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Chair: Marilyn Gladu



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• (1540)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 12 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 Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using Zoom.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of members and witnesses here. Please wait until I recognize you before speaking. You can activate your mic when you're speaking, and please mute yourself when you're not. With regard to interpretation, those on Zoom and those here in the room know how it goes: You can select floor, English or French. If you want to speak, raise your hand. I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. Thank you for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is studying the subject matter of the main estimates 2025-26.

I would like to welcome the Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State for Small Business and Tourism, the Honourable Rechie Valdez.

We also have, from the Department for Women and Gender Equality, Frances McRae, deputy minister; Lucie Malette, chief financial officer and executive director; and Jennifer Cairnie, director general, strategic policy.

From the industry department, in the first and second hour, we have Etienne-René Massie, assistant deputy minister, small business, tourism and marketplace services.

The minister will be with us for the first hour. She has a hard stop, as I understand it, at 4:45. The deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister will be with us for the full two hours and will be joined by officials for the second hour.

I also want to welcome Ms. Khalid. I understand that you are now officially here, not just friendly to us all the time. We are glad to welcome you as well.

Minister, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we'll proceed to the questions.

You can start. Thank you.

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

It is an honour to appear before this committee. I want to begin by thanking each and every one of you for your incredible work in advancing equality, protecting rights and ensuring that women and gender-diverse Canadians are safe, supported and heard.

Congratulations to my honourable colleague Iqra Khalid for officially joining the committee.

We all share the same goal: a Canada where every person, no matter their background, identity or circumstance, can live free from violence and realize their full potential.

For me, this work is very personal. For those of you who don't know, I was born in Kitwe, Zambia, to parents from the Philippines, who came to Canada in search of opportunity. I grew up watching my parents work hard, sacrifice everything, build a life and give back to their community. Years later, I took my own leap of faith, leaving a 15-year corporate career—I think some of you may know that feeling—to start a small business out of my own kitchen while raising two young children. That journey taught me something simple but very powerful: When women get a fair chance to succeed, families prosper, communities grow and our entire economy becomes stronger.

This is what brings me here today.

I want to start by sharing some good news with the committee. Last week, alongside my colleagues Minister Champagne and Minister Gull-Masty, I was pleased to announce that in budget 2025, we will provide \$660.5 million over five years, and more than \$131 million ongoing, to advance gender equality across Canada. This is the largest single investment in the department's history since its creation in 2018.

Here's how it will make a difference. First, we are investing \$382 million over five years, with \$76.5 million ongoing, to support Canadian women and to stabilize the women's program. This will allow hundreds of organizations on the ground to help more women like me improve their economic security, achieve leadership roles and succeed in every sector of our economy.

Second, we are investing over \$223 million over five years, with nearly \$45 million ongoing, to continue federal efforts to address gender-based violence. This funding will enhance prevention efforts and survivor supports, because no one can learn, work or lead if they do not feel safe at home, online, at work or in our communities.

Third, we are investing over \$54 million over five years, with nearly \$11 million ongoing, to strengthen the 2SLGBTQI+ community capacity fund. These funds will help protect rights, expand networks and make spaces safer and more inclusive across the country.

Fourth, we are investing \$7.5 million over five years, with \$1.5 million ongoing, for Pride security.

Advancing women's economic security, addressing gender-based violence and protecting and empowering 2SLGBTQI+ communities form the foundation of a stronger, safer and more prosperous Canada.

Our government is also reaffirming its commitment to work with provinces and territories to support the continued implementation of the national action plan to end gender-based violence. This collaborative 10-year plan is bringing together federal, provincial and territorial partners with the shared goal of building a safer Canada that supports victims, survivors and their families in every community. It is about ensuring that no matter where someone lives—in a big city, a small town or a remote community—they can access the services and supports they need.

These historic investments build on other measures in budget 2025 that directly support women and gender-diverse Canadians. For example, through Build Canada Homes, we are investing \$1 billion in transitional and supportive housing, because safe housing is often the first step toward healing and a fresh start. We are also introducing a code of conduct for the prevention of economic abuse, setting clear expectations for how banks identify, prevent and respond to financial control and coercion, a too common but often hidden form of gender-based violence.

Each of these measures reflects the same principle: Safety and opportunity go hand in hand. Behind every investment is a person—a woman who finds safety in a shelter, a survivor rebuilding her life, a young entrepreneur launching her first business or a family able to afford child care. Their success is Canada's success.

I'm committed to working alongside this committee, and I appreciate your time. I'm happy to be here with our deputy at WAGE and our assistant deputy for small business and tourism as well.

Thank you so much.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll begin our round of questions. As you may have noticed, I'm very helpful. When you have one minute left in your question sequence, you get the yellow card. When you have 30 seconds left, you get the red card, and then I gently bring you to a close.

We will start with the Conservatives.

Madame Vien, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Minister, welcome.

The \$660 million you mentioned, which was announced by the Minister of Finance last week, means nothing to us. We are all wondering why you announced this five days before the budget was tabled. For us, this does not resolve the issue of violence at all.

What is real and tangible are the figures on your website. Your annual plan for 2025-26 states, among other things, that your department's spending will drop from \$407 million in 2025-26 to \$76 million in 2027-28. This is called a bloodbath. As for staffing levels, they will be reduced by 53%. For us, there is no doubt that this is a significant reduction that will affect women.

Do you think this is the right time to let the government make budget cuts in your department, when intimate partner violence has increased by 39% and sexual assault has increased by 76% since you came to power 10 years ago?

[*English*]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you so much for that question.

I disagree. This is certainly not indicative of any cuts whatsoever.

As I said, we are going to continue to invest in supporting women and gender equality across the country. The announcement I just made, again, was about an investment in supporting women and women's economic empowerment and supporting and keeping safe our 2SLGBTQI+ communities while addressing gender-based violence and—

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien: With all due respect, Minister, that is not what your website says, nor is it what your departmental plan says. Budgetary expenditures will drop from \$407 million to \$76 million. You were in contempt of Parliament last week when you made a \$660 million announcement even before the budget was tabled.

How can you accept a reduction from \$407 million to \$76 million for the women of Canada? That is what we see on your website.

● (1550)

[*English*]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Again, as I said, our investments are going to help strengthen women and gender equality.

My deputy looks like she wants to mention something.

Frances McRae (Deputy Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Thank you.

This is just a bit of precision about what is on our Internet site. That would be a reflection of previous decisions made and would not have taken into account a proposed budget to come.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Madam Chair, excuse me, but I don't have much time with the minister, so I would like her to answer the questions.

Minister, in June, the Minister of Finance gave a fairly clear order to the entire cabinet. You were to reduce your budgets by 7.5% for the current fiscal year, which ends in March 2026, then by 10% for the following year and by 15% for the third year.

The question is quite simple: how will you respond to the request from your Minister of Finance to reduce your department's spending by 7.5% this year?

[English]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Again, I'm going to emphasize that, contrary to what my colleague said, with this announcement there will be consistent, ongoing and stable funding so the women and gender equality ministry will have the support. I've already indicated that \$660 million will go on the ground and—

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Minister, you are not answering my question. You have been ordered to reduce your spending by 7.5% this year, 10% next year and 15% in two years' time.

What did you tell the Minister of Finance about what you were going to cut in your department to meet the targets he gave you?

[English]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Again, I want to say thanks to the women here who advocated to the Minister of Finance. We fought for this funding. I'm happy to share that, based on the announcement I made last week, we are going to be providing \$660 million through the women and gender equality ministry to continue the good work we're doing. Again, this is consistent, ongoing and stable funding that—

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Minister, are you telling us that you are exempt from the cuts that the Minister of Finance has asked every department to make, particularly with regard to the purchase of military supplies, for example? Are you telling us that you are exempt from these 7.5%, 10% and 15% reductions?

[English]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: I have good news for the honourable colleague. Again, we have our budget coming tomorrow at 4 p.m. All the details will be shown in that budget. It's good news. This is stable, predictable funding for the women and gender equality ministry.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: When the budget is tabled tomorrow, you will explain to Canadians why you announced \$660 million out of thin air last week in contempt of Parliament. This is serious, Minister.

I have reviewed Women and Gender Equality Canada's 2025-26 Departmental Plan. I found no performance indicators to assess the spending you say you are committing to violence against women. I would remind you that in Quebec, we have had 15 femicides since the beginning of 2025. Violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence, has increased by 30%, and sexual assaults by 76%, since you became minister.

If you say that your government is so effective in this regard, how do you assess this? You spoke earlier about historic investments, yet your record on protecting Canadian women is very poor.

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question—

[English]

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

We're now going to Ms. Khalid for six minutes.

Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for taking the time today.

Minister, what is the purpose of having a ministry that is specifically for women in our country?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: I am really proud to be able to advocate for women and gender equality. Our goal as a ministry is to ensure that as we're building the strongest economy in the G7, we're taking into consideration gender equality and ensuring the inclusive and full participation of women across the country.

We're doing that in several ways. I have already provided all the details for the announcement that I made. The way we're effectively able to do that is through our gender-based analysis plus and ensuring that we have that as an integrated component of government decision-making. It's the 30th anniversary of our GBA+. This is our commitment in ensuring that all the policies we put forward have the lens of ensuring that we're building equity through all the legislation we continue to put forward.

Again, as we do that, we're empowering women through their economic participation. We're ensuring our communities are safe. We're addressing gender-based violence. Ultimately, that will build the strongest economy in the G7.

• (1555)

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much for that.

What is your role in involving other departments across the government in making sure the objectives you've just laid out are actually achieved?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: One of the roles I play as the Minister for Women and Gender Equality is the convenor role. I've spoken with many women and gender-diverse advocacy groups across the country. For example, we have round tables and conversations, as we did this past summer. We continue to bring forward the issues and concerns they have.

I'm able to share those with my colleagues within caucus and cabinet. This is to ensure that against the GBA+ lens, all government policies that are put forward are taking into consideration equity and equality.

There is one thing I also want to mention. I recently met with the provincial and territorial status of women ministers in the Northwest Territories. We had an incredible conversation. We were really looking at ways we can continue to address this in all regions across the country. Through those conversations and advocacy, I can continue to stand up and fight for women and gender equality across the country.

Iqra Khalid: I really appreciate that. It is all about equality of opportunity, regardless of your gender or race, whom you love and every single denomination we can come up with. Thank you for the work you're doing in ensuring there is equality of opportunity.

Last week, you announced that in budget 2025 there would be an inclusion of over half a billion dollars for the Department for Women and Gender Equality. Women's organizations and stakeholders across the country have been calling for more stable and consistent funding.

Can you walk us through how this investment will help support them?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Again, with the announcement I made, it's absolutely critical that we have that stable and consistent funding for these organizations. I'd also like to share and ask you to look at what we've already been able to do in terms of investments. WAGE estimates that there are over 2,000 organizations operating right across the country that are literally saving lives. They are helping and are able to benefit from some of our investments made in the past.

As a case in point, here are some of our program successes: There have been 160,000 participants, people who have been directly impacted by our supports; 1,500 have leveraged our resources; 3,300 partnerships were strengthened or created; and 69% of funded projects have reduced barriers through gender equality. These are huge.

I think about my daughter, Cassidy, and the opportunities she will have growing up in a world where she can have the equality that we need and connecting it to the investments we make. These continued investments will ensure that the organizations on the ground have the capacity to build and have the resources to provide supports on the ground. This is something I'm greatly proud of, the supports that the women and gender equality ministry provides to Canadians.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much for that very wholesome answer.

Minister, there has been some criticism about how we measure the supports we provide for women. What do you have to say to that?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: As for how we measure that, I already mentioned a couple of examples, but I will elaborate on those.

In 2023-24 alone, over 280,000 resources were delivered, and 731,000 individuals benefited. In that year alone, \$559 million was invested in over 193 initiatives, counting federally, provincially and territorially. Again, these investments are all here to support women and gender equality across the country.

We're working directly with organizations, to which we've provided funding through robust agreements. The WAGE ministry will follow up and continue to ensure there's accountability so taxpayer dollars are maximized in every way to support women, gender equality and inclusion.

• (1600)

The Chair: That's your time.

[Translation]

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

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Honourable Minister, thank you for being with us today.

First, I would like to return to a question that was asked earlier. You made some announcements last week. Is it the government's new strategy to drip-feed measures before the budget is tabled? You received calls. You spoke to me to make an announcement, but not to negotiate, nor to see if it suited us, nor to see if it responded to the demands of groups in our community. It was simply to make an announcement, even though the budget will be tabled tomorrow.

In the context of a minority government, where we must not only talk and make announcements, but also reach agreements and negotiate to improve things, what do you think of this strategy of sprinkling information and teasing out government measures before the budget is tabled?

[English]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: What I can say is this. Since the summer, I've met with many women's and gender-diverse organizations, which shared with me their concerns about ongoing support. Having the announcement done prior to the budget allows these organizations to understand that our government sees them, hears them and provides consistent, reliable and stable funding that the sector needs in planning ahead to support women and gender-diverse individuals.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I feel like we're watching a smokescreen show by the government, which is making announcements to try to cover up budget cuts.

If the goal is stability, why will the budget drop from \$407 million to \$76 million by 2027-28? It's in a table. The figures are there.

Will there be bridge funding between the current funding and the funding announced for 2026-27 to avoid any interruptions for organizations?

[English]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: As the deputy said earlier, essentially we had several programs that were sunseting. The announcement I made was in response to those sunseting programs, whether it's the women's program, the 2SLGBTQI+ program or supports to end gender-based violence.

When we table the budget tomorrow at four o'clock, Parliament will have the opportunity, as it always does, to debate the budget and what's in there. I look forward to those conversations and the debate.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I still feel that it is too little, too late.

How can you guarantee that services for women who are victims of violence will not be weakened by staff reductions? A 53% reduction in staff has also been announced. Will the positions that are being eliminated be related to regional support, expertise or analysis?

[English]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Again, I did not make any prior announcements of any cuts. Our commitment of \$660 million includes \$223.4 million, with \$44.7 million ongoing, to strengthen our response to end gender-based violence. We recognize the challenges happening across Canada and that women need to continue to have those supports. These investments will provide the secure, consistent funding required to help support this, in addition to the national action plan to end gender-based violence.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Minister, there is still a risk that the budget will be reduced and that staffing levels for violence against women will also be reduced.

In your opening remarks, you also spoke about collaboration with Quebec and the provinces. This summer, one of my colleagues alerted me to the fact that in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and several other places in Quebec, women's shelters are grappling with bureaucratic decisions made by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC. This adds delays and increases costs. It is important to remember that the Abitibi-Ouest region needs this first shelter for women who are victims of domestic violence. Why has the government not done everything possible to facilitate the completion of these projects? Why is CMHC's bureaucracy hindering the assistance provided to women?

As Minister for Women and Gender Equality, you must be able to talk to your colleagues in order to seriously tackle the issue of violence against women. If someone warned me about the problems associated with building these shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence, how come you were not aware of the situation? What did you do? Did you discuss it with the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure?

• (1605)

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[English]

Our government certainly respects the autonomy of Quebec and the jurisdictions of all provinces and territories. As you're aware, we do have agreements with the Quebec province separate from the national action plan to end gender-based violence. This agreement respects Quebec's autonomy. The Government of Quebec receives its fair share of federal funding to support programs, initiatives and services aimed at ensuring that we're tackling gender-based violence. Some of the funding we've provided has resulted in interesting projects—for example, Femmes autochtones du Québec, with over \$1 million in funding.

On the organizations you mentioned, I'm happy to work with you to see what issues are there on the ground, as you mentioned. I'm happy to be able to address that directly with those organizations as well through our department.

[Translation]

Thank you.

Andréanne Larouche: Minister, I would just like to conclude by saying that, during the pandemic, Quebec was facing six-month delays compared to other jurisdictions. This is unacceptable. At some point, Quebec's requests must be respected.

I will come back to this issue.

[English]

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go into our second round.

Ms. Roberts, you have five minutes.

Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for your attendance here today, Minister.

I didn't hear anything in your comments earlier about helping seniors, and single seniors in particular. We have some stats that are very frightening in our community. Sai Dham Food Bank services 3,600 seniors per month, for a total of 44,000 per year. Vaughan Food Bank services 1,000 seniors per month, totalling 12,000 per year. Seniors are forced to decide whether to pay their rent, buy their medication or feed themselves. The percentage of seniors who use the food bank is 8.3%, up from 6.8% in 2019.

If you wouldn't mind, Minister, could you please explain to the people of King—Vaughan how this is sustainable?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: This is an important question. I appreciate my honourable colleague's advocacy for seniors. My parents are also seniors.

Senior women do face these challenges, as mentioned, whether it be financial abuse or scarcity instances when it comes to elder abuse. Through the Department for Women and Gender Equality, we provide funding in this regard so that we can better support and empower senior women who are facing these challenges. For instance, we provided \$499,999 to the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, which is leading a 20-month initiative to empower senior women—

Anna Roberts: I'm sorry to interrupt, Minister, but my question is on the affordability of food.

We have 58,255 widowed women over 65 living in poverty. Single Seniors for Tax Fairness notes that 39% do not benefit from pension income splitting. They actually pay 10% more in taxes than a couple earning \$50,000. Between the couple earning \$50,000 and the single senior earning \$50,000, the single senior pays 10% more, which reduces her opportunity to feed herself.

Again, I will ask you to explain to the people of King—Vaughan who are watching at home today how this is sustainable. We have over 58,000 single seniors living below the poverty line. They can't afford the food, they can't afford the medication and they can't afford the rent. How is this fair to them when they're paying more taxes than a couple does?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: We recognize that things are challenging. That includes the challenges that the member opposite addressed with seniors. What we have been able to do is put forward a tax cut that will assist 22 million Canadians across this country. They've already received that tax cut. This is going to help them. We're helping seniors through the Canada dental care plan as well, ensuring that seniors are able to get the supports they need—

Anna Roberts: Minister, I'm sorry to keep interrupting you, but I have only a short window of opportunity to ask questions for my seniors from my community.

As you know, I volunteer at a seniors home. I also volunteer on the accessibility committee in my township, which I am really proud of. Seniors are coming to me and saying that they can't afford to pay rent and can't afford to buy medication. They are paying a lot of taxes on a minimal income and yet everything continues to go up. How can this be sustainable? Recently, this past January, I had two seniors living in their car. They could not afford their rent.

If we continue this unaffordability and this crisis.... The more we borrow, the more we have to pay. How do we explain that to seniors who have built this country and have raised us and now can't live in dignity because of the high taxes?

• (1610)

Hon. Rechie Valdez: What we've done is that we've brought down the age of retirement from 67 to 65. That has helped ensure that more seniors are able to retire sooner—

Anna Roberts: I'm glad you brought that up. You've led me right into my next question.

You brought it back from 67 to 65, but here are some statistics that are really boggling my mind. Seniors are working into their seventies and eighties because they can't afford this. How is it that we're bringing back the retirement age to 65, but they're not retiring for another 15 to 20 years? How does that help seniors?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Again, through the supports I mentioned with the Department for Women and Gender Equality, we're supporting organizations like the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, which is leading a 29-month initiative to empower senior women who are survivors of violence, for example.

We will continue to help support women-led organizations, whose direct support goes into supporting seniors as well. I just visited the Malton Women Council, which helps support seniors on the ground by providing them with the supports they need.

Anna Roberts: Let me give you this stat. According to—

The Chair: Actually, that's your time. You know I'm cruel about it, but there you are.

We're going to Ms. Fancy for five minutes.

We have five minutes for you, Ms. Fancy.

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank our minister for coming today.

I have two parts to my question, but the first thing I wanted to address was that some of my colleagues from across the aisle today talked about smokescreens within the budget. I really wanted to give you an opportunity today, Minister, to talk about the transparency of offering some of these tidbit announcements before the budget comes tomorrow, such as some of these different announcements on defence, housing and small business.

Thank you very much for being in my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets to help with that small business announcement. A lot of the women in the chamber of commerce are really strong supporters of women in business.

I want to give you the opportunity to talk about the transparency in giving us that announcement five days ago, Minister, and what that can do to help provide transparency as we launch our new budget for our new government.

Hon. Rechie Valdez: As I was saying earlier, it's important for us to be able to get ahead and share some of the tidbits, as you've mentioned, that are really going to benefit our communities.

In this case, the Department for Women and Gender Equality is really going to help support and provide that consistent funding that organizations are looking to us to have. The budget that we're announcing tomorrow is going to have clear transparency as to the predictable dates that are coming, not just for tomorrow with the budget that we're launching, but for future budgets as well. I think that type of transparency will provide Canadians the opportunity to have future investments, etc.

To the point, Madam Chair, I was in the honourable colleague's riding. I was happy to be able to do that to announce the \$100-million initiative through the BDC and Community Futures to provide vital resources to 520,000 entrepreneurs and small businesses in rural and remote communities. We know what challenges they have there. This investment will allow rural SMEs to continue to create jobs, strengthen our communities and ultimately build the strongest economy in the G7. This is what the rural and remote small businesses have asked for, and we are delivering that.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you so much.

I have just one more question.

Thank you for teeing that up so well, Minister, in terms of rural and remote, because, as you know, my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets is a predominantly rural riding, and Atlantic Canada unfortunately has seen quite a large rise in gender-based violence.

My question for you, Minister, to finish up today, would be to ask you, how does the government acknowledge this rise in gender-based violence in rural areas such as Atlantic Canada, where women often find it really difficult to gain access to supports?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Madam Chair, my colleague is bringing up to me what I've heard from rural, northern and remote ministers in the status of women. We have talked about this at great length. Some of the unique barriers that are faced in those communities are particularly challenging, especially if you're a woman fleeing violence.

Our government understands that women and girls in those communities are having challenges. That's why, through our women and gender equality funding initiatives, like supporting the YW-CA.... I'm sure my honourable colleague is very familiar with their work. It provides emergency safe homes for those fleeing violence. These culturally responsive shelters provide immediate protections, emotional support and access to resources, bridging those critical service gaps in those communities, especially those that are accessible only by ice roads, flight or canoes. This ensures that women, regardless of where they are across this country, can get the support they need through the women and gender equality ministry.

• (1615)

The Chair: I think you still have a minute and a half, if you want.

Jessica Fancy: That's wonderful.

I have just one more quick question.

I was wondering if you could provide us with a few examples of how applying an intersectional lens has strengthened federal support for women and gender-diverse people across the country, particularly in ensuring that no one is left behind because of who they are and how they live.

Hon. Rechie Valdez: As I mentioned already, it is the 30th anniversary since the GBA+ became integrated into the Government of Canada. This is our commitment to ensuring that we're applying the GBA+ across all federal agencies to ensure that their work is inclusive and that it reflects the diverse and lived experiences of many women across our country. This will continue to improve

training, tools and guidance related to GBA+ to ensure that we can share those best practices and improve our legislation.

I'm proud to say that Canada is a leader on this front, with the implementation of the GBA+. I thank my honourable colleague for continuing this work as well.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

I do encourage anybody who hasn't seen the GBA+ training, which is free on the website, to take that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Minister, I have a lot to say to you before your testimony ends.

First, I would like to return to a topic that my colleague Mrs. Roberts mentioned, namely the fact that older women are more likely to live in poverty. This can perpetuate a cycle of violence.

You boast about lowering the retirement age from 67 to 65. However, what is your government's position on the retirement age? Have you had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Seniors? By increasing pensions only for people aged 75 and over, you have created an unacceptable inequity that is being denounced by women aged 65 to 74, who have not received any increase.

Finally, what is your view on retirement, Minister?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

I'll say this again. Our government continues to support senior women. Through the Department for Women and Gender Equality, we're going to continue to fund and support women's organizations that directly target seniors, so that seniors can get the support they need.

I was initially citing the example of the Malton Women Council. Through the funding they have received through the Department for Women and Gender Equality, they're helping seniors who have faced gender-based violence to ensure they're getting the support they need on the ground, whether that's resources or emotional support.

I actually spoke with one of the victims just last week when I was there. She told me directly that, with the support, they were able to help her have a better chance at getting a shot at life again.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: That is not what they are asking for. I receive emails from senior women across the country asking for this pension increase for people aged 65 to 74. For them, too, poverty and illness do not wait until age 75. You can discuss this with your colleague, the Secretary of State for Seniors.

That said, you ended your previous intervention by talking about Gender-Based Analysis Plus, or GBA Plus, and its importance. I also receive emails from people who are concerned about cuts in your department. We know there will be a reduction in program spending.

How will we measure the results of GBA Plus in other departments if there are no internal resources? Will this compromise the quality and depth of GBA Plus?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[English]

What I can say is that, with all the supports—and we've already pre-announced some of these supports that will help women all across the country—what advocates have asked for is funding to support victims of gender-based violence. I've already talked about that. Also, they've asked for supports to ensure we're building affordable homes in this country. Through our Build Canada Homes program and initiative, we're going to continue building homes at a faster rate.

When women in this country get the housing and support they need, they'll be able to—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry, but that's the time.

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

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming here today.

I'll get right into the questions.

Small businesses are going bankrupt at alarming rates. Women who own businesses are disproportionately affected. As the minister for women and small businesses, this is under your watch. Are you proud of this record, yes or no?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: What I can say is that small and medium-sized enterprises make up almost 98% of all businesses in this country. Our government has been there and will continue to be there for small businesses—

• (1620)

Connie Cody: Just give a simple yes-or-no answer. Is it yes or no?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: What I can say is that we're using every tool in our government to support small businesses so that they can get the help they need, especially during these challenging times.

Connie Cody: Respectfully, Minister, that's not the answer to my question, so I'll take it as a no.

Minister, these investments aren't working. Despite \$7 billion in funding, the women entrepreneurship strategy has failed to reach its targets. The women venture capital initiative has been closed down

after funding only five organizations. Ten years of bad Liberal policies have left women struggling. Are you supporting these failures, yes or no?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: We are committed to ensuring that our government is going to create a vibrant and sustainable venture capital initiative—

Connie Cody: Again, Minister, is the answer yes or no?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: We are going to continue to support them through our venture capital—

Connie Cody: Okay. I'll have to move on to the next question. I'll take that as a no.

When you were running your small business, did you ascribe to the notion that it was okay to balance your operational budget but run massive debt in your balance sheet, yes or no?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: With my business, I sought every opportunity to look for the support that I needed. Through our women entrepreneurship strategy, we are providing just that. We're providing supports through loans—

Connie Cody: Okay, I'll have to take that as a no as well. The obvious answer is no, because the bank would call your loans. Do you agree?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Again, through the women entrepreneurship strategy, we're providing loans, supporting this incredible ecosystem right across this country so that small businesses can help start-ups scale their businesses, get the resources they need—

Connie Cody: Okay, I have only a few moments of time here, so I'll go on to the next question.

Your funding of \$382.5 million to women-led organizations is building bureaucracy. How long will women with small businesses have to wait to hear on results from the government?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: I disagree with the premise of that question. Through the women entrepreneurship strategy, we have already provided supports to over 490,000 women entrepreneurs across the country. That's a \$7-billion investment that we have made. We're also moving the needle with the majority of women-owned businesses. We have moved the needle from 16.8% in 2020 up to now 17.8%. This is an improvement to empowering women to start up and grow their businesses, and it's also helping women gain the independence they need to grow the strongest economy in the G7.

I'm very—

Connie Cody: Okay, so why are Liberals paying hundreds of millions of dollars to consultants who will tell us what we already know, instead of providing the funding to the women your department is supposed to help?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Our government is investing through the women entrepreneurship strategy. This is supporting 20 federal departments. We have supported over 490,000 women. We have provided 35,700 loans. These are loans and supports for women to be able to invest in their businesses, grow their businesses and create jobs for Canadians. This is real support that is going to benefit them; typically, they wouldn't have had the support to be able to do so in the past—

Connie Cody: Excuse me, Minister. You actually did state that the funding would be going to women-led organizations. I'm asking about how much bureaucracy you're building here, and I'm asking how long women-owned businesses in need of help have to wait. I have small businesses in my community of Cambridge that are severely struggling, and they deserve a time frame. How much longer do they have to wait for actual results?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: There is good news, Madam Chair. I visited Cambridge and the small businesses out in her region of the country, and what I can say is that the supports are available right now—

Connie Cody: Minister, how long do they have to wait? They're asking for our help now.

Hon. Rechie Valdez: They have help available to them through the tools and resources we have accessible to them. They can also access the business development—

Connie Cody: They're going bankrupt. That's not help.

Let's move on to the next question.

Given that nearly one-quarter of all violent crimes in Canada now involve intimate partners, will the government not prioritize Conservative Bill C-225, which would treat the murder of an intimate partner as first-degree murder, despite the rising femicide rates, yes or no?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: What I can say is that, again, my heart goes out to anyone who has experienced gender-based violence in this country. Again, I'm happy to share that our government continues to help address this through the national action plan for gender-based violence—

Connie Cody: So, will you support Conservative Bill C-225?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: We know that violence has no place in this country whatsoever, and as you know, we are taking legislation in front of the House to address—

Connie Cody: It's a simple yes-or-no answer. Will you support Bill C-225?

Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I've been listening to Madame Cody's questions, and they are valid questions. However, I've also found that we haven't been giving the minister the opportunity to answer those very valid questions. Is it possible, Madam Chair, that we treat our witness here with the respect that is owed? I know that she has taken the time to come to this committee and to answer the questions, so let's give her the opportunity to answer them.

The Chair: Absolutely. We would encourage everyone to be respectful in the last 20 seconds.

Ms. Cody.

• (1625)

Connie Cody: Respectfully, Minister, according to Stats Canada, total police-reported incidents of human trafficking increased by 72.7%, and 93% of victims are women and girls. Your government passed Bill C-5 to allow house arrest for kidnapping and human trafficking. Do you think that Bill C-5 is a mistake, yes or no?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] communities, especially supporting survivors and holding perpetrators accountable—

Connie Cody: Could you respond with a yes or no, please?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Of course, we know that human trafficking disproportionately affects women and girls—

The Chair: That's your time.

Thank you, Minister.

We're going to move now to Madame Ménard for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard (Hochelaga—Rosemont-Est, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for taking the time to speak with us on the eve of the budget statement.

There is a situation that is not unique to Canada, but it concerns me greatly. It is one of the reasons I entered politics.

We are seeing a rise in hatred directed at various 2SLGBTQI+ communities in particular. This summer, I was very active on the ground. I am the member of Parliament for the riding of Hochelaga-Rosemont-East, where a large part of the Montreal Pride celebrations take place. I know that organizations have contacted you. I have also had conversations with them, and they are asking the government to take action to better support and protect them.

In this context of growing hatred, how do you see things moving forward and how do you intend to contribute?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

The member opposite is absolutely right. We are seeing troubling signs of a rise in hate, whether it's against the 2SLGBTQI+ community or through anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, and that is unacceptable.

When it comes to the rise in hate against the 2SLGBTQI+ community, our government has long supported organizations that are driving inclusion, safety and empowerment across the country. When I spoke to them this past summer, I learned that our women and gender equality funding is actually saving lives because those in the 2SLGBTQI+ community can have a place to turn to that's safe, where they feel included and seen.

Building on our previous investments, we continue to fund projects that create those real-life changes that the member was talking about. For instance, through Sunshine House, the Department for Women and Gender Equality has invested nearly \$250,000 to address housing insecurity among 2SLGBTQI+ people through community-led and culturally grounded supports. Through Pride security funding—I also attended many Pride celebrations this past summer—our government is helping Pride organizers and queer advocacy groups across Canada to strengthen safety measures for events, ensuring that everyone can celebrate free from fear and discrimination.

These are the types of supports that I am proud we are going to continue to support and build on, as per our recent announcement, so that our 2SLGBTQI+ community can feel safe and seen in this country. Thank you.

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you, Minister.

There is undoubtedly a moral duty.

Will there also be an economic vision in what will be presented this afternoon?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you very much.

[English]

Yes, absolutely. All of our investments will ensure... Canadians have asked us, and have given us a mandate, to keep them safe. Keeping them safe will ensure that they will be able to contribute freely in society, help build our economy and work together. That type of inclusion is definitely needed.

We have seen that through the investments I've already talked about today. These investments are extremely important. We're going to continue to build on that through our investments through Women and Gender Equality Canada.

[Translation]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Minister, we are also seeing a disproportion. Earlier, we were talking about gender-based violence affecting women, girls and indigenous communities. The government has developed programs in this regard.

Why is it important to devote programs to these communities in particular?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[English]

Violence against indigenous women and girls and people who are two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex is an ongoing national tragedy. The national action plan to end gender-based violence and our federal 2SLGBTQI+ action plan, both

led by WAGE, are complementary to the missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people national action plan and the corresponding federal pathway.

Pillar four of our national action plan to end gender-based violence is focused on implementing indigenous-led approaches, and I'm proud to say that WAGE has successfully supported over 100 first nations, Inuit and Métis organizations in all provinces and territories since 2021 through the indigenous-specific funding initiative. This funding is not just money. It is actually saving lives. It is helping communities on the ground, and this is vitally important to ensure that we're able to not only build a safe community but also support economic growth in our country.

[Translation]

Thank you.

• (1630)

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Excellent.

We have time to start our third round. I think we'll get in part of the round with the minister, respecting that she has to leave at 4:45.

We'll start with Madame Vien for five minutes.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

When I questioned the minister earlier, I told her that no matter how hard I searched her website and her departmental plan, I could not find any performance indicators for combatting violence against women. The most recent statistics on this subject show that sexual assaults have increased by 76% and that intimate partner violence—as we learned last week—has increased by 39% over the past 10 years. The minister says she is investing a lot of money in this, but there are no performance indicators.

Do you have any? If so, please share them with me.

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[English]

Again, as I said before with regard to funding to address gender-based violence, in 2023-24 alone, over 280,000 resources were delivered and over 731,000 individuals benefited. More than 43% of all federal investments were allocated for prevention efforts, which is well above the initial target of 25%.

Our government believes that addressing gender-based—

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: It's not working, madam. All the indicators are flashing red. All crimes against women are on the rise.

I'm going to ask you another question.

Your predecessor was responsible for women and young people, while you are responsible for women, gender equality, tourism and small businesses.

Given such a disastrous record on women's safety, I would like to know how much of your work is devoted to women.

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[English]

I want to explain to my honourable colleague that there is integration among all three mandates. As I said earlier, Canadians have asked us to keep them safe. Keeping Canadians safe and addressing issues like gender-based violence means they will be able to contribute to this economy, help build the economy and participate in the economy fully. Gender-based violence alone, unfortunately, costs billions of dollars for our economy. That's why ensuring that we have funding investments that are secure, safe and predictable for the women and gender equality ministry allows us to support those who are facing violence.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Thank you.

One of your five objectives, Minister, is to strengthen the organizational well-being and capacity of Women and Gender Equality Canada. That sounds a lot like bureaucracy.

How does that help survivors, keep women safe and reduce crime? What does that have to do with your department?

[English]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Again, we know that gender-based violence is widespread and rising considerably. Violence, including gender-based violence, is a key pathway to homelessness, particularly for women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

However, again, through our announced investments—I've already mentioned those a few times today—we are going to help ensure that we're able to keep Canadians safe, help victims who are fleeing violence and—

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Minister, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but you haven't understood my question. I will repeat it.

Your departmental plan mentions five objectives, and the last one, tourism and small business, has nothing to do with women. It's about building organizational well-being and capacity at WAGE. I was a minister for eight years, and that seems like a lot of bureaucracy to me. It doesn't help women.

Explain to us why that's one of your objectives.

• (1635)

[English]

Hon. Rechie Valdez: What I can say, again, is that, for example, the pillars we have in our gender-based violence national action plan are to support victims, survivors and families, and 25% of all funding, federally, is going towards the prevention of gender-based violence.

This also helps us to respond to the justice system and to implement an indigenous lens to—

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Thank you, Minister. I have only a few seconds left to address you again.

I reiterate that the announcement you made is contempt of Parliament. When I was in the Quebec legislature, that was not allowed because it can have an impact on the stock market and lead to all kinds of negative consequences. What you did is contempt of Parliament, and my colleague from the Bloc Québécois joins me in saying so. You should stop doing that. It is unacceptable and despicable. Parliamentarians will be meeting tomorrow for the tabling of your budget, but last week, you left off by announcing more than half a billion dollars. That is reprehensible.

[English]

The Chair: That's your time.

We're now going to Ms. Nathan for five minutes.

Juanita Nathan (Pickering—Brooklin, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the minister for being here today.

Minister, you recently announced \$189 million in renewed funding for the Black entrepreneurship program. In communities like Pickering—Brooklin, we are seeing a growing number of Black-owned businesses contributing to local job creation and economic growth. In fact, recent regional data shows that the number of Black entrepreneurs in the Durham region has increased by over 30% in the past five years, with many concentrated in sectors such as tech, retail and professional services. I personally had the opportunity to visit businesses such as the Snooze Room, a Black-owned business that provides multi-sensory space for those with neurodivergent needs to everyday corporate groups in the Pickering area.

We also have chapters of the Black Chamber of Commerce and the Congress of Black Women of Canada, which both share spaces in the building of local economic opportunities, both in Pickering—Brooklin and across the country.

Minister, can you please share with the committee how this renewed funding is helping Black entrepreneurs not only start and grow their businesses but also build long-term sustainability, connect national organizations on Black entrepreneurship and create opportunities that strengthen our local economies, please?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: The renewed Black entrepreneurship program supports efforts that address anti-Black racism and the systemic discrimination that has existed for a long time. The Black entrepreneurship program is a very key part of the Black justice strategy that supports employment and income opportunities for Black Canadians as they start, grow and scale their businesses, whether that's gaining business skills, helping to provide employment or helping them build wealth. I'm very proud of the Black entrepreneurship program, because I have seen what it's done to provide loans and funding for Black entrepreneurs investing in this incredible ecosystem across the country. That really helps support those entrepreneurs start and scale their businesses and get access to resources that they never knew existed before.

Finally, there's the Black entrepreneurship knowledge hub. This is something we're extremely proud of, because the knowledge hub puts Black entrepreneurs on a digital map that connects Black entrepreneurs right across the country.

Regarding the organizations that the member opposite has already shared, I'm very proud to also have been able to meet and work with them. We're going to continue to support Black entrepreneurs and, by doing that, we can build the strongest economy in the G7.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you so much for that.

I also want to ask you about the investments and the funding that you're putting in, because, as you know, the fight against gender-based violence is an ongoing effort that requires the involvement and the engagement of every single Canadian. That includes men and boys. Can you share the work that your department does to ensure that men and boys are included in these important conversations, please?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Absolutely. At the recent meeting we had with the status of women provincial and territorial ministers, this was a key topic that kept coming up again and again. The work of gender equality requires every single one of us, including men and boys, to be part of that conversation. That means working together to engage men and boys so that they are part of the work that we're doing, so that they can help promote respect, challenge harmful norms and promote healthy relationships as well. Our department funds projects that engage men and boys. This includes organizations like Next Gen Men, for example, which does incredible work empowering men by directly involving them in these conversations in a healthy and productive way. So far, we have provided them with \$1.3 million through both the women's program and the gender-based violence program.

We will continue to engage men and boys to be part of this work so we can build more equality in our country.

• (1640)

Juanita Nathan: Thank you, Minister.

I have 30 seconds. I want to thank you for coming here to explain the program and the funding opportunities that you have had so far. Thank you for your service.

The Chair: For the last two and a half minutes, we have Madame Larouche.

Then the minister will go, but the department officials will stay, and we'll be able to ask some more questions.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, you are announcing funding to strengthen federal measures to end gender-based violence. Is that your national action plan to end gender-based violence? Is this money earmarked for the plan?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[English]

The funds we announced through the \$660 million are to support ending gender-based violence directly through the national organizations. The national action plan to end gender-based violence is separate from that. The funds are already there and in place all the way through to 2027.

I'm sure the deputy can go into that after I leave. What I can say is that the funding I announced is in addition to this.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Minister, last week, Quebec's justice minister announced the creation of the 25th specialized court for sexual violence and domestic violence in Montreal. In Quebec, there was a widespread reckoning after the *Rebâtir la confiance*, or rebuilding trust, report was published.

When you talk about strengthening the measures in the federal national action plan, I was wondering if you had actually spoken with your Quebec counterparts. In Quebec, there is different expertise. For example, elected officials worked on the *Rebâtir la confiance* report. Their demands, and those we hear in committee, are clear when it comes to addressing violence against women. The federal government could, for example, criminalize coercive control.

Minister, do you share that view?

Are you talking to the Secretary of State for Seniors to work on the specific issue of senior women living in poverty?

Are you talking to the Minister of Justice?

Are you talking to the Minister of Public Safety?

We can't solve this issue with money, bureaucracy and lofty yet empty objectives. Of course, we need resources, but we also need as broad a vision as possible.

Are you talking to your colleagues in other departments who could help you work on issues of violence against women?

Hon. Rechie Valdez: Thank you for your question.

[English]

Madam Chair, I'm going to try my best to answer all those questions.

First, yes, I have met with the former status of women minister for Quebec. I look forward to meeting the new status of women minister for Quebec. Again, in my role as a convenor, I actively meet regularly not just with caucus colleagues but also with cabinet ministers in those various different roles so that we can continue to work and advocate for women and gender-diverse people to ensure that the policies we put forward are shaped with all of their feedback.

I've never had the opportunity to share this, but since you talked about gender-based violence, the bail and sentencing reform act will bring forward 80 clauses of targeted changes to the Criminal Code, following extensive consultations with police, mayors, provinces and victim advocates. The reverse onus provisions in the bail legislation we'll put forward are extremely important.

We're doing our part. I just hope the provincial responsibility will take action, as well, to strengthen bail and sentencing laws, ensuring that they're administering them, investing in infrastructure and resources, and funding the police accordingly within their respective jurisdictions. If they're able to do that, we'll do our part federally. If the provinces are able to do their part, we can move the needle in ensuring we're ending gender-based violence.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

On behalf of the committee, I appreciate your time. I encourage you to continue your good work to eliminate gender-based violence here in Canada.

We'll give you an opportunity to take your leave.

I invite the other department officials to come to the table. Then we will be able to continue our rounds.

I will give you a couple of minutes. I will suspend while you do that.

• (1640) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1645)

The Chair: I welcome all the officials from the various departments. I look forward to their answers.

We're continuing with our third round, with Ms. Roberts for five minutes.

Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for joining us today. We have a lot of important questions we'd like answered, so maybe you can help us out.

The percentage of seniors using a food bank is 8.3%. That's up from 6.8% in 2019. Here is one of the comments that came through about hunger in Canada: "I often have to choose between buying medication and buying groceries. It's food that I do without more often than not." This comment came from a senior in Ontario.

My question for your department is this: How is it assisting the 39% of single seniors who do not benefit from income splitting? I pose that question to whoever would like to answer it.

Frances McRae: I will start.

Clearly, seniors are a critical area for our society. Given the mandate of the Department for Women and Gender Equality, we have some programming that we work on with seniors groups. The minister talked about a couple of those. Our programming is focused on things like gender-based violence, addressing women in the economy and addressing women in leadership. Those are the primary areas of our work.

Anna Roberts: I'm sorry to interrupt. My question is this: What programs does the department plan to implement—hopefully we'll hear it in the budget tomorrow—for the 39% of single seniors who are living below the poverty line? That's 58,255 widowed seniors who are living below the poverty line, and they're all over 65. They go out and get a job. They're working into their seventies, and some of them into their early eighties, to make up the difference so that they can pay for their food and their medication, but here's what happens: They get their extra dollar, but they get cut off GIS, because they've earned too much money. They're backtracking and not any further ahead.

I'll ask the question again. What is in the budget—if you can disclose that to us—to help seniors live above the poverty line, not below it?

Frances McRae: We certainly are not at liberty to disclose anything in the budget.

Anna Roberts: Okay. I have lots of single seniors who have contacted me. There's an organization of single seniors who are struggling. They're going to the food bank and donating their time so they don't feel guilty bringing food home. By 2030, 25% of our population is going to be seniors. People who are heading in that direction are disappointed in this government, after 10 years. They should have been able to retire in dignity. They should be able to have a half decent life, and they can't do that because of the continuous increase in spending by this Liberal government, which causes a high taxation. I guess they don't really care about our seniors. That's my perception, and I'm sorry to say that.

I'm going to change the topic now. Women's health research accounts for 6.8% of total national research funding, despite women making up half of the population. Women have been systematically excluded from clinical trials, leading to greater risk for misdiagnoses, ineffective treatments and adverse drug reactions. Up to 75% occur in women. Menopause-related health challenges push many women out of the workforce. The cost to the Canadian economy of unmanaged menopausal symptoms alone is estimated to be \$3.5 billion per year. The total potential GDP impact of closing the women's health gap is \$37 billion. If we truly want to support women's economy and success and growth, it is crucial for us to address that gender gap.

I know you can't discuss the budget. What plans does this government have to ensure that women have the ability to ensure that their health situation doesn't deter them from working?

• (1650)

Frances McRae: What I can say in terms of women's health gap research is that we at Women and Gender Equality Canada work with our colleagues in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. We actually work with them in areas around gaps for women's health research. You're quite right about the disparities there. Certainly we know that women are in poorer health than men. I would say, though, that our mandate at Women and Gender Equality Canada is not specifically related to programming around health issues. That would be our colleagues in a different department.

Anna Roberts: Okay, let's go back.

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

We're moving now to Ms. Khalid for five minutes.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials for being here today.

I want to talk to you about sustainability. One of the biggest complaints I hear in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills and actually all across Canada with respect to women's organizations that rely on funding from federal grants and supports is about the sustainability of the programs that they run. Can you walk us through how the funding that we provide to such organizations to implement the work that we need in order to empower women and create equality of opportunity for women works for these organizations that go from grant to grant to grant?

Frances McRae: I'll start by talking about our key programs. Our programs really are focused on projects. The reason they're focused on projects is that the issues that are challenging frontline service organizations on the ground across the country are very different depending on where you are. The work that we do supports those organizations in achieving the goals they set out for themselves that align with the government's objectives as stated and as voted on by Parliament. Our funds are really focused on helping them achieve a goal they have and then ensuring that the project is well managed and that they do, in fact, achieve the outcomes.

We also work with organizations sometimes to scale very promising practices, such as moving it to a different territory if it's doing well or moving it to a different population.

Iqra Khalid: Is there any long-term plan that is in place or that you guys are thinking about within your department with respect to sustaining the existence of a lot of these organizations, especially given how difficult it is for organizations to thrive nowadays in this economy?

Frances McRae: As I mentioned, because we work on a project basis, we have been able to help build the capacity of organizations. This was very specifically something that the government asked us to do in the last few years. That capacity-building funding has enabled organizations to become much stronger, increase their financial viability and establish partnerships, therefore contributing to sustainability.

The programming funds that were announced a few days ago, as you might have seen, also include ongoing funding for programming, which is very positive. This is what the minister was saying organizations were looking for: predictability. The proposed funding, should the budget be voted on positively, will contribute to sustainability from that perspective.

• (1655)

Iqra Khalid: When you approve a project, say, this year, you enter into an agreement with the organization. If, five years down the road, the funding runs out—the program is or is not still viable, but they still need support—where do you go from there?

Frances McRae: Organizations sometimes need, through the projects that we fund with them, a particular kind of service or tool. That particular kind of service or tool is then delivered through the project, and they are able to carry that through into their operations.

In many cases, this is not funding that necessarily sustains their operations—that's really not part of what we do—but because of the capacity-building funds we have provided, they have been able to become stronger. That's really our role at Women and Gender Equality Canada, to support the organizations in getting stronger.

Iqra Khalid: How do you measure the strength of an organization? How do you measure the success of the projects you've funded?

Frances McRae: I will just say, should anyone be interested in the projects that we've funded, all of the project descriptions are on the Open Government website. That includes the funding we're providing and the time frame over which it's being provided. Often, it's multi-year, where we can and where it's warranted. It includes the outcomes that are envisaged, and then we document the outcomes.

For our women's program in particular, we have an upcoming evaluation. There's a regular evaluation that's done. That evaluation will be published fairly soon. It was externally done, to establish the relevance, coherence and efficiency of the program.

The Chair: Excellent. That's wonderful.

Now we're going to start our fourth round. We'll start with Ms. Cody for five minutes.

Connie Cody: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll direct my question to whoever would like to respond. There wasn't enough time to ask the minister, so I'll ask you now.

Do you know the national breach rate for peace bonds issued under section 810.03 since Bill S-205 came into force? Why is the data not publicly available?

Frances McRae: As I am the deputy minister for Women and Gender Equality Canada, this question would be better directed to our justice colleagues.

Connie Cody: That's true enough.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Public Safety refused to come here today. I was hoping you might have an answer as to why the data is not publicly available.

Frances McRae: As I noted, this would be better directed to my colleagues at the Department of Justice.

Connie Cody: Billions have been allocated through various initiatives addressing gender-based violence. Can you provide a clear accounting of how much funding has directly targeted intimate partner violence prevention? Have these investments produced measurable reductions of victimization rates?

Frances McRae: Certainly, intimate partner violence is one of the most significant forms of gender-based violence. It's not the only one, but it is one that we are very concerned about.

I'll just stick to the national action plan to end gender-based violence for a moment. The reporting that happens on the investments is actually done through annual progress reports that are published. Our progress report last year would have indicated what specific initiatives corresponded to which pillars of the plan. I would just note, though, that the gender-based violence national action plan also draws significant funding from the provinces and territories themselves—

• (1700)

Connie Cody: Excuse me, but my question was about whether it actually produced measurable reductions in the victimization rates, not about the funding for the program.

Frances McRae: As was noted earlier, the challenge of gender-based violence is that it is a society-wide problem—

Connie Cody: Can you not tell me if there were measurable reductions that can be reported on?

Frances McRae: The crime statistics—

Connie Cody: We'll move on to the next question. We only have a limited time here.

Can you confirm whether mandatory training exists for judges and police on coercive control? If not, why is legislation being considered without implementation support?

Frances McRae: It is very critical that we do training for judges in the court system. This is an area that the Minister of Justice is working on. When the Minister of Women and Gender Equality was here, she referred to legislation that had already been tabled. I understand the Minister of Justice has talked about additional legislation that he is looking at for later in this calendar year, addressing specifically some of the areas around gender-based violence.

Connie Cody: Thank you.

Since the launch of the women entrepreneurship strategy in 2018, funding has grown from \$2 billion to nearly \$7 billion, yet the share of women-owned SMEs has only risen from 15.6% to 19%, failing to reach the goal of 25%.

How do you justify this limited progress despite such a substantial public investment?

Frances McRae: I'm going to allow my colleague to answer that question.

Etienne-René Massie (Assistant Deputy Minister, Small Business, Tourism and Marketplace Services, Department of Industry): You are right. The women entrepreneurship strategy is a collection of 20 federal departments, Crowns and agencies that have come together to deliver a range of services and supports for women entrepreneurs.

The number of women entrepreneurs has increased, as you mentioned. I would also note that we have seen that those are businesses with employees. I would also note that in addition to businesses with employees, we have seen an increase in women sole entrepreneurs. Women sole entrepreneurs now represent 34% of sole entrepreneurs across the country.

Connie Cody: Could you explain why the results are not being posted, several times for several years?

Etienne-René Massie: On a yearly basis, we would publish a sort of state of entrepreneurship in Canada. The latest edition is currently being reviewed and will be made public very soon. In addition to that, we also work with the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, out of the Toronto Metropolitan University. We work with them to publish a state of women entrepreneurship in Canada on an annual basis.

The Chair: That is time.

We're now going to Ms. Fancy for five minutes, followed by Madame Larouche.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you very much.

I would like to welcome the panel here. Thank you for coming.

I have three questions. They might seem a little scattered, but hopefully I'll have time to bring them together at the end.

My first question is for the deputy minister.

We've been seeing in the House lately a Conservative attack on DEI. Could you take this opportunity and talk about DEI and its importance? As Canadians, our strength is our diversity and our mosaic. As a former educator and high school principal, I know the importance that DEI has and its role for our youth in how they enter the job force.

I would like to give you the opportunity today to talk about DEI, please.

Frances McRae: I'm going to bring this question back to the issue of GBA+. The reality is that Canada is becoming more and more diverse, as we know. Therefore, our job as public servants is to ensure that our programs and services respond to the Canadian population. With that population becoming more and more diverse, it's only natural that we should be ensuring that everyone benefits from the programs and services we have, no matter what their circumstances. That diversity is a fact.

When it comes to equity and inclusion, the reality is that not everyone has the same chances and not everyone has the same opportunities, so equity is about fairness, and inclusion is about belonging. From our perspective, when people belong, they are healthier, they are better able to contribute and they're better able to learn. For us, these are really important concepts that are built into GBA+ and in fact enshrined in the Gender Budgeting Act.

• (1705)

Jessica Fancy: Thank you very much for that.

I would also like to ask.... It's time to talk about boys for a moment. We know that the fight against gender-based violence is an ongoing effort, and it requires the involvement and engagement of every single Canadian. This includes men and boys.

I'm wondering if your department today could share what you're doing to ensure that men and boys are included in this important conversation.

Frances McRae: As the minister talked about, men and boys are a critical part of prevention. However, I want to raise a couple of issues. We've been talking quite a lot about equity.

For example, men in Canada are much less likely than women in Canada to go to post-secondary education—significantly. This is not good for our society, and that, to us, is also part of the challenge when it comes to ensuring inclusion and engagement and solving issues like gender-based violence. We also know that men are in poorer health and they're less likely to seek help from medical professionals. Again, that contributes to well-being below levels that are optimal.

As examples of some of the work we do, we certainly work with our provincial and territorial colleagues under the gender-based violence national action plan, in the prevention pillar in particular. There are a number of programs engaging men and boys. One project that I would like to talk about is White Ribbon, which we at Women and Gender Equality Canada support. They have a campaign called “My Friend Max Hate,” and they're working quite heavily on this campaign, from September 2023 to March 2026. What they're doing is scaling up some work they've been doing on social marketing through this campaign, reaching educators and developing lesson plans. They've now been able to scale this program and expand it to Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and the three territories. We're quite interested in making sure we fund projects that are working, and this is one of them.

Jessica Fancy: That's awesome. Thank you very much. I would love to have Nova Scotia on that list. I'm very familiar with the program. I'm also familiar with the work of Morris Green, in my own riding of South Shore—St. Margarets, who is doing a lot of work with Guys Work. We've had him in a lot to work with some of our boys.

I have one last question. Within my riding, I've met with a lot of different women's groups and a lot of different action groups. A lot of them talk to me about application processes. I'm glad to talk to the panel here today about that. They're saying that when their programs come out, sometimes they have multiple places within, let's say, my province of Nova Scotia, and they feel like they're competing when they're applying for things. When we're looking at

streamlined application processes, I think my colleagues from across the way mentioned the rubric and how we apply for these.

I have wonderful organizations that are having to spend a lot of money on consultants in order to apply in some of the applications, because they're so convoluted. I'm wondering if there have been any measures in terms of how we could have a streamlined process so that it doesn't take a rocket scientist to help get funding and apply for some of the programs that are available.

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, please.

Frances McRae: At Women and Gender Equality Canada, we solicit feedback from our applicants on a routine basis to be able to streamline our application processes. We recognize that it's not easy when you're a small organization. We work with very small organizations, so we are very sensitive to that at Women and Gender Equality Canada.

The Chair: Excellent.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for three minutes. I'm giving you extra time, to be fair.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Training is key. We've heard about the importance of training within the justice system during studies at this committee. In fact, we put questions to the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Justice. We were told that the training sessions were not related, even though the issue affects various departments. In my opinion, this reinforces the idea that members of the Department for Women and Gender Equality, the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Justice must work together in order to have related policies.

Can you explain what the additional funding for the women's program and the equality for sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression program will be used for?

How much of vote 5 is allocated to Quebec and rural regions? Can either of you answer that question?

• (1710)

Frances McRae: Thank you for your question.

I agree with what you said about working together. We work very closely with our colleagues at the Department of Justice, the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada. You're absolutely right that coordination is very important.

In answer to your second question, that is not how we calculate the increase in vote 5 allocations to various populations. We can give examples of projects in Quebec and rural projects, but the data we collect is not divided into those categories.

Andréanne Larouche: It would still be worth knowing how much of the funding is allocated to the regions, especially rural areas, where access to services is a problem, particularly for women in financial difficulty or victims of violence. We've already done a study on the importance of the distribution of funds.

What are your priorities in allocating funds? Is it violence, economic security or leadership? Are those your priorities?

Frances McRae: If I understood the question correctly, you want to know how we set priorities.

Currently, the three priorities of the women's program are fairly long-standing. The program itself was put in place in 1973. It has been around for a long time, and each government gives it different focuses and priorities.

[English]

The Chair: We will now go to Madame Vien for five minutes.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien: Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Deputy Minister, would you say that your department is succeeding in protecting women when there has been a 55% increase in the number of violent crimes, a 30% increase in the number of homicides, a 76% increase in the number of sexual assaults, a 40% increase in the number of spousal violence cases and a 41% increase in the crime index? I'm not the one saying this; it's the Minister of Justice, who announced these figures last week.

In your opinion, are you succeeding in protecting women?

Frances McRae: We are confident that our programs and the funding we provide to organizations working on the ground are making a difference.

Have the numbers gone down? No. You're absolutely right that these are unconscionable numbers.

As department members, we have leverage to support organizations that do the work on the ground to help women and people who have been abused.

However, the numbers sometimes go up because people are more likely to file reports because they trust the police more. Our data shows that the number of reports is increasing.

Dominique Vien: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

In your departmental plan, which appears on your website, you talk about a 53% staff reduction. However, there are two files in addition to the minister's. It isn't just the women's file; there are also the tourism and small business files.

Can you tell us exactly how many employees your department has at the moment, and how many of them are dedicated solely to the issue of women in Canada?

Frances McRae: I thank the member for her question, Madam Chair.

First, the small business and tourism files are under another department, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada.

You won't see them in our departmental plan. This one deals only with the Department for Women and Gender Equality.

As far as staffing is concerned, the figures you would have seen in the departmental plan tabled in June do not reflect the decisions that will be made based on the budget.

• (1715)

Dominique Vien: You're not able to disclose what's in the budget, but there was an announcement last week of almost half a billion dollars.

I don't have a lot of time, Deputy Minister. I want to know whether, as deputy minister, the department's top official, you received a letter from the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, the Prime Minister's Office, the secretary to the cabinet or the Privy Council asking you to cut 7.5%, 10% and 15%.

Did you receive that letter, yes or no?

Frances McRae: Madam Chair, the minister received the letter this summer, at the same time as the other departments.

Dominique Vien: Thank you.

Did you reply to the letter, Ms. McRae? Did you reply—

Frances McRae: Madam Chair, I thank the member for her question.

Yes, the minister replied to the letter.

Dominique Vien: Thank you.

What does the letter contain in terms of cuts to meet the 7.5%?

Frances McRae: Madam Chair, I thank the member for her question.

The contents of the minister's letter is confidential, so I can't discuss it.

Dominique Vien: Then you're confirming that the minister received a letter asking her to make budget cuts of 7.5% this year, 10% next year and 15% in two years. In addition, you say that the letter is confidential.

Frances McRae: I can confirm to you, Madam Chair, that the letter asked for proposals from the minister and that the minister, like all other ministers, forwarded her proposals.

Dominique Vien: Is it possible to assess that right now? Cuts have been announced. An amount of \$660 million was announced, but that was before the budget that will be tabled tomorrow. Can we, as parliamentarians and Canadians who pay taxes, find out exactly where you're going to cut in order to fund military activities, in particular?

Frances McRae: Madam Chair, as far as the contents of the budget and the information presented to parliamentarians is concerned, the Minister of Finance is the one who will decide.

Dominique Vien: I gather there are cuts in the offing.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: That is the end of your time.

Now we have Madame Ménard for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm taking a step back, because I'm puzzled.

This committee has been at work since the beginning of the session, and we've written two reports. One is on gender-based violence and femicide, and the other is on coercive control. In these two reports, we recommended that, as a government, we maintain funding for community organizations as well as organizations specializing in advocacy, survivor support and prevention.

Last week, in this same committee, we heard from Pierre Brochet, president of the Association des directeurs de police du Québec. He also fully agreed that support for community organizations is essential in the fight against gender-based violence. Since the beginning of the afternoon, I've been hearing my Conservative Party colleagues say that there's no point in supporting community organizations. The minister was interrupted many times when she was here this afternoon.

Would its representatives here like to add anything on the current situation?

Frances McRae: I thank the member for her question, Madam Chair.

The support provided to organizations on the ground, as I said, is essentially provided by the women's program, whose main role has really been that since 1973. We do know that the difficulties and challenges are different depending on where you are in the country and depending on the other services provided on the ground. For example, many of my colleagues would tell me that, even within a province or territory, the challenges are very different. Therefore, it's essential to work with people who really know the situation on the ground, and who have means and solutions. However, the organizations need support to do so.

• (1720)

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you.

I would like us to focus on so-called national organizations, that is to say organizations that are not supported by their provinces. There aren't that many of them across the country. Some of them have been funded by WAGE for five, 10, 15 or 25 years. They are all asking for funding for the mission so that they can continue to work and meet the needs on the ground.

You talked about project-based funding. What about potential funding for the mission?

I'd like to hear your department's view on that.

Frances McRae: I thank the member for her question.

Fundamentally, our commitment to national organizations is very important to our department.

You're right that projects aren't always perfect. However, we have national projects that are really important for carrying out work that is more national in scope.

There are different kinds of organizations, and I would say that we have quite a few national organizations. A number of them work for women's rights in particular. An investment was announced in December 2024 through the 2024 fall economic statement, which allocates funding to national organizations. We are currently working on distributing the funds.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: In a few seconds, can you tell me if we can dream? Will it ever be possible to get mission-based funding? It exists in other departments. I saw it in the department responsible for sports.

Frances McRae: I thank the member for her question.

We in the department do what the government asks us to do. If a government makes decisions, we implement them.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you, Ms. McRae.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent.

We have enough time to do part of a round. After Ms. Roberts, Ms. Nathan and Madame Larouche, that will be the time and resources for today.

We will now go to Ms. Roberts for five minutes.

Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to ask a yes-or-no question.

Deputy Minister, do you live by a budget? Do you live on a budget? I think we all do. We all have to budget our income.

Frances McRae: I just want to clarify the question. Are you asking about my personal budget?

Anna Roberts: Yes. Do most people, like yourself, live on a budget? I know I do.

Frances McRae: Yes.

Anna Roberts: Okay. Good.

Here's my concern. I had the wonderful opportunity this past summer to go to Ms. Fancy's riding in Nova Scotia. It's a beautiful place. I loved visiting it. I visited many seniors there. They told me that the food banks are running out of food. The rural areas can't afford food because of the high cost of heating. A lot of the rural areas are heated by oil, and they have no other choice.

My question is this: Is your department working on an affordable situation for seniors so that they don't have to choose between heating, eating and medication?

Frances McRae: As I noted earlier, our department's mandate is really focused on women and gender equality. We certainly do have programs and projects where we are working with senior women. If I were to say what our major contribution is on the affordability front, though, as a department, it's actually our menstrual equity fund pilot program, which is not—

Anna Roberts: That's not going to answer the question. I promised the seniors I met in Nova Scotia that I would ask this question. They don't have the income to support the basic needs of life. When we talk about gender equality, we're talking about seniors as well.

What is in the budget to ensure that seniors who are living below the poverty line don't have to choose between heating, eating and medication?

• (1725)

Frances McRae: I will go back to the mandate of the organization that I'm in charge of as deputy minister, and that is working with senior women's organizations, in many cases, to help support them in their needs. In our case, it tends to be things like survivors of gender-based violence who are senior women. The minister talked about a project that was specifically about ensuring that senior women who find themselves in those situations are able to—

Anna Roberts: Your department, then, doesn't work with the affordability crisis for seniors. Is that what I'm hearing?

Frances McRae: The affordability programming that our department has is related specifically to menstrual equity, which we deliver with Food Banks Canada as a significant—

Anna Roberts: It's the Department of Women and Gender Equality. Wouldn't that also encompass seniors?

Frances McRae: As I said, we do serve senior women, absolutely.

Anna Roberts: What's in the budget for seniors who are living below the poverty line? Do we have a number? Are you aware of anything that's going to be presented on November 4 to ensure that seniors—

Iqra Khalid: On a point of order, I don't believe it's appropriate for us to talk about what the budget will present. I know there will be a lockdown as to what is in the budget. I appreciate the opinions here, but I don't think it's fair to ask the officials these questions, because they're not able to answer them.

The Chair: If I could just clarify, I think the department officials have already indicated that they can't disclose anything about the budget. It's been asked multiple times, but I think the answer would be the same every time.

Ms. Roberts.

Anna Roberts: We were told that there is \$660 million that is going to be used. What part of that money is distributed to the seniors? That's my question. I'm not asking them to divulge the budget—I get that—but I'm talking about seniors. As I am the shadow minister for seniors, they continue to ask me what is happening.

What are we doing to ensure that seniors can afford to eat, heat themselves and buy medication?

Frances McRae: As we've talked about, seniors are a clientele that we pay significant attention to at Women and Gender Equality Canada.

As for the announcement made a couple of days ago, clearly these are proposals that are being put in front of parliamentarians. Should the budget pass, we will be looking at opportunities for allocation of that funding. Those announcements will be made by the government in due course.

Anna Roberts: Would you assure seniors in this country that your department is doing everything to acknowledge the fact that they're living below the poverty line? Would you be able to assure seniors that, this winter, they won't have to sleep under 20 million different comforters because they can't afford to heat their homes?

Frances McRae: Madam Chair, in answer to that question, I will return to the comment I made earlier, which is that within the mandate of Women and Gender Equality Canada, we will be serving seniors, and we will continue to do that.

The Chair: That's excellent.

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

Juanita Nathan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In the programs that are funded through WAGE, are there criteria for age groups, for example? Do you fund projects that are for girls, specifically, or for abused women or for seniors? Do you give priority to any one of them in your funding?

Frances McRae: We serve women and girls, gender-diverse people and the 2SLGBTQI+ community, through our organization.

Juanita Nathan: When the funding proposals come in, do you try to see which areas they are coming from and try to give priority to some of the areas you may not have funded in previous years?

Frances McRae: In fact, we continually monitor the work that we're doing and the projects that are submitted. In some cases, we have gaps, in the sense that not enough projects were submitted or no projects were submitted for certain parts of the country or for certain communities. For example, women with disabilities and senior women are areas where we find that sometimes we don't get enough proposals, so we do go and work specifically with organizations to be able to support their application processes. We have a continuous intake mechanism; therefore, we can bring in projects and ideas that are outside of our calls for proposals but that fill gaps.

• (1730)

Juanita Nathan: I understand that the populations in certain provinces, around certain cities, are a lot bigger than in other places, so you may be funding more in Ontario or in Quebec, or in other parts that have larger urban populations. What kinds of measures do you take to fund rural areas? Do you have any specific funding models that target rural areas?

Frances McRae: Our programming is really to address issues where they arise. We look at data gaps, and we look at information that we have on particular needs.

An example is our survey on safety in public and private spaces. We did a first round of that survey in 2018. We did not get sufficient data from that in certain areas, so in this round we are over-sampling in rural areas, in the north and in particular populations where we didn't have enough good disaggregated data. The disaggregated data then helps us target programming, and it helps our evidence base for determining what the needs are, where they are and how acute they are. Therefore, it helps us provide good evidence-based programming.

Juanita Nathan: Do you have a segment of funding that's specifically for the indigenous community, indigenous women, or do they come in with all the other applications? Can you talk about some of the importance of funding those projects as well?

Frances McRae: The minister, when she was here, did refer to a specific funding envelope that we had, and that has currently allocated \$55 million for 100 organizations that are working on project work.

I will say that, for our department, discussion and engagement with indigenous peoples are critical. We have what we call our indigenous women's circle, where we bring in a number of different experts to help us better understand the needs on the ground and bring the evidence that we need through lived experience to understand the areas where we could make the biggest difference.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you.

You've also established that Canada is very diverse and, as such, we need to think about funding certain communities where domestic violence is very prevalent. Can you talk about how you would select groups like that and fund them specifically to curb that?

Frances McRae: We rely on data to be able to understand where the needs are greatest. I will just say, for example, that gender-based violence is higher in the territories. We see different types of crimes. For example, when we have femicide in rural areas, gun crime is much more likely to be involved.

You really have to understand the details of what's happening to be able to understand where you can make the biggest difference and where your investments are going to have an impact.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

The last turn goes to you, Ms. Larouche. You have two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

I remain concerned. I also covered a lot of ground this summer.

What should I tell the member of the LGBTQ community, who wrote to me again recently because he was extremely concerned about the department's funding? What should I tell the Réseau des tables régionales de groupes de femmes du Québec, or RTRGFQ, which sent me a carbon copy of a letter sent to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Women and Gender Equality about budget cuts

at the department? You confirmed that the minister had received the letter regarding the 7% budget cut to the department's budget. A 53% staff reduction was mentioned.

I will conclude by letting people on the ground speak. What should I tell the RTRGFQ, which wrote that, unsurprisingly, the organization is greatly concerned about the budget cuts of over 80% planned for WAGE and announced in the departmental plan published this summer? These unprecedented cuts are all the more concerning given the rise of right-wing movements that pose a direct threat to the rights and freedoms of women, girls and 2SLGBTQI-A2+ people. The announcement of over \$330 million in cuts sends a clear message. Achieving gender equality is far from being a priority for the government. Without WAGE funding, major repercussions will be felt across Canada and in Quebec. Feminist, local, regional and national organizations, which are at the mercy of programs, are threatened by the planned cuts at the department.

On top of that, there is talk of budget cuts while needs are increasing.

What has the minister planned to do to support her officials, who will be receiving more applications? What concrete measures can it put in place to protect the psychological health of staff and retain talent? Will the department's internal management be subject to a performance audit related to these cuts?

• (1735)

Frances McRae: Thank you for those questions.

First of all, I'll reiterate what the minister said about funding. Our June departmental plan essentially reflects the decisions made by the government in June. Tomorrow's announcements, proposals and budget are not reflected in the June departmental plan. These were time-limited funds. We're waiting for the next decisions from the government and parliamentarians on our funding.

Then I will answer the question about the psychological health of staff. You're absolutely right that because they work on issues like gender-based violence, our employees are more likely to experience very tough times and very strong emotions because of the issues facing the people we serve. Therefore, we work very closely with the employees assigned to the employee assistance program.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's the end of our time.

Thank you so much to all of the officials, especially the deputy minister, for all of your answers today.

I want to remind the committee that Thursday at noon is our deadline for supplemental or dissenting opinions on our coercive behaviour report.

With that, I'm going to adjourn the meeting. Thank you so much.

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