public transportation across the country.

We also partnered with the humanitarian aid organization, GlobalMedic, and worked with them to use FedEx to send hand sanitizer to shelters in the Arctic. How can we possibly ask community members to physically distance or wash their hands regularly if over 60% of reserves do not have access to running water or potable water? We have seen Canadians step up and they're interested in working with us on solutions.

We also partnered with the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto to start to develop a framework around a feminist economic recovery.

I'd like to now turn it over to my colleague, Anjum Sultana. She is the co-author of "A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada".

Thank you.

● (1125)

**The Chair:** Ms. Sultana, you're on mute.

**The Clerk:** Ms. Sultana, could you verify if you have a button that perhaps is muted on the cord? There's a little button on the cord of the microphone often that could be muted.

We can't hear you, so we will have a technician reach out to you.

Unfortunately, we'll have to move to the next witness, but we will reach out to you via phone.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will go to our first round of questions for six minutes.

We'll start with the wonderful Nelly Shin.

**Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC):** Thank you so much to all the panellists today. I feel the weight of the impact of COVID and the psychological strain on the overall well-being, the wellness, of women. I just want to thank particularly the women with the YWCA. In my travels I've stayed at different hotels and I've seen the programs that go on in those spaces. I'm very blessed to know that is happening. Thank you very much.

What I'm hearing from all of you consistently is on the repercussions of isolation. It has a very strong impact on relational strain and so my focus right now is, from what you've all shared, on that stage of transition and recovery coming out of those mental health-related issues and the safety as well.

My first question has to do with the actual mental health aspect. I know some workplaces provide counselling services and whatnot, but if you're working at home and taking care of children and you don't have a place of employment that provides that special service, how are these women accessing mental health care? What programs are out there that are working for them and what can we do better?

That's open to anyone. Thank you.

**Ms. Maya Roy:** Thank you very much for that very important question and for the shout-out to YWCA Canada.

Yes, we have certainly seen, not just as the service provider but also as an employer, the pressure of that triple burden of care for women when it comes to looking after children and the elderly as caregivers. One of the things we have been able to do, like many women service providers, is work with, for example, the Telus Foundation and try to shift all of our services online.

It's very challenging though for many charities to do that work because many of us are actually, under government funding, not allowed to upgrade our computers. I have colleagues across the country some of whom are literally on Windows 95, which our cybersecurity firm assures me is unhackable. That being said, it doesn't necessarily get at the mental health supports that women need. We are creating spaces online but I think, if possible, this committee

should work with the bureaucracy and federal government to continue to invest in IT infrastructure supports across the country. As we know, this is our new normal. With the social isolation, women not only need access to Internet, but they also need access to data and technology to even get that mental health support.

Also, we're working with workspaces, for example, some credit unions, across this country to start to develop child care co-ops to look at ways whereby we not only can provide child care in women's workspaces and homes but also at how they can also get some community supports as well.

I absolutely agree with the committee that this is a critical issue and additional investments are needed.

● (1130)

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** Thank you.

The other question is similar to that. It is related to women in domestic violence relationships. The exit strategy is becoming more complicated. Where are agencies like yours in terms of providing a better exit strategy in this context of the pandemic?

**Ms. Maya Roy:** It's been very challenging. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was an increase in women choosing to leave their relationships, as the witness from St. John's, Newfoundland, also talked about. What we're seeing with the second wave, as we start to go into lockdown again and courts start to close down, is it's very difficult to get protection orders for women. Also, many abusers are actually using the access to visitation centres, because those are also closed as well during lockdown, as an opportunity to further harass women.

With courts being closed and public transportation being shut down or not available at all in a community, it is getting harder and harder for a woman to safely plan and leave. What we're worried about is that many women are having to make the unfortunate choice of not being able to leave at all, because of how the very necessary pandemic public health restrictions are actually stopping women from being able to move on to that next step.

**Ms. Nelly Shin:** Thank you so much.

Do I have time for one more question?

**The Chair:** No, we're off to Ms. Zahid for six minutes.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you, everyone. Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks to all the witnesses for joining us today.

My first question is for Ms. David.

Ms. David, we know that one of the most effective ways to grow our economy is to ensure that everyone is part of it and everyone is able to participate in it. That's why our government announced the first-ever women entrepreneurship strategy, which was a \$2-billion program that sought to double the number of women-owned businesses by 2025. We cannot allow this pandemic to roll back the progress that has been made.

What recommendations for action do you have for this committee so that we can reduce barriers for women entrepreneurs and women-led small businesses in the economic recovery? We all know that economic recovery will not be possible without the she-recovery.

**Ms. Cindy David:** Thank you, MP Zahid.

It's an excellent question. I would say that we fully support the government's strategy of a growth-led economy or recovery versus increasing taxation. We always say the two most stressful things in life are death and taxes. They're both equally important, I would say, but I will focus on the taxation side, the reason I am here.

I looked at the women's entrepreneurship strategy and it's fantastic. There's a lot of information on there. Everything about it was good. The only shortcoming, I would say, is that it's finished. It's done. The last dollar was given in 2019. There's a big section of the website.... Every part of that section of the website says, "We are no longer accepting applications." There were some great businesses that were supported throughout that initiative, and I would say we need more of that.

It's help for female business owners, support with their income tax, streamlining income tax. We have a lot of people concerned about just making payroll. If you're a female business owner, you're worried about overhead. I spent \$20,000 getting computer systems set up and supporting my staff. Not many people can afford that. What are we doing to support getting more dollars in their pockets so that their businesses can thrive, so they can continue to employ staff? As well, what happens in an emergency? Everybody stops learning. How can we encourage female advisers to continue their education path, and even support team members to continue their education throughout this uncertainty?

We also have a lot of barriers in legislation on transfer of wealth, on transfer of ownership of businesses, that actually make it... We're incented to sell a business to a third party versus a family member. This is an unintentional consequence of tax legislation, and we need to look at things like that which were meant to do one thing but are actually doing another and discourage women in business.

• (1135)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** My next question is for Ms. Roy or Ms. Sultana, whoever can take it.

I understand the YWCA is conducting a three-year national study to identify practices to build social resilience and labour market access for the most vulnerable women. Can you speak a bit more in detail about this project and what you are hoping to learn from it? Are you applying an intersectional lens to look at challenges for newcomer and minority women? How important is this

sort of research work to allowing policy-makers to make fact-based decisions?

**Ms. Maya Roy:** I'll take the question. Unfortunately my colleague's headset mike is not working.

The research you describe has been led by newcomer and racialized women. One of the key themes that emerged from that research, which I'm sure will not be a surprise to anybody on this call, is that a lack of affordable and accessible child care is one of the key barriers to labour market access for newcomer, racialized and Black-identified women.

We've been looking very closely, as a result, at recommendations from a Quebec economist, Pierre Fortin. When he looked at investment in Quebec, for example, after 10 or 15 years he found that for every \$100 the Quebec government invested in universal affordable child care, not only did tax revenue increase, but both the federal and provincial governments received over \$140 back in taxes. They also saw workforce participation rates increase.

What we're hearing from our service users on the ground is that we need different models for supporting affordable child care right across the country. Many newcomer women work in the child care sector, but because of the way the subsidies are structured, the pay for early childhood educators is so low that many newcomer and racialized women who work as early childhood educators are actually leaving the sector altogether. The pay is not worth it, and the health and safety risks with COVID are simply not worth it.

YWCA recently did a survey—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but that's your time. The good news is the technician has said we've fixed Ms. Sultana's mike, so I'm going to give her two minutes.

**Ms. Anjum Sultana (National Director, Public Policy and Strategic Communications, YWCA Canada):** Thank you so much.

As Maya has talked about, the folks most impacted in this crisis are folks who are already marginalized, such as minority women, newcomer women, immigrant women and women with disabilities.

What this crisis has shown us is that the old way of approaching things is no longer viable and is simply not enough. We need a new playbook to address the pandemic and its social and economic consequences. YWCA's work on a feminist economic recovery plan does just that. We launched it at the end of July. It offers a starting point and a road map for action for a better, more resilient economy that works for us all. There are several recommendations, but the one key piece of it I want to highlight today is child care.

In addition to the research that Maya pointed to, we saw in the U.K. that when you invest any amount of money in care, it creates 2.7 times more jobs compared with an equivalent investment in construction. This would translate into 6.3 times more jobs for women and 10% more jobs for men. When we're talking about the lack of adequate pay, as Maya did, investing in care and investing in decent work for care workers will actually help us all.

In the U.K., a 2.5% investment in the country's GDP could result in 1.5 million jobs. I know the government has talked about creating one million jobs. This is a small investment. What the research is telling us is that investment in care goes farther for families, for communities, for gender equality and, yes, for Canada's economic recovery.

The last thing I'll say is that often in times of crisis what gets us through is care and community. In terms of gender equality, we should invest in community-based organizations that make gender equality possible. What we'd like to see, from the YWCA's perspective, is investments in care and community. This would not only address the short-term impact of COVID-19, the gendered impacts, but also would set us up for success for decades and generations to come.

Those are my remarks, and I'm happy to continue the conversation in questions.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll move on to the next round of questions.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** I want to thank all the witnesses this morning. We can see many connections between their organizations, given the different ways in which the pandemic is affecting women.

I'll turn first to Ms. Williston. I want to hear more about the specific realities of women in the regions.

How is COVID-19 disproportionately affecting women in rural areas compared to women in urban areas?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sharon Williston:** For rural women, access to community services is going to be one of the biggest obstacles they face. Let me give you an example from here, locally.

Many of the volunteers in our community are seniors, and they're the most vulnerable in the COVID-19 pandemic. Many seniors take care of our local food bank. When the middle of March came about, it had to close its doors for six weeks until another organization took over taking care of the availability of food. You're looking at very vulnerable people who don't have access to a food bank for over six weeks.

Then it changed to a drive-through method. As I talked about earlier, not everyone has access to a vehicle here. Friends and family members could not drive seniors, so they were walking there. It was March—well at this point it was April, but here the winters last

quite a period of time. Now we're going back into winter. We worked with other local organizations to provide a service where we received incoming calls and then organized volunteers to pick up food hampers and deliver them to doorsteps.

That's just one example of some of the things they're facing.

In regard to the mental health aspect of it, we are doing everything we can to increase capacity within our communities. I'm working with the Canadian Mental Health Association, and we're going to be delivering safeTALK to over 50 individuals within the community in the next little while. That's all about suicide intervention. We're also going to be delivering two ASIST training sessions within the next 60 days. I'm working a lot with the Eastern Door Feather Carriers, which is a life promotion group looking through an indigenous lens to help people overcome some of the challenges they're facing with their mental health.

The impact on rural women is in access, but we're trying to find creative ways, while working together as different organizations, to overcome challenges.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you. That's very interesting.

I'll now turn to Ms. David.

Ms. David, you spoke a great deal about a feminist economic recovery. How will COVID-19 create specific tax and financial challenges for women?

How can we overcome these challenges?

Lastly, what might a tax policy for a feminist economic recovery look like?

• (1145)

[*English*]

**Ms. Cindy David:** With regard to recovery, we're looking to focus on resolving gender-based issues, by lenders in particular, that affect women's ability to fund their businesses. I've experienced, on both sides of the gender spectrum, issues with bank loans. When there's so much uncertainty, this becomes quite an issue.

Going back to taxes, let's improve the tax regime affecting small business. We know small business is the backbone of our economy and has been particularly affected by the pandemic.

A very specific example is form T2200, which requires thousands of pages to be filled out by everybody across the country, not just one person, versus a check box. Let's streamline compliance, because every time we go to do something, it takes us time to leap over hurdles, as opposed to doing our jobs.



Let's allow capital expenditures, as I mentioned, and the setting up of home offices. There's now a dynamic approach to business in how everybody has had to shift, and we need to support that from a tax perspective, allowing deductions for expenses. Let's also encourage the continuation of business so that people can sell their businesses as opposed to just winding them up.

We're looking specifically at things like the capital gains exemption for small business, or even a new tax, like a tax on split income. We've spent a lot of time since 2018 talking about that extremely complicated piece of legislation. Let's streamline that to make it easier for people to understand how they can live by the rules and spend more time on their businesses being productive.

I mentioned already the disincentive we have for family businesses to continue selling from generation one to generation two and so on. It is a serious issue that is really catching people.

Before the pandemic, reducing red tape and streamlining compliance were, we think, key issues, and they will be post-pandemic especially.

**The Chair:** Excellent.

Now we'll go to Ms. Mathysen for six minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

To the YWCA members, Ms. Roy and Ms. Sultana, I really loved the title “Born to be Bold”. I really latch on to the idea that, of course, the status quo isn't working and that we need to challenge that. We need to change things. Bold, courageous ideas will take us beyond this, much as we saw during World War II with the creation of pension systems, EI systems and so on.

I'd like to talk more about the need for universal, affordable, accessible child care. I've certainly looked into the idea of the government introducing a piece of legislation that would ensure this across the board, much as the Canada Health Act does, for example, and ensure that we have equality.

Quebec certainly gets to enjoy that. What would that mean for the rest of Canada?

**Ms. Maya Roy:** I think the last eight months have been a very interesting moment because, as you know, we've been talking about universal child care since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, in 1970. I was at a meeting with the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce. Every single chamber of commerce, including the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, has talked about the importance of universal child care.

This is one of those golden opportunities for us as a country and as a society, because business, small business, labour and non-profits all agree on it. That's what my colleague, Ms. Sultana, was talking about. Investing in care work is the foundation of a proper restart for our economy. Many businesses are now also losing good staff because women are excluding themselves, so it's also a talent pipeline issue.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Yes, and certainly we've seen this in how we view care work in health care, long-term care, social work and child care. I believe because it's female-dominated, there is

lower pay and a lack of respect. There is both racial and gender discrimination within those fields as well. That's certainly been clear. I've heard from child care workers specifically who have addressed that directly. They have a desperate need to hold on to their workforces.

I want to talk about a couple of different programs. A lot of provinces have domestic violence leave. How do we ensure that across the board, nationwide, there is paid domestic violence leave and how would that help?

You talked about education, training and moving the workforce forward with investments in education. How would a guaranteed basic income or annual income help achieve those goals for women?

• (1150)

**Ms. Maya Roy:** Having federal legislation for paid domestic leave would be a huge step forward. As many of you on this committee know, the impact of gender-based violence on the economy results in a loss of billions of dollars to, for example, many of the businesses that Madam David works with.

With respect to a guaranteed minimum income, it's certainly something the YWCA is exploring. We've been watching the research and data coming out of certain pilot projects in Canada, for example, in northern Ontario and B.C., but also in other countries, such as Iceland and Denmark, to look at the impact.

We also know that this recession is increasing job losses. It will only accelerate job losses due to automation, so I think, again, as policy—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** I have a point of order.

There isn't any interpretation.

[*English*]

**The Clerk:** We have lost interpretation.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Yes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Can we check interpretation with the technicians?

Also, Ms. Mathysen, could you raise your mike a bit?

Ms. Roy, go ahead.

**Ms. Maya Roy:** Thank you.

As we have seen, this recession has only accelerated job losses due to automation, and this will disproportionately impact women, people—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Chair, I'm told that the sound quality isn't good enough for the interpretation.

**The Chair:** No. There isn't any interpretation at all.

**Ms. Maya Roy:** I'm sorry.

I can continue in French, if that's fine with you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We're supposed to have it in both official languages.

Can the technicians verify?

**The Clerk:** Perhaps, Madam Roy, if you could speak as loudly and slowly as possible, we'll give it another try. I do apologize for the many technical problems that we're having today.

**Ms. Maya Roy:** Yes, apologies. I would just leave it as this. This pandemic has only accelerated job loss due to automation.

**Ms. Anjum Sultana:** If I can supplement with respect to the child care question, one of the things that we would like to see is a nationwide approach to child care, similar to the Canada Health Act. I think that's an excellent model to look at. What we need is high-quality child care across the country in rural, remote and northern communities from coast to coast. One of the challenges that we found—and Maya talked about this—is that there are recruitment and retention challenges right now, and currently, we're at a deficit. We actually don't have the number of care workers that we need, and that means communities are being left behind, and people are being left behind.

I think, absolutely, that a nationwide approach is necessary. It would help to create clarity around standards, around workforce development and also around recruiting for the future. Many economists have talked about how we are entering a period of slow growth, so that means we need all hands on deck. Every single barrier that is stopping labour market participation needs to be addressed, and child care is one of the biggest ones that we've seen in our work.

With respect to gender-based violence, again, there's an economic cost. It's also an infringement on human rights. The communities that we're part of across the country, they talk about.... We can't talk about economic recovery in a climate of hate, fear, discrimination and hate crimes. Those all have to be addressed for us to all get back to recovery so that we don't have that K-shaped recovery that has been talked about quite a bit, so that we don't see that disparity in building back better.

I'll leave it there. Thank you so much.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Very good.

We don't have time for a full second round. Would the will of the committee be to have each party ask one question? Would that be acceptable? Okay.

We'll start with Ms. Wong, then.

**Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC):** Thank you. To save time, I just want to make sure that I still thank everybody.

You brought a lot of perspectives to our study. Mental wellness is one big thing, like seniors in social isolation. Suicide is coming up. There was a sad case in Vancouver lately where a woman with depression, from the Chinese community, disappeared and her body was found in Stanley Park. This has bothered a lot of people.

My question for the panellists is this. How can you prevent suicide at this very, very challenging time? One of our colleagues proposed a 988 number with people who would have training so that they would be able to persuade people with suicidal intentions to give up the idea of killing themselves.

I'll throw this question out to all of you, to whoever wants to pick it up.

**Ms. Sharon Williston:** It's a very important question that you put forward.

I'm involved with a number of different things with regard to suicide prevention, including the applied suicide intervention skills training. We provide that to grow capacity within our communities as often as possible. It's to break down the stigma that's associated with suicide. It's allowing folks to have those safe places to talk about suicide, their thoughts of it, and not be judged for it. It's giving them the opportunity to share their stories and have someone who's going to listen and meet them where they are. Having those folks available through a phone, yes, is great, but we also need to have people who are available within the communities to provide that.

There are different ways of doing that. The person with applied suicide intervention skills training is able to help dismantle the plan for suicide, if the person has a plan. Then they will help to create a safety-for-now plan. With regard to safeTALK training, the individuals can be 16 years of age or older to take part in the training. It's great to have our youth involved in that. It's, once again, how to identify when a person may be having thoughts of suicide, how to ask that difficult question, "Are you thinking about suicide?" and what to do when the person responds, "Yes."

**The Chair:** Excellent.

**Ms. Sharon Williston:** Now, changing it around a bit, there's also availability through different organizations. I mentioned Eastern Door Feather Carriers. They're looking at suicide prevention through an indigenous lens to help people reconnect with the land, with their culture, with their traditions and with elders, so once again—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but I have to cut you off. We're trying to keep these short.

We'll go to Ms. Dhillon for one question.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Since we're short on time, I can't delve deeper into these questions.

I would like to hear from Ms. Williston or Ms. Roy about the impacts. We speak a lot about the impact on women and the elderly, but I would like to know about the impact that isolation has had on children who are in a situation of domestic abuse, watching their mother being abused.

What impact has this had on children? Has there been any help for children psychologically to deal with these issues? The mother is dealing with her own issues, whether they're psychological, emotional or physical, with violence or abuse, and the child is watching this, but she also has to protect her child.

Can you shed some light on that? I think it's very important, because these are future generations, and we have to find a way to help children and protect them.

• (1200)

**Ms. Maya Roy:** We have a number of YWCAs, such as YWCA Lethbridge and District. It has developed the Amethyst Project, which is a trauma-informed mental health program for children who have witnessed domestic violence. However, that's just one community in many communities across Canada.

Unfortunately, schools being shut down will simply intensify the impact of trauma on children. We know how it impacts children developmentally. There's no difference between being abused oneself and witnessing abuse of a parent.

I thank you for raising this very important issue. We need a nationwide strategy, because it's going to impact the economy and education and development outcomes for generations.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Larouche, you have time to ask a question.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** I want to thank Ms. Williston, Ms. Roy, Ms. David and Ms. Sultana for being here.

Ms. Roy and Ms. Sultana, thank you for recognizing the work of economist Pierre Fortin on child care services in Quebec.

You touched on different areas where women are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. You really emphasized the importance of making progress on many issues to promote a feminist economic recovery. These issues include the Pay Equity Act, which still isn't being enforced; the Internet, which is recognized as an essential service for both women and seniors; access to drinking water on indigenous reserves; and domestic violence. We must find ways to help women break out of the cycle of violence.

In short, why is it important to include a gender-based analysis in all post-COVID economic recovery measures?

[English]

**Ms. Anjum Sultana:** What the research tells us and what our experience on the ground in 300 communities across the country also demonstrates is that mathematically we cannot have a recovery if we don't look at the experiences and needs of women. We need all hands on deck. Any single barrier—a gendered barrier, a barrier

based on racialization or a barrier against people with disabilities—will hurt all of us.

I really want to make clear that it's mathematically impossible to have an economic recovery if we don't have a gender lens and a feminist lens.

Another part of what we need to do is start to measure what matters. Every month I look at the labour force numbers and we look at whether jobs are coming back to pre-COVID levels.

In addition to that, we need to look at job quality. Is it permanent? Is it full time? Does it have good benefits and decent pay? In precarious work, people face further risks from COVID because they can't go back to work and can't be there for their families. That hurts all communities.

Another piece of it is.... I really appreciate this committee's focus on gender-based violence and on housing and homelessness, because oftentimes economic recovery is just focused on GDP and job numbers. What we've seen is that when homelessness is on the rise and gender-based violence is on the rise, this stymies economic recovery. When we look at what we want to see for our future society, we need to change what we use as measures of success so that they're more fulsome, given the actual realities on the ground.

**The Chair:** Ms. Mathysen.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** That was a perfect segue because my question is about just that. It is about national housing and the affordability crisis.

I have certainly seen this in London, the growing numbers of those who are living rough on the streets. There is a 5,000-family wait-list for affordable housing. This morning I was speaking specifically to a woman who was fleeing an abuser. She is in second-stage housing, but it isn't sufficient. It isn't as she needs it, and the options and choices are extremely limited. She is being shut out of that system.

I would love to hear from you about how important that second-stage housing specifically is to women fleeing violence—the adequacy of it—and about the investment in a national housing strategy focused on that affordability piece and how that plays out for women.

**Ms. Anjum Sultana:** I can share a bit, and then I'll pass it to my colleague, Ms. Roy.

One of the things that we have seen and we were pleased to see in the national housing strategy is a 33% carve-out for gender-responsive investments. That is the type of mechanism that would allow us to have more second-stage housing.

The challenge has been that we haven't seen the full rollout of that money. What we would like to see is that all investments, anything related to housing, have that in-built gendered focus, because when we don't do that, we see the rise in hidden homelessness as previous testimonials today have talked about. Oftentimes, the measure of homelessness is an under-representation, so we need to consciously have that gendered focus.

I'll pass it over to my colleague, Ms. Roy.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Quickly.

**Ms. Maya Roy:** Especially for northern and remote communities, we need affordable housing. We've seen an increase in landlords sexually coercing women who are behind on their rent payments, so this is very important.

**The Chair:** Mr. Erskine-Smith, welcome to our committee. Would you like to take the last question on this panel?

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Sure.

I guess I'm most interested in the benefits, particularly as they relate to families that wouldn't be able to afford child care. Maybe you can speak to the impact this can have specifically for families that otherwise can't afford it.

**Ms. Cindy David:** I'm not an expert on child care, but I will say that, in British Columbia, the experience is access. Child care services are typically full with a long wait-list, so focusing on wait-lists and accessibility, what you would have to do, I would imagine, is support business owners getting into that line of work, again, typically run by women. There would be tax incentives. There would be streamlining regulations again, encouraging child care.

Real estate is very expensive. There are many aspects to how you can increase the number of day cares and the number of workers in day cares.

**The Chair:** That is a great segue into our next panel.

I want to thank the witnesses on this panel. You are awesome.

We are going to switch gears now, and we are going to go to our next panel.

The first witness we have on the next panel is from the Canadian Childcare Network, Kate Tennier.

We also have, from Cardus, Andrea Mrozek.

Each of you will have five minutes to make your remarks and then we'll go to our round of questioning.

Kate, go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Kate Tennier (Advocate, Canadian Childcare Network):** I want to start by saying that I really hear what Ms. David is saying. I started a neighbourhood association—

**The Clerk:** I apologize, Ms. Tennier, but if I may interject, could you put your mike down a little bit? It seems to be up high and we're not able to catch your sound.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** I have a bit of an issue. I wear hearing aids and I'm getting feedback. I can't hear myself. I'm going to try again.

I concur with something Ms. David was saying. I started a neighbourhood association several years ago focusing on small businesses. Two of our most popular business owners are women married to each other. What hurt them the most in the pandemic was that they were not able to afford to pay their staff. It was women helping women. That's something I can certainly see.

I'm addressing my comments to the Liberals, who are once again trying to bring in a national child care system for Canadians, a system that is as wrong now as it was last year and the year before that. I instead stand for strengthening our Canadian child care network currently in existence, in which parents have successfully been choosing their own care for the past 40 years.

The studies you are being presented by your hand-picked advisers in favour of such a system are based on research from years ago that never supported the claims they make. Renowned think tanks, such as the EPPI-Centre at the University of London, state, "Politicians and policy-makers should stop basing the case for expanding early years provision on old, inaccurate and decontextualized data about long-term economic benefits." The recognized leading expert on child care cost-benefit analysis, Nobel laureate James Heckman, says, "I get the impression that early childhood advocates feel the need to put forward an appearance of unanimity, which in reality is an illusion. We need programmes openly competing with each other."

Why are you proposing this program? I ask because so many of your reasons are hugely problematic. You say you want to help low-income women in particular. Do you really want to provide child care for these women just so they can go out and work minimum wage jobs for grocery chains that refuse to offer enough full-time work and have eliminated COVID pay, even though they saw profits rise during the pandemic?

• (1210)

**The Clerk:** I'm sorry to interject, but could you perhaps bring your mike a bit farther away from your mouth? We're getting a popping sound. We're trying to improve that, because we lost interpretation at that point.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** Okay.

Do you really want to offer low-income women child care so they can be underpaid workers in long-term care homes? I'm asking you to look them in the eye and say, "Yep, we think it's more important that you work in these conditions and for that pay than to spend a few precious years looking after your own children."

This is not progress, and I'm very progressive. Until you can assure that the work these mothers are doing provides dignity and a living wage, all you're doing is providing a corporate subsidy to businesses that profit off their labour.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Chair, I don't have any interpretation.

[*English*]

**The Clerk:** We've lost interpretation again.

Could we try to move the mike a bit down and a bit farther away?

Could we suspend, please?

**The Chair:** Yes, let's suspend while we fix this. I apologize to committee members and other witnesses.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•

**The Chair:** Ms. Tennier, go ahead.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** I really want to make this work. I did the testing last week. Do you want me to move it up or down?

• (1215)

**The Clerk:** Let's move the mike up, please, closer to your nose, and a bit farther out. There's a popping sound causing audio shock to our interpreters.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** I'm going to take my hearing aids off. It could be due to that, so just give me one second.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**The Clerk:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Why don't we trade the order and go to our other witness?

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** No, no, I'm going to continue. I will be one second, okay?

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** Let's see if this helps. I'm just going to keep going.

You say in the throne speech that labour is on board and that you want to create more jobs. You can't honestly be willing to use two- and three-year-olds, i.e., put them in an unproven system just to create jobs for adults, whether it's to build day cares or have people work in them. You say that you want to advance women's equality.

Sweden, where 91% of young kids are in day care, has one of the highest rates of gender workplace segregation in the world. Researcher Patricia Morgan writes that, 20 years after universal child care was implemented there, Sweden had a more "gender-segregated workforce" than "the U.S.A., U.K. and Germany". "Indeed, it is more gender-segregated than Asian countries like China, Hong Kong and India."

Even 30 years after the program was introduced, the OECD stated that "pay differences remain significant and are not narrowing."

This phenomena of a pink ghetto workforce—extensively written about internationally but never mentioned by universal advocates here—is a result of forcing all families to have both parents in the paid workforce, leaving mothers to take on lesser jobs.

There's one more crucial thing. You say that you want to provide quality care and education, especially for Canada's neediest kids. However, a memorandum on child care financing co-written by one of your advisers, Armine Yalnizyan, suggested that four- and five-year-olds across the country be given full-day kindergarten, which is not good. There never was a peer-reviewed body of research backing up its implementation in Ontario. There was, however, one indisputable fact: all four- and five-year-olds suddenly found themselves all day in ratios that were anywhere from two to 15 times worse than what they had been benefiting from outside of a half-day program. While ratios are not everything, they are essential.

As a primary specialist elementary teacher who mainly taught grade 1, I know from experience that almost all young kids benefit more from low ratios with a not perfect, but pretty good adult than from a large class taught by a professional like me.

**The Clerk:** I apologize for intervening again. We have lost interpretation.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** Okay. I have one more paragraph, so I'm going to go ahead.

You will have to explain to all Canadians how grandmothers, neighbours, trusted friends, co-ops, nannies, Montessori schools, small French schools, all private—small and large—day cares, neighbourhood home care, nursery schools, tag-team parenting, and even parents themselves are all forms of care and early learning that will wither away once you redirect funding to a no-choice system. You need to be open and transparent about this to the Canadian people, open and transparent about this decidedly non-progressive move backward.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Mrozek for five minutes.

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek (Senior Fellow, Cardus):** Thank you very much, Chair Gladu. I hear that you have a book out, so thanks for advertising that multiple times.

Cardus is a not-for-profit think tank. Over the course of more than a decade, we've compiled peer-reviewed child care research and produced papers, including a recent collaborative effort called "A Positive Vision for Child Care Policy Across Canada". We've also done polling of Canadians' child care preferences, among other things.

Today, I would like to comment on child care data and then look at solutions for families, both during and after a pandemic.

Child care is the care of a child, no matter who does it. Child care is not only a women's issue; it's also a family issue. We have, across Canada, a tremendous and beautiful diversity of care options available, care that is both done and chosen by families according to their own cultures, customs, traditions and work needs.

Statistics Canada data tell us that, prior to the pandemic, most parents do, in fact, find what they are looking for. Two-thirds of parents report no difficulty in finding a space or a child care arrangement. Only 3% of parents cite a shortage of spaces as a reason for not using non-parental child care.

Again, nationally, according to Statistics Canada, about 60% of children under six are in non-parental care. We don't know a lot about that 60%, whether they're in for five hours or 55 hours, but of those children, about half are in child care centres or in a preschool program. What this means is that if we consider all children in Canada under the age of six, both those in parental care and those in non-parental care, only 31% are currently in centre-based spaces or preschools.

Polls and surveys consistently show over years that parents do not prefer centre spaces for their children, so the obvious implication of this is that using public money to disproportionately fund spaces means that the vast majority of Canadian children receive no benefit.

Public funding for spaces is structurally opposed to equity for all families. This inequity, I would argue, is particularly bad in a pandemic. At a time when mothers—both those doing waged work and those not—are most needed and continue to need support in the home, money is flowing to spaces sitting empty because we are sheltering in place.

The data further suggest that it's not a lack of access to child care that is preventing mothers from returning to waged work. In Ontario, 93% of day cares were back in operation by the end of September, but in places like Brampton, for example, only 20% of those spaces are occupied. I have the data for Alberta. They reported that 94% of day cares were back in operation, with an enrolment rate of about 50%. This suggests that factors other than the availability of child care spaces are at play when considering how and when mothers return to waged work, particularly in and after a pandemic.

I think the federal government has many options to help families. I will suggest four today.

The first is arguably the most important: to start consulting more widely with truly diverse communities, parents and child development experts.

Gordon Neufeld is a treasure to Canada and a developmental psychologist who is based in Vancouver. He specializes in attachment. The various economists who have done peer-reviewed research on the issue of quality, in Quebec, in particular, Steven Lehrer, Milligan, Baker, Gruber, all of these people need to be involved and consulted.

The research and the voices that I am bringing here today do, in fact, represent a majority of Canadians. Most Canadians want flexibility in how we care for our very youngest so that families can do what works for them.

Second, I would suggest that we can enhance existing federal programs, such as the successful Canada child benefit.

Third, I might consider changes to make maternity and parental leave more flexible.

Finally, bilateral federal-provincial agreements and particularly agreements with our first nations should maximize freedom and flexibility so as to honour the unique heritage, culture, history and tradition of different cultures across Canada.

There is little evidence that expanded space provision will help mothers return to waged work after the pandemic.

• (1220)

There is evidence of an existing ecosystem of parental and non-parental child care in Canada that is neither properly understood nor accounted for, and it risks being steamrolled in a so-called universal system. The federal government should cherish and defend the beautiful choice and diversity, an intricate patchwork quilt of variety, that already exists in child care across Canada today.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to go to a round of questions, beginning with Ms. Jag Sahota.

Ms. Sahota, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here and for the presentations on a very important topic.

My question is for both of you. You both talked about universal child care not working. That is something the Liberal government is looking at as a model of child care for the rest of Canada. Why doesn't the Quebec model work?

Maybe Kate could start.

• (1225)

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** I think there are a few reasons for this.

First of all, Andrea mentioned the Gruber, Baker and Milligan report, which, shockingly, Liberal advisers have not brought forth to you. It points out serious concerns in the mental health and behaviour problems that have happened, and we've had 20 years of a universal program in Quebec.

I'm a real feminist. My mother battled the nuns 70 years ago at U of T to get her commerce and finance degrees, and then went on to get a graduate degree in economics. I have four sisters. I have to put this out there. I'm really progressive.

What you're seeing with these universal programs, which I know as a former teacher, is that when you take kids in such low ratios and really cram them into group care at such a young age, the problems often don't show up until later, in the teen years. This is what's happening. I have so much other research I could read to you, but unfortunately the time is limited.

Sweden found, in droves, that the problems showed up in the teen years. Even their own health ministry is very concerned about the high level of suicide, ill behaviour and depression in teens. The largest parents protest group in Sweden actually wanted to join our group and make a complaint to the United Nations to say that unless parents had the right to look after their own children, problems that didn't show up until the teen years were the result of a universal program.

Simply put, you are not putting enough adults in little kids' lives. You are basically corralling kids, on the cheap, to raise them.

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** Could I jump in as well?

**Ms. Jag Sahota:** Yes.

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** I think the Quebec model should be measured against the standards of universal child care advocates and activists. They have goals such as quality and universality. We've used the word "universal", but only 30% of children in Quebec have access to those spaces. Economist Pierre Fortin has said that there's a two-tier system there and that quality spaces are not accessible. Again, after 20 years, one would assume that this kind of thing could be ironed out if it were possible.

The model that we're looking to emulate in Canada is neither universal nor quality, according to peer-reviewed research. The quality question is not up for debate. It's something that advocates for such a system speak about at their conferences, and they discuss how to improve it, finally, for children.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** I'll just add to what Andrea said.

Just last month an article in iPolitics, in referencing the Auditor General of Quebec, said:

Quebec budgets \$2.4 billion a year for daycare, but still doesn't offer enough subsidized spaces to meet the needs of Quebec families.

The article further said:

While originally designed to give children from low-income families a better start in life, such children are under-represented in Montreal and Laval day-cares....

To Andrea's point, 20 years later it's not even doing what it was supposed to be doing.

**Ms. Jag Sahota:** To follow up on that question, why would the Quebec model be more likely to fail outside of Quebec?

Andrea.

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** I've spoken a lot about ensuring that we respect the unique cultures, traditions and history of the places we come from. Quebec has more of a social democratic history. It may be the one place in Canada where such a system could work better.

I am in favour of provincial jurisdiction and it is important on this issue, so Quebec is certainly free to follow a model that suits it. But Canada outside of Quebec does not have the same tradition. We do not have the same desire toward conformity, toward becoming Québécois. We do not have language goals. We have a diversity of immigrants, newcomers and refugees, people who come from ethnic backgrounds, people who come from different places, who desire to raise their children in a very broad diversity of ways. I believe it is very unlikely we will ever have enough money to fund that kind of diversity for the rest of Canada.

There is an established literature in academic literature in Quebec that talks about assimilationist goals and uniformity for people coming into Quebec, and that kind of thing is not present in the rest of Canada. From coast to coast to coast, we have diversity and have people, again, coming from elsewhere who desire to raise their children in very unique and diverse ways. They should not be discriminated against because they don't desire to use spaces in a child care system.

• (1230)

**Ms. Jag Sahota:** Do you have anything to add—

**The Chair:** We'll go to Ms. Sidhu, for six minutes.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

As a member of the committee, I know this year marks the 50th anniversary of the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, an important milestone to remind us what has been accomplished since then and the work that remains to advance gender equality. We often take for granted how far we have to come, and the report expressly states that expanding child care is crucial.

I'm from Brampton, and in my riding alone, 24,000 children receive the Canada child benefit. We know we need to do more, and when I'm speaking with my residents, they know that. When 24,000 children come out of poverty with the Canada child benefit, it's a big help.

What role would the federal government have in how things work in the provinces and territories so families can find good-quality services? Day cares are not open because parents are afraid of COVID-19. How can the federal government play a role?

My question is for Ms. Mrozek. Can you explain that to me?

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** Do you mean how the federal government can play a role in helping families?

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Yes, in particular when helping, and working with, the provincial and territorial governments.

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** I think the role for the federal government is to establish very flexible standards so that in any bilateral agreement, the provinces can have a choice in how to use any money the federal government is giving.

You mentioned the CCB. It's not expressly a child care benefit, but money for parents. It's also a very effective way of ensuring that people have increased resources to establish and create the diversity of care they prefer in their communities.

You also spoke of being from Brampton. I think intergenerational care happens in homes there, with grandparents living with families and kids. Again, some of this is based on cultural preference.

I think universal child care was always a bad idea. I think it's a particularly bad idea in a pandemic, because under these circumstances, parents are keeping their kids out of schools and out of spaces to protect elders living in their homes. It is short-sighted to try to capitalize off the pandemic to create a so-called universal system that people are not choosing to use.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Many of my residents are in the trucking business and in manufacturing and food processing, and most of them have elders. They can provide child care. Money from the Canada child benefit is also helping those families.

I know we need child care. That is why it was in the throne speech. I was very impressed when I heard that.

The "National Progress Report on Early Learning and Child Care 2017–18" states:

Research shows that high-quality child care supports positive child-development outcomes, particularly among children from disadvantaged families. Studies indicate that high-quality early learning and child care (ELCC) has positive effects on child cognitive and social development, improves school-readiness, and creates a foundation for lifelong learning.

Ms. Mrozek, can you explain to the committee whether women hit hard by the pandemic who don't have the luxury of affording private care and don't have family members to depend on will be realistically able to participate in the workplace with a publicly supported child care system?

• (1235)

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** You spoke a lot about high-quality care. What we've seen through peer-reviewed research is that we don't establish high-quality care via the universal system. I'm very concerned that we would be replicating essentially a mediocre quality of care for families across the country.

I think we need to turn back to the data. When we look at those who are unable to access care today, we find from Statistics Canada that while it can be very stressful and while a third of parents say

they have a hard time, only 3% say they are not finding the child care they need in order to return to the work circumstances they desire.

You also mentioned elders caring for kids. I don't happen to live near family, but I do think that kin care is a very important aspect of child care provision. We have peer-reviewed research that suggests kin care is more effective and of higher quality than spaces in centres. I advocate strongly for a greater provision of monies for families to be able to support elders as family members and community-based members so they can help with child care needs in parental and non-parental child care.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** How do you think the isolation of kids is impacting women? I know Kids Help Phone is there. Do you think the help line is helping many kids?

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** Sorry, but are you talking to me?

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** No. This is for Ms. Mrozek.

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** I don't know a lot about Kids Help Phone, but I know that isolation is a tough thing.

I did a research article discussing what parents need to be concerned about with regard to the really high rate of home-schooling happening during the pandemic. That's available at cardus.ca, and I reference Dr. Gordon Neufeld, who is a foremost expert on attachment and learning and in helping parents have a bit less stress over that, particularly for children under six. While it's difficult to have a new normal form of home-schooling, there are advantages that can come from not being in a school-based environment, so I recommend that article.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but that's your time.

Now we'll move to Madam Larouche for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses who have the courage to state their point of view.



However, you'll understand that, as a member of Parliament from Quebec, I can't agree with everything said today. Any of the witnesses can answer my questions.

I'll start with my point of view. It should be noted that Quebec chose to establish a child care service. Quebec wanted to implement many more social democratic measures and to take care of its people. I think that this characteristic is unique to Quebec and that we stand out from the other Canadian provinces. In Quebec, we clearly made this choice.

I gathered the following information on Pierre Fortin. I'm very familiar with him since I'm from Quebec and I've read several of his studies, especially his economic studies. He worked very hard to show the positive impact of a child care system. I'll share a few figures with you, since the study is only a few years old. The study states as follows:

Quebec simultaneously stood out in terms of the development of the women's participation rate. In 1996, the participation rate for mothers in Quebec was four points lower than the rate for mothers in other provinces. Since then, the rate has increased much faster than elsewhere. By 2011, it exceeded the Canadian average. The increase in women's employment in Quebec particularly affected mothers with children under the age of 15 and single parents.

Women who were single parents and who wouldn't have been able to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty managed to do so as a result of the child care system.

The study goes on to state as follows:

Our review of the studies published to date on the issue led us to estimate that, in 2008, approximately 70,000 mothers were working specifically as a result of Quebec's reduced-contribution child care program. We estimated that this influx of employed women led to an increase of about \$5.1 billion in Quebec's domestic income, or GDP, in that year.

This isn't negligible. However, I want to hear your views. Clearly, we made this choice in Quebec. The provinces of Canada can decide what they want to do. However, we want the right to opt out with full compensation in order to comply with this model, which even draws the envy of the international community.

• (1240)

[English]

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** I am not sure if there is a response necessary or even particularly a question, but I do stand by the provincial jurisdiction of the nature of child care. Understanding Quebec has their system, I would speak briefly to the return of women to the workforce after instituting such a system. I believe that the Quebec stats were different, as the member said. They were lower than the Canadian average for women's waged work labour force participation and then they rose to increased. Certainly we saw increased labour force participation in Quebec.

There's a reason, in peer-reviewed research, to believe that wouldn't necessarily be the case in the rest of Canada, because we already have a very high labour force participation. I also don't necessarily think that in an age of attempting economic recovery that burden needs to fall on the shoulders of mothers of young children.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** I'm going to add in terms of other areas, other provinces having their own jurisdiction, the option that Andrea and I are talking about is direct support from the government to continue the great diversity of care that we have across the country,

with refundable tax credits, because right now with subsidies, a lot of poor parents, poor mothers, don't know how to access those.

Refundable tax credits are very democratic, very fair, put money right into poor mothers' hands. Right now during the pandemic, as a teacher, what I'm seeing is that more wealthy parents are able to pool their resources, create a bubble and bring in a tutor for their children. When we talk about the issue that Ms. Sidhu brought up about social isolation, what the federal government really needs to do is quickly roll out direct support to parents so they can hire their own tutor, get two or three families together, and we've knocked out the social isolation, knocked out the issue of kids falling behind scholastically. That is the way to create equity across the country.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you.

Local entrepreneurs told me about the difficulties with finding child care spaces as people return to work. I want to remind you that Quebec's family policy model has been held up as an example around the world. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development highlighted the model in its most recent report on social inequalities.

Current research is also unanimous. Quebec's universal low-fee child care system launched 20 years ago has had a tremendous leverage effect on the use of child care services and on the participation rate of mothers with young children. The economist Pierre Fortin came here in 2017 to share the good news. Quebec has become the world champion when it comes to the participation rate of young women, ahead of the Swiss, and the previous leaders, the Swedes.

I understand that we made a different choice in Quebec. However, it worked for us. I want to hear the witnesses' views on this. Clearly, measures taken with regard to children are important for economic recovery. During the pandemic, the mental load of women increased significantly. They had to manage many things at once. I'm thinking of teleworking and having children at home, not to mention health standards. All these things affected their mental load. Many organizations are focusing on this issue.

I want to hear your views on the mental load of women who are now at home.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but that's your time.

We'll go to Ms. Mathysen now for six minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree with my colleague from the Bloc that you two have come to us with a very different point of view. As a committee, we hear all kinds of views and we respect them. However, it probably comes as no surprise that I don't agree with you.

I find this difficult considering that throughout this study, and certainly when we were hearing from witnesses in the summer, we heard otherwise repeatedly, from all sectors and all different outlooks, whether we were talking to child care experts, stakeholders in the field, the witnesses we heard from earlier today or witnesses from the chamber of commerce. As we heard in the media from the vice-president of the CIBC, child care, and more than that, universal affordable child care, is a necessity. I find it very difficult to juxtapose that with what you're saying today.

In terms of choices, I could agree that saying we haven't put enough funding support into child care to make it universal is true. We certainly need to do a lot more to ensure that when we talk about the choices parents have, they actually have a choice.

Madam Sidhu was talking about those who have to work, such as double-income parents who earn minimum wage, which is certainly not strong enough. They have to work; they don't have choices. Affordable child care actually provides them with more choices. Those with higher incomes, wealth and power, those who have benefited from the privileges that our society provides have choices, but people with lower incomes don't.

In ensuring there are options, we can compare any sort of universal system. We could compare it to the United States' health care system. People there have to make very difficult choices, and their loved ones have to mortgage their house for the health care they need. I know of parents, friends of mine, who have lived on the Quebec side and then on the Ontario side, and it's the difference between eight dollars and \$60 a day for child care.

Those aren't real choices in my mind when we talk about a universal program. I can agree with the fact that it's not universal, but taking that away, instead of putting more supports into it, is probably where we need to go.

I would like to ask a question of both of you. There was mention of how children grow. I know that in my community there's an amazing group called Childreach, and it believes in the fact that child development is equally based on what children learn from their peers and what they learn from adults and the importance of that.

We talk about the isolation of parents who can afford smaller groups. They can tutor their children. However, what would you say to the teachers who are finding themselves in difficult positions? In those cases, they wouldn't have the supports they normally would in a protective workspace from a union or from different kinds of provincial laws, like labour laws. How would you address that?

• (1245)

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** First of all, I think we all agree that child care needs to become more affordable and that we have to help parents far more.

The most affordable form of child care is what we have right now, Ms. Mathysen, and what we need is more money. The Canada child benefit is fantastic. Frankly, even though I wrote an op-ed in the Globe that said "Fund the child", I would have done it differently. I would have given the second child half the amount as opposed to the full, because there's an economy of scale in raising children and you would then.... No, no, no, it's not that the second child is not as important. It is that the money could have been redeployed more broadly.

We need refundable tax credits, but there is not.... Unfortunately, I think the people you heard from in the summer.... What does "an expert" mean? I see that the hand-picked advisers to the Liberal government.... I know the information that they are giving the government, and it is not accurate. It is not full. It's—

**The Clerk:** I apologize. We will have to interrupt. We don't have interpretation.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** Is that because of my mike?

**The Chair:** Yes. I think we're having significant problems. What I would suggest is that the witness submit a brief with the answer that you would like to have to the question.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** Is there any way, though, that at least for the English-speaking people who can hear this, I would really prefer to say it and I can still do a brief after? It's hard for me to remember what I'm saying.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, it's a policy of the committee that we need to have everything in the two languages of our country.

**Ms. Kate Tennier:** Okay.

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** Can I try to jump in?

We're speaking of choices. Child care is the care of a child, no matter who does it. There is a lot of honourable work being done across this country that is completely disrespected by an Ottawa bubble that fails to recognize the beauty and diversity of that care. Choices come when we give low-income parents more money, who can then choose to spend it in the manner they see fit—

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Could I could squeeze in there? Sorry.

If we talk about choices of parents, then, how do you feel about something like a guaranteed livable income that would raise up the choices of those parents to ensure they actually could afford what you're talking about?

• (1250)

**Ms. Andrea Mrozek:** With regard to parents and mothers and fathers at home making choices around their child care, I think that even large sums of money to parents for them to be able to make those choices is a more effective policy decision than creating a bureaucratic system where the money doesn't ever reach the majority of children.

If we're going to look at models—for example, we talk a lot about Sweden—I would like to raise the model of Finland, which does fund spaces but also gives a sizable chunk of money to parents, and for a child under the age of three, they can decide which they prefer to use. That's choice as well. It's not saying that we are giving money only to spaces, and you, Parent A, get money for your child care choice because you chose that particular type of care, and you, Parent B, get nothing because you don't prefer that form.

Parental preference is so key on this, and I just fear that we are not getting enough of the polling and stats out there on parental preference. There is a University of Saskatchewan public policy analyst, Rick August, who has written on and coalesced the years of polling data on what parents prefer, and they don't prefer centre-based spaces. That's the type of care we get when we fund federally a universal so-called system. We need to move away from that and offer parents the preferences that they say they choose and they prefer. I'm really strong on that as well.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, we're at the time we have for this panel. We still have a bit of committee business to do.

I want to thank the witnesses. I do apologize for the technical difficulties today. As I've said, if there are things you want to submit to the committee, I encourage you to submit briefs to the clerk.

At this point, the committee business we need to talk about is that on Tuesday we have the minister coming for the main estimates from 11 o'clock to one o'clock. You will remember that it was going to be a three-hour meeting, but unfortunately, due to a COVID exposure, our final witness, representing the front-line police officers, cannot appear as planned.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all of our front-line workers for the amazing service that they're providing during these challenging times.

That means we will have only a two-hour meeting, then, on Tuesday. On Thursday, if the committee agrees, we wanted to have a meeting of the subcommittee of FEWO to talk about prioritizing the order of future studies. If there are suggestions in addition to the motions we have, I ask that we get those.

I just wanted to take the will of the committee. Do we want to have the subcommittee on Thursday, or do we want to have the whole committee have that discussion?

**Ms. Jag Sahota:** I'll go for the subcommittee.

**The Chair:** The subcommittee?

Very good. With that, we will have the subcommittee on Thursday, and the minister with the estimates on Tuesday.

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