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Chair: Robert Morrissey





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

Monday, February 23, 2026

• (1540)

[English]

**The Chair (Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, committee members.

The clerk has advised me that we have a quorum, and we have respected the time for members to come from the chamber to the committee following the vote.

The audio for the witness appearing online has been tested, and it's good.

With that, welcome to meeting number 26 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today, we will begin our review of Bill C-222.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are appearing in the room and virtually.

Before we begin, I would advise all members to make sure your devices are silenced. Please refrain from tapping on the boom of your mic, for the protection of our interpreters. Also, please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

You have the option to participate in today's meeting in the official language of your choice. Make sure you're on the right channel in the room. For those appearing virtually, click on the globe icon at the bottom of your screen to choose the official language of your choice.

If there is a breakdown in interpretation services, please get my attention, and I will suspend while that is being corrected. From time to time, I forget to remind members and witnesses, especially when you're giving your opening statements, to speak slowly for the benefit of the interpreters.

Madame Koutrakis.

**Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before we begin today's meeting, in the interest of providing clarity and ensuring that the committee can complete its study of Bill C-222, I would like to propose the following motion:

That, pursuant to the Order of Reference dated February 4, 2026, the committee undertake a study of Bill C-222, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code (Evan's Law); that the committee hold up to three meetings to gather testimony; that upon completion of these meetings, the Chair schedule clause-by-clause consideration at the earliest possible opportunity; and that the Chair report the bill to the House at the earliest possible opportunity

I'm putting it on notice.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Before I go to Mr. Genuis, the motion has been circulated in both official languages.

**Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** I'm sorry, but I have a point of order.

Is that being put on notice or being moved?

**The Chair:** Are you moving it?

**Annie Koutrakis:** I'm moving it.

**Garnett Genuis:** Okay.

**The Chair:** It's been moved by Madame Koutrakis.

The motion is in order because it's relevant to the subject matter before the committee.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'll move that we amend "three" to "four". We've submitted witness names. I think "up to four" is reasonable. After three meetings, if we decide that's enough, that's fine, but I suggest having up to four. Otherwise, I think it's agreeable.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** We have the motion of Madame Koutrakis. As Mr. Genuis has proposed an amendment, I will have to dispose of the amendment.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Could you repeat the amendment? I'm sorry.

**Garnett Genuis:** It's just changing the number of meetings from three to four. That's it.

**Annie Koutrakis:** We're okay with that.

**The Chair:** Is there any further discussion on the amendment by Mr. Genuis?

I'm seeing consensus on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** The motion of Madame Koutrakis, as amended by Monsieur Genuis, has been adopted.

With that, committee, I will proceed to Bill C-222, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code regarding the death of a child.

Pursuant to the order of reference received on Wednesday, February 4, 2026, the committee will begin its review of Bill C-222.

I would like to welcome the sponsor of the bill, the Honourable Terry Beech, MP for Burnaby North—Seymour.

Mr. Beech, you have five minutes for your opening statement.

**Hon. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to speak to Bill C-222, the relieving grieving parents of an administrative burden act, also known as Evan's law. It is my extraordinary pleasure to be back with you at HUMA.

I want to start by acknowledging that while legislation often deals with budgets and bureaucracy, this bill is fundamentally about compassion. It is about how our government treats Canadian families in their darkest moments.

For me, this is personal. As I mentioned at second reading in the chamber, my wife and I came incredibly close to losing one of our daughters during a difficult birth. The 20 days we spent in the NICU gave us a glimpse into the heartbreak that too many families have to live through.

Sadly, for approximately 1,700 families in Canada every year, there is no happy ending. They leave the hospital without their child, but they return home to a government system that inadvertently adds to their pain.

Right now, under the Employment Insurance Act, if a child passes away while a parent is on leave, that parent legally ceases to qualify for parental benefits. Consider what that means in practice: In the midst of planning a funeral and grieving a profound loss, a parent is expected to contact Service Canada immediately, and if they don't, they begin accruing a debt to the government that the CRA will later claw back.

Parents can switch to EI sickness benefits, which offer similar financial support, but to do so they must navigate a lot of red tape. They often have to call every two weeks to prove they are still grieving to re-justify their need for support. It is a cruel, unnecessary administrative burden placed on people who are barely holding it together.

Evan's law proposes a simple, elegant solution. The bill states that if an individual qualifies for parental benefits and their child tragically passes away, they should continue to qualify for the benefits they were already promised. There would be no phone calls, no clawbacks and no questions asked. A grieving family could simply take the time they need to heal without the government looming over them.

I know that as committee members, you must consider the fiscal responsibility of any bill, so I want to address that point head-on as well.

While the Library of Parliament costing suggests a fiscal cost of several million, this figure looks at payouts in isolation. It does not account for the fact that many of these parents would otherwise simply switch to EI sickness benefits, which pay out at approximately the same rate.

Therefore, on a net basis, this measure is largely cost-neutral. In fact, it will generate savings, which are also not accounted for, by

removing the need for Service Canada officers to process biweekly reports and for the CRA to chase down grieving parents for clawbacks. We're actually reducing administrative waste, helping the government run more efficiently.

Regarding the royal recommendation, when I first introduced this bill, I was honest that I needed help securing it. I am pleased to report to this committee, as I did in the House during second reading, that through positive discussions with the responsible ministers, we have found a path forward.

I acknowledge that we may need to look at minor technical amendments during the committee stage to ensure the legislation is executed properly within the EI framework, and I am open to that co-operation. It's part of the reason we have the committee process.

However, I urge the committee to keep this bill focused. This is a small but mighty piece of legislation. It targets a specific injustice faced by approximately 1,700 families each and every year. It was identified a long time ago, and for some reason it has taken way too long to correct, and we now have that opportunity.

Let's not over-complicate this. Let's pass this bill to show that our Parliament can be efficient, smart and, above all, kind.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beech, for the opening statement.

We'll now go to the first round of questioning, which is six minutes.

We'll begin with Mr. Genuis for six minutes.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Beech, thank you for introducing Bill C-222.

Conservatives believe that this is an important and necessary protection for parents and families. Grieving parents shouldn't have an additional burden of needing to fight bureaucracy to access the benefits to which they're entitled.

[English]

Mr. Beech, thank you for presenting this bill. I haven't had a chance to speak to it in the House yet. As the Conservative shadow minister leading our response on this, I want to assure you very much of our support for the principle. I see it as building on work that has been done by my colleague Blake Richards and others to take important steps forward to help families. I know the debate that happened at second reading was very meaningful and very heartfelt.

I wonder if you can start by sharing a bit about the work that's been done on this issue in the past, in particular with motion 110 from the 42nd Parliament. I believe there was a study at this committee that came out of that motion, and many people spoke to it at the time. I wish we could have acted sooner, frankly. I wish we'd seen action on this in an earlier Parliament, but can you speak to motion 110 and some of the issues emerging from it?

**Hon. Terry Beech:** Certainly, I'll do my best.

Even though you didn't have the opportunity to debate during the two hours of debate in the House, you have been very communicative about this bill. I appreciate your desire to see it go ahead in a good way and your communication as we go through this process.

There are many issues where it makes sense to be partisan, and this is not one of them. This is something that benefits all Canadians, and both of our families and all of our neighbours, so I appreciate how you've gone about addressing it. I also appreciate the opportunity to salute your colleagues, including Blake Richards, and members of this committee previously, who studied bereavement.

Obviously, many other issues were raised, not just this one. This has been attempted a couple of different ways, but I have specifically focused on this one because of the work of the previous minister responsible for Service Canada, Karina Gould, but also my work at Service Canada, knowing that this was an opportunity to not only do the right thing, but do it in a cost-effective manner. That is a rare thing.

We really have no excuse not to figure this out. As I said to Blake in the House during debate, I have no excuses and no reasoning for why we were not able to accomplish this sooner. I can only promise that we're going to do everything we can to get this across the line.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you very much for that.

I want to highlight an amendment that we Conservatives would like to propose. This bill deals with the case of bereavement when a child dies, and the continuation of leave in that case. It was also brought to our attention, as a result of a case in the riding of one of my colleagues, what happens when a parent dies. It's a similar situation of pain for the family. If the parent who was on leave dies while leave is being paid out, immediately that leave is lost. That compounds the grief the family is facing with financial hardship.

This is going to be a relatively small number of cases. Our view is that provided we have agreement among parties and a mandate to do so from the House, these are things we can secure. We would be able to add the element of supporting families when a parent dies to the existing provisions around supporting families when a child

dies. Obviously for that to proceed, it is dependent on the agreement of the government, with a royal recommendation, but it is something we would like to put forward as another situation of bereavement where we can protect families in a vulnerable situation.

I wonder if you could share your reflections on that proposal.

● (1555)

**Hon. Terry Beech:** I'd be happy to, and I want to be very careful how I frame this. You raised this potential amendment with me before today, so this isn't coming as a surprise. I don't think my response will be a surprise either, because I've also raised my own personal concerns.

There are obviously lots of things that need to change within EI, and EI modernization has been ongoing for some time. This is close in scope in that it deals with bereavement.

My concern is that this is a private member's bill. Royal recommendations have only been allowed for private member's bills since 1994, and since that time, in the last 31 years, they have only been received three times. As well, given that we were able to achieve a line item in the index of the current budget specifically for the measures we have in this bill, I would be concerned about expanding the scope in any way—

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry, but I'm just going to jump in, because I'm almost out of time.

I want to be clear that we would at no point want to jeopardize the bill, so there's no point in doing this unless we know we're going to have a royal recommendation. Having said that, I would encourage the government to consider offering a royal recommendation to an amended bill that also takes care of families in those situations.

The only possible impediment to this is the willingness of the government to provide the royal recommendation, so we will be advocating for that and hoping for a good result.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

We'll now move to Ms. Fancy for six minutes.

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

Terry, thank you so much for being here and for this bill.

I'm from Nova Scotia. In 2015, a bill was created that is very similar to yours. It was called Ruby's Law. That bill was used to create a job protection strategy for leave when a pregnancy ends without a live birth. It applied before the parental leave had ever existed.

Ruby's Law, similar to yours, was only about loss and bereavement in a medical event. It was very limited. There was nothing in terms of pay. It was just protection of job loss for taking an extended bereavement leave.

As a newer member of Parliament, in reading your bill, Terry, I was very moved by that, in conjunction with something that Nova Scotia fought really hard for in the past decade or so for when there is loss of life giving birth. I want to commend you to the utmost for that, because as you said earlier, any time we can show compassion in how we treat families in this country is a win for everybody. It is—or should be—a non-partisan issue.

I have a couple of quick questions for you today. My riding in Nova Scotia is quite rural. We have very limited access and means for families within our riding, which means that our constituency office acts as a saving grace. We regularly spend time behind the scenes making phone calls and helping with paperwork when people are going through these momentous occasions.

With that in mind, and with families dealing with this unimaginable loss, my question for you is, how do you think Bill C-222 will help ensure that these parents, particularly in rural communities, receive compassionate and coordinated support without unnecessary administrative burdens?

**Hon. Terry Beech:** Thank you for that question, and thank you as well for raising Ruby's Law.

Both the previous example and the law being considered today demonstrate that not all government work is fancy headline-drop-ping material.

Nobody designed the system to work this way. Sometimes, when different things get legislated at different times, if we don't come in and play cleanup, we get these unintended consequences. There is, I have found, great valour in doing the boring work and making things more reasonable for normal people.

When you explain the law to individuals, it is such an obvious no-brainer that people are surprised that this is how things actually work today. We had some polling. When the polling was unprompted, with people not knowing anything about the bill and with just an explanation of the situation, less than 4% strongly opposed this bill. There's great support for it.

In terms of the good work that happens at constituency offices, obviously some trouble happens here. Often, a constituency office will hear from a parent in this situation, but more likely, they hear when they get a letter from the CRA asking what's going on with this. They question how they got themselves into this mess in the first place. Then the member of Parliament has to justify what is going on behind the scenes for something that is almost unjustifiable.

We will be able to clean that up, save some administrative hassle and really make life better for parents who are in the worst position imaginable.

● (1600)

**Jessica Fancy:** Thank you so much for that, Terry.

I have a quick follow-up to that. We talked about the administrative burden. I'd like to ask one more question in regard to the financial burden. This bill addresses an important financial burden, which you mentioned earlier in your introduction.

I think all parties can agree that this needs to be addressed and moved forward. However, families who have lost a child don't need just financial support. They also need mental health support and wraparound care, especially in our rural communities, where services sometimes are harder to get.

How will the government ensure that parents are provided for beyond income relief and are meaningfully connected to mental health services without having to navigate our fragmented system? This is more a question in regard to continuing care after this happens.

**Hon. Terry Beech:** It reminds me of the last time I was at HUMA, in a previous role. We were talking about the good work that can be done as provincial health authorities work more closely with a modernized federal government system.

Part of the disconnect in this case specifically is that when an incident happens, provinces and territories are reporting at some time in the future—it's different for every province and territory—as to when the event occurred, and then that initiates the federal process, which is inconsistent. Realistically, we would want this to be consistent across the board.

With regard to rural ridings specifically, a lot more work can be done not just in cleaning up legislation like this, but in making sure that individuals have real-time access to their government, whether it be on their phone or on their computer, wherever they happen to be in Canada. We need to make sure that citizens in the most remote parts of this country can access their government 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Jessica Fancy:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much, Terry.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fancy.

[*Translation*]

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

**Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague for introducing Bill C-222, which is very important. It's something crucial and important, so I'd like to thank my colleague for his work on this file.

Basically, it's about showing humanity and dignity before worrying about paperwork when such a tragedy happens. Losing a child is an ordeal that I think flips everything upside down. No one should have to deal with all the government's red tape on top of that. Ultimately, it's important not to add suffering to suffering. That's how I see this bill.

Basically, we also want to align this bill with the Quebec reality. In Quebec, we have already made the choice with the Quebec parental insurance plan to maintain benefits even in the event of the child's death and to adopt a personalized approach that's humane and respectful of grief. We believe this is something really crucial, so it goes without saying.

I know my Conservative colleagues proposed an amendment to the bill. We'll analyze it. We can receive this amendment and take a look at it before voting. We're going to do so with the rigour that we need when we're studying a bill, but this bill has to move forward.

Mr. Beech, can you explain in concrete terms what parents experience when they have to interrupt or change their benefits immediately after the death of a child? As you said, this is an experience that troubled you. Would you say that the employment insurance system is designed mainly around administrative criteria rather than around the human realities experienced by claimants? You talked about this, but it's the crux of the bill. I would like to hear your comments again.

• (1605)

**Hon. Terry Beech:** Thank you for your question.

I spent 180 days studying French.

[*English*]

To be precise, I'll have to answer in English.

[*Translation*]

Maybe we'll be able to speak in French afterward.

[*English*]

To answer your question, it is unfortunate that if you were to follow the trajectory of the current rules and you're a parent who did this perfectly, you would go through the following experience. You would have some difficult circumstance. You would receive awful news. Under the current system, you would be expected to contact Service Canada immediately because you no longer qualify for your parental benefits. You would have the option—the option exists—for you to switch to EI sickness benefits. If you did that, you would receive access to similar financial compensation, but you would be within a system that is designed for someone seeking employment. You would be calling a service desk and talking to a new person, whoever happens to be picking up the phone that day, every couple of weeks, potentially, to justify your current situation.

It's also important to share with the committee that the average experience for a parent is different. It's personalized. Some people just want to go back to work. Other people need time. Often it depends on the type of work they're doing. If they're working with children every day, they might have a much different circumstance than if they're working with their hands, as an example. This takes care of all of those situations, and it doesn't make it perfect—my colleague has talked about the wraparound services that are required—but it makes it significantly better at no significant increase in cost.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Of course.

Do you think that ad hoc changes like Bill C-222 show that the employment insurance system needs a much more comprehensive reform instead?

[*English*]

**Hon. Terry Beech:** I have learned through this process that a lot of colleagues in the House have a lot of ideas about different things they would like to do with regard to the EI system, despite the fact that Canadians enjoy a robust system. I almost said that better is always possible, to quote a previous prime minister, but there are, obviously, always ways we can improve a system.

There are significant ways to do that that have been identified at various committees through various reports by the government and all parties of the House. There is no doubt in my mind that there is room for improvement, and this is a significant one.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** However, we have just done a study on seasonal workers. There were so many recommendations concerning employment insurance that we're thinking there probably should have been a more comprehensive reform.

In 30 seconds, can you tell me how this measure could apply to self-employed or non-standard workers, who are often less well protected by the employment insurance system?

[*English*]

**Hon. Terry Beech:** That's a really good question. Obviously, whether you are seasonal workers, self-employed or otherwise, this particular legislation depends on you qualifying for parental benefits in the first place.

It does not solve the problem of individuals who do not qualify for parental benefits because they haven't banked enough hours or for some other reason under the current system. It simplifies the problem by saying that if you have qualified for parental benefits, you will benefit from this clause and this change. It does not address any discrepancies or weaknesses that someone might feel about what it takes to qualify for parental benefits in the first place.

• (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beech.

Madame Goodridge, you have five minutes.

**Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Beech, for bringing forward this bill.

As a fellow NICU parent, I know it's a challenge you go through when all of a sudden you're carrying a child and you think everything's going well, and then you end up in a space where your child has challenges and needs medical assistance. On top of that, you're seeing the death of other kids in the NICU around you. At least, that was my circumstance when I went through it almost three years ago with my youngest son.

Until you're going through that space, I don't think most people would ever contemplate it, because most people don't imagine that they would lose a child, so they don't even know what steps to take. The fact that there are steps you have to take when you lose your child seems ludicrous to me.

I know my colleague Mr. Genuis has already talked about the amendment the Conservatives would like to move forward. If a royal recommendation was still possible, would you be open to the idea of amending the bill so that if a parent that had qualified for EI were to die, EI would be able to continue as if that parent had not died?

I understand that the royal recommendation is a whole other conversation, but I'm just trying to figure this out. As the sponsor of this bill, would that be something you would be willing to endeavour to do?

**Hon. Terry Beech:** I'm going to say two things on this.

The first is that I struggle to not talk about being a NICU parent, only because I get so emotional when I think about it. One of the most striking things about having that experience was, in fact, listening to other parents. You're in very close quarters, and hearing families who could not afford to be there and were trying to figure out that dynamic was very tough to hear.

With regard to your question, on this particular bill, I have done a ton of research, including into the costing. On the surface, from the amendment and the discussions I've had with the previous member who discussed this, it seems like a reasonable idea. I'm not outright opposed, but I have not looked at the costing. I have not looked at unintended consequences. I have not heard what the department might have to say about this particular amendment, nor have I examined it in any great detail.

My biggest concern, which I've been very up front about, is not putting the royal recommendation, which is a very rare thing, for this particular part of the bill at risk.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

My son and I were actually airlifted out. We got airlifted to another community so that he could be in a NICU, because there was no NICU in our community. We shared a bathroom with the room beside us. In the week we were there, the room constantly had a new parent. Often, it was because the child died, or in some cases because the parent had died. While that is not common for most people—most people have a baby, it's healthy and they go home—it is something I experienced when I was there.

I implore you to try to seek out whether there's any assistance we can offer. I think it is something that all members of the Conservative caucus are interested in seeing. This is critically important. This is well beyond politics; this is about the right thing to do. I can't imagine the amount of stress someone would be under in those circumstances.

We have a few minutes. When you were doing your consultations, what were some of the common statements you heard from parents who had gone through the horrific circumstances with the communications they had with Service Canada when they had to do their check-in every couple of weeks?

**Hon. Terry Beech:** The primary feedback that is most memorable is the disbelief. It just seemed that nobody had followed through the extent of what would happen in this particular situation. For years now, parents have just kind of dealt with it and moved on.

The reason the bill is called Evan's law—that's a real person—is that his mother raised this issue with a member of Parliament and said that what she had gone through was unbelievable. She told a very specific story about how she and her husband grieved very differently and required very different things, and how disconnected the process seemed from any sense of fairness or humanity, given her specific situation.

She did the right thing. She called her member of Parliament and said that this should not happen to another person. Sadly, it's still happening today. We have a chance to stop it.

• (1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Goodridge.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague for introducing this bill.

As members of Parliament, we have a responsibility to pass bills to support Canadians and Quebeckers during vulnerable times. We all know that the loss of a child is an unimaginable ordeal for a family. In moments of immense grief, parents should be able to take the time to mourn and support each other without having to immediately navigate complex administrative procedures or face the sudden loss of financial support.

Could my colleague explain in simple terms how this bill ensures that parents don't lose their benefits after such a tragic loss? How does this legislation simplify the process so that grieving parents don't have to worry about paperwork, overpayments or complex administrative procedures during this difficult time?

[*English*]

**Hon. Terry Beech:** The benefit of having a small but mighty bill is that it's very simple to contrast.

Under the current measure, if your child dies, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] somewhat urgent. If you don't do it, it leads to a lot of administrative backlog and a bunch of other processes that actually have a real cost outside of what you're expecting the parents to do.

With this measure, that disappears. It basically says that you continue to be entitled to your benefits. If this happens to you and you don't pick up the phone and don't contact the government for an extended period of time, you're going to be okay.

Most parents have a very well-thought-out, sophisticated plan. There are negotiations they have with their employer. There are negotiations they have with their spouse and with other family members who are going to be there for support. They have a room painted and a crib built. A lot of planning goes into this.

Nobody plans for this particular circumstance. This allows us to ease the burden for parents who unfortunately have to face this a little too often.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** Okay.

By proposing to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code, Bill C-222 seeks to enable parents who receive parental benefits to continue to be entitled to them, even in the tragic event that the child dies during the benefit period. This is a simple but profoundly human measure that aims to bring more compassion and dignity to our family support system.

Mr. Beech, why is it important to ensure that parents don't have to submit new claims or repeat painful information? How does this bill address those challenges?

[*English*]

**Hon. Terry Beech:** There are situations where parents switch over to EI sickness benefits and then cease to access the benefits. It's because they don't want to explain to a stranger what happened to them. How individual parents grieve is so unbelievably unique and personal. The last thing you want, in that state, is to be dealing with any bureaucracy at all. As I stated previously, a number of resources are situated in the index of the budget—it's not yet passed, but it's there—specifically pointing to this measure.

As I was proposing the private member's bill, I was also just trying to.... How it passes doesn't really bother me; I just don't want it to be another 10 years that we're talking about this. I think there's a will, and given the two hours of debate, I think there's a way. It sounds like we might try to do some things with it and maybe try to expand it. That's at the will of the committee. I would just double down on my insistence that at least this part gets passed. We can all commit to ensuring that this passes and we can get the royal recommendation.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

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

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Beech, earlier, I talked about Quebec's unique situation and the difference with, among other things, the Quebec parental insurance plan, which recognized this bereavement. Do you know if any Quebec groups or families have notified you of any specific inconsistencies between human support and administrative rules? Have you heard this point of view from Quebec groups?

[*English*]

**Hon. Terry Beech:** In fact I have, and with great support. I have also been approached in Quebec specifically about various challenges in ensuring that if this law is passed, there be time for the

system—specifically in Quebec, because it is integrated and intertwined with the federal system—to be implemented correctly.

I will take this opportunity, because this is Quebec-specific, to say that I don't think we should give them unlimited time, but my original drafting said that it would be enacted immediately. I certainly am in favour of giving adequate time for the federal government, ESDC, to make the changes they need to in their systems and for the provinces to adjust as well, but overall, federally, provincially and across jurisdictions, this has been very well received.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** In 30 seconds, can you tell me whether it would be appropriate for the committee to study a more comprehensive approach to family bereavement in employment insurance?

[*English*]

**Hon. Terry Beech:** The work that was done at the previous HUMA committee pointed to several instances.... I'm sure there are other good ideas out there. I certainly wouldn't say this is the be-all and end-all. I hope we can get this passed. I'm sure there's still more good work to do.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Larouche, you have 20 seconds left.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Beech, I don't know if I'll have the floor in a future round of questions, but I want to thank you and congratulate you on your work.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, just parenthetically, I think members know that I have a motion on notice that asks the committee to report to the House that it opposes discrimination against students in the distribution of student grants based on the type of regulated institution where students are studying. I would like to move that motion today, but I'm not going to move it now. I think we should use Mr. Beech's time while he's here.

However, I'll ask your indulgence, Mr. Chair, that you come back to me after he's done so that I have the opportunity to move the motion. I think you know I could move it now, but I would rather not. I would rather just do it at the end.

Mr. Beech, it's important to underline again that we won't expand the bill unless we have the support of the government to do it. We hope the government will support the expansion we're proposing. We see no reason that it wouldn't want to support an expansion that also includes families dealing with the loss of a parent. Obviously, the government holds the final decision because it controls whether there's a royal recommendation. We don't want a situation in which the bill gets amended and then gets stopped because the government blocks it at that point.

The point of raising this amendment is not to say that it's the expansion or nothing. It's to say that we want to use this moment to advocate for an expansion that will cover as many families as possible.

You made the point that different families grieve differently and that different individuals grieve differently. I think that's a really important point, because in the past there has sometimes been a pressure on individuals to say that there's one way of grieving or one form that grieving takes. This is an important insight around leave and around different things that people are involved in—recognizing that it's a very individual process. I thank you for highlighting that. That's an important thing to flag in this context.

For the balance of my time, I'm going to hand it over to Mr. Bailey, who is, I think, the fifth generation in his family to be a funeral director, so he knows a lot about this subject.

I'll hand it over to you.

• (1625)

**Burton Bailey (Red Deer, CPC):** Thank you.

There are a few things I'd like to make note of.

Most young couples have never made funeral arrangements. No two deaths are the same. There may be similarities. It's an extremely difficult arrangement. I have arranged thousands of funerals, and I can remember every child that I've ever buried. The work this committee is doing is very important.

One of the things you mentioned was that different cultures require more time. I want to reiterate that some funerals can take up to a week to arrange. A normal funeral arrangement takes a couple of hours for a grandparent or an elderly person. When it comes to a child and getting answers from a couple who have never arranged a funeral, you can't even do it in one day. Children's funeral arrangements take a period of time. They have to take these ideas home so they can plan, and every culture is different. In some communities, as I said, it can be spread over a week.

Are you considering the timelines that it takes to arrange a funeral? Are you aware that it takes up to a month just to have the funeral process take place?

**Hon. Terry Beech:** I want to give four comments, and I'll be very fast about including an answer to that question.

Thank you to my colleague for the consideration on the motion he wants to put forward and for leaving it until the end.

I appreciate the clarification on the royal recommendation and the Conservative stance. That is truly appreciated, so thank you for that. I'll have to leave you in the hands of the parliamentary secre-

tary and the minister for the decision, of course. That's outside of my control.

With regard to the timing, I believe the amount of funding in the index of the budget was for a minimum of eight weeks, which should be enough time for most situations and also to get organized in the worst case. I think there is adequate time there.

I have an East Indian wife. I've learned about a lot of different cultures in this job and in my own marriage. What you say about cultural differences and your obvious experience... It's unbelievable service that you're providing to those families in those situations, and I can believe that it must weigh on you heavily. I appreciate you for that service, and I thank you for the question.

**The Chair:** We're going to Madame Koutrakis for five minutes, after which the witness portion will conclude.

I will stay in the meeting to deal with Mr. Genuis's issue.

**Annie Koutrakis:** I thank Mr. Beech for being here today and for the incredible work he has done on this bill. It's very important legislation. Hopefully we can get it done without delay.

I know you have, during your testimony, time and again, mentioned why it's important to pass it without delay. I will ask you this one more time: Why, in your opinion, is it important for the committee to stick to the bill as drafted in order to ensure that grieving parents receive support as intended and without delay?

• (1630)

**Hon. Terry Beech:** I think the “without delay” part is obvious, so I'm going to focus on the “as drafted” part.

I want to go back to the rarity of a royal recommendation. It is so rare that I had to go through the different offices, the House leadership and the like to talk to experts about exactly how royal recommendations happen in the first place. We're talking about them happening three times in 31 years. I was wondering whether it's on a piece of paper. Does somebody sign it? Which minister does that? Is it a prime minister? What's the balance of that? It was a real process to track that down, and something I'm still tracking down. It literally changed over various months.

I thought I had a clear path. It was off the table, and then it was back on. The fact that we got this item in the budget is key. Already having an assigned budget made this possible. I can only tell this committee about my experience dealing with multiple ministers and the Prime Minister's Office. I asked everywhere I could—including my own caucus and members opposite—for help in trying to navigate this. I found a path, and I worry about anything that will take us off that path.

As I said in my previous answer, I have no explanation. I don't think any member of Parliament could come up with a reason this has taken us 10 years to figure out and get to the point where we can actually pass it. We are literally weeks away from solving this problem, and I don't want to derail it.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, once again, for your good work, and for appearing before the committee today.

With the time I have left, Mr. Chair, I would like to resume our debate on my national school food program motion from last week.

During our last meeting, it seemed an agreement was reached with some of my colleagues across the way to reduce the number of meetings to four, and the rest were agreeable. However, we ran out of resources. Seeing that this is an extremely valuable program that is being made permanent, I believe it deserves being studied comprehensively here at HUMA. I hope this is something we can all support as is.

I move to resume debate on my national school food program motion from last week.

**The Chair:** Before we go to that, I would like to advise Mr. Beech that he can leave the meeting at this time, because we have two items that committee members have the option to put forward. We have them now, so we will not return to him as a witness for questioning.

If you wish to leave the meeting, thank you very much for your testimony.

I will hear out Ms. Koutrakis and then go to Mr. Genuis. The issue Ms. Koutrakis raised is a dilatory motion, so we need a vote on it. Just so we're clear—

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, before we vote, can I ask that the meeting be suspended for two or three minutes?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Madame Larouche. The vote is dilatory, so I must call the vote at this moment. I cannot entertain any debate until the vote is over.

We'll have a recorded vote, Clerk. The committee is voting on—

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] not allowed to have a two-minute suspension.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Larouche, order.

We have a motion. It's a dilatory motion by Madame Koutrakis to resume debate.

[*Translation*]

**Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.):** [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] ask what we're voting on.

**Garnett Genuis:** We can stop the game.

**Caroline Desrochers:** If that's what you want to continue doing, go ahead.

**Garnett Genuis:** It's always the other person who's the problem.

**Caroline Desrochers:** I love when you talk in French.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Order, members.

We have a dilatory motion, which must go to a vote.

Mr. Clerk, please call for a recorded vote on the motion of Ms. Koutrakis.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

**The Chair:** The motion to resume the debate has been adopted.

• (1635)

**Garnett Genuis:** On a point of order, Chair, I would like to get on the speaking list.

Also, could we distribute the current version of the motion? I'd like to know precisely what we're debating. I think we're debating an amendment to it.

**The Chair:** I'm going to suspend for a moment while the clerk circulates it.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Committee members, we are back in session and we are still public.

Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you very much, Chair.

We have this motion that's been put forward by the Liberals. I want to make a couple of quick comments about the context for this motion and then proceed to discussing it.

As you know, Chair, and as anyone following the meeting will know, I signalled my intention to put forward a motion on a matter related to the budget implementation act. This was important because we were in a bit of an unusual situation as a committee. We had been charged with studying the budget implementation act, Bill C-15. Then, as a result of a decision made in the House, our deadline was abruptly moved forward, so we didn't have an opportunity to provide a report to the finance committee on Bill C-15.

In hopes of honouring the work we had done on that, I had put a motion on notice and hoped to move that motion. The motion was dealing with the threat to student grants for students attending private institutions. That was a motion I had signalled an intention to move. I could have moved it during my last round of questioning with Mr. Beech. The reason I didn't move it was purely out of respect for my colleagues across the way. I wanted to give them an opportunity to move their final round of questions.

I recognized the sensitivity of the subject, Bill C-222. Rather than interrupt those proceedings, I wanted to give them an opportunity. I was trying to be courteous to them by not moving the motion until they had the opportunity for their round, but I asked to have the opportunity to move my motion after that hour was over. After I ceded the floor, the Liberals did not return the courtesy. They used their round to interrupt the discussion on Bill C-222 to move their motion.

Look, we're trying to respect the gravity of the subject we were talking about, which was bereavement, and not interrupt those considerations by raising other issues, even though we could have done it earlier. That is the point at which I asked to have the opportunity to move my motion at the end of the meeting. Unfortunately, our goodwill was not reciprocated, and the Liberals moved a different motion during their time.

This is where we are. I want to highlight this, because the Liberal government has a proposal in their budget to strip student grants from students learning—

**Caroline Desrochers:** I have a point of order.

**Garnett Genuis:** —vital, career-relevant skills at private for-profit institutions. They clearly don't want to talk about it.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we have a point of order.

**Caroline Desrochers:** I thought we were resuming debate on Ms. Koutrakis's motion.

**The Chair:** We are. He is speaking to that.

**Caroline Desrochers:** He is not speaking to that, Mr. Chair.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, on the point of order, maybe this is a good opportunity to advise new members on aspects of the process here.

The members opposite moved a motion in a way and at a time that was not at all courteous, given what we had signalled we were doing and the respect we were trying to show Mr. Beech, whose private member's bill was there, and the process. This is the second motion that was moved—

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I did indicate to Mr. Genuis that I would return to him at some point.

We will deal with Ms. Koutrakis's motion, but Mr. Genuis has the floor. Then we'll come back.

**Garnett Genuis:** In light of the way this unfolded, we have a number of amendments that we'd like to discuss with respect to the motion from Ms. Koutrakis. These are amendments that could be negotiated more efficiently in other ways, but the government has chosen to proceed in this fashion. We're prepared to use the procedures and processes of the committee, as they have.

In light of the context and in light of the fact that, as members will recall, I was the one who was first to present that I wanted to move a motion but was trying to respect other members and the process, I'd like to move that the committee proceed to the consideration of the motion I put on notice last week.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Genuis. That would not be in order, because currently the committee is—

**Garnett Genuis:** It's on page 1176 of the green book. It's a "proceed to" motion. You can move to proceed to an item. That's pretty well established.

**The Chair:** As you are well aware, Mr. Genuis, you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, if you want to allow the clerk to speak, that might be....

**The Chair:** I will have the clerk speak to it.

**Garnett Genuis:** My understanding is that you can move a motion to proceed to another item.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Clerk, would you address the procedural issue and where we're at?

I'm sorry. Currently there's a motion on the floor. You discussed a motion, and then you wanted to move a motion to proceed. That part of the procedure is not in order, Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** I can't move a "proceed to" motion at all. I don't think that's correct, and the clerk is shaking his head here.

**The Chair:** No.

**Garnett Genuis:** I know I'm able to move "proceed to" motions. It sounds like you want to give me some guidance about the kind of motion I can or can't move, so I wonder if you can give me some clarity on that.

**The Chair:** I'll ask the clerk to provide the committee with clarity on that.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Alexandre Longpré):** Moving a "proceed to" motion is admissible. It would be a dilatory motion, but we are trying to move to a notice of motion that has not been moved yet.

If this motion had already been moved, it would have been considered before the committee, but right now we are trying to move a new motion that has not yet been moved to resume a study. It's like you're trying to move a motion that hasn't been considered by the committee and that isn't on the floor when we currently have a motion on the floor. What we're trying to do is move a motion that doesn't pertain to the order of business to start a discussion on something that's new.

**Garnett Genuis:** What you're saying is that I can't proceed to a motion that hasn't yet been moved.

**The Clerk:** I'm not saying anything. It is my clerical opinion that I have given to the chair. The chair—

**The Chair:** The chair agrees with the clerk.

**Garnett Genuis:** All right. On that basis, I move that the committee proceed to committee business, which would be a rubric under which I could move the motion.

**The Chair:** That's a dilatory motion, so I must call the vote on the motion to move to committee business.

• (1710)

[Translation]

**Andréanne Larouche:** We haven't dealt with the other motion, Mr. Chair.

Let us deal with the other one, and then we—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** It's a dilatory motion. Mr. Genuis moved a motion that the committee move to committee business. It's dilatory, and I must call a vote on it. If the vote carries, then the committee will move to committee business.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** The motion to move to committee business has been defeated, so I'm going to return to the motion Ms. Koutrakis had on the floor so we can deal with it.

Madame Larouche has her hand up.

**Garnett Genuis:** I have a point of order.

I believe I still have the floor, and I have more things I want to say on the motion.

**Caroline Desrochers:** You asked for a vote.

**The Chair:** No, Mr. Genuis, you do not have the floor. You had the floor when you called the motion to move to committee business.

**Garnett Genuis:** Could you add me to the list at the bottom?

**The Chair:** That's fine.

We are now back to the amendment of Madame Larouche.

Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** We previously talked about four meetings on the issue of food assistance. I'm still going to let the debate take place. However, I am concerned because we are still debating. I have a small concern that I want to mention to the clerk. I will do so now and let my colleagues debate afterwards.

Last week, we got a letter from Minister Lightbound. It's important to mention that, especially today. The committee passed a motion calling for Minister Lightbound to appear along with officials as part of the study on the Cúram software. The committee agreed unanimously.

Today, I want to follow up with you, Mr. Clerk, so that you can reply to the department that the minister must come and testify. The department's letter didn't rule it out, but we were wondering whether the minister would be able to come and testify.

The minister is still responsible for the department's decisions and actions, whether or not he was in office when the decisions were made. In any case, all indications are that the cost overruns were authorized since he took office in May 2025.

The motion, which was passed here on February 5, was as follows:

That the committee invite the following individuals to testify for two hours each:

1. Ms. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment and Families, accompanied by officials;
2. Mr. Joël Lightbound, Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement;

To answer the committee's questions about the Cúram software with the goal of developing a rapid and effective action plan to resolve problems in the processing of the Old Age Security, or OAS, benefit claims and to provide an update on

past and future cost overruns; and that the ministers testify no later than February 26, 2026.

I'm just instructing the clerk to issue a reminder.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, but, Madame Larouche, we are on your amendment about the number of meetings for the food program study, which is currently being debated.

Mr. Genuis, please speak to the amendment.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In my previous intervention, I made some observations about the context that has brought us here today—a really unfortunate context in light of what I had hoped would be some collaboration and goodwill in the first half of the meeting. This brings us to the consideration of the motion before us.

I've made the observation privately, and I'll make it publicly as well, that typically, there are two logical times to study a particular program or proposal. One would be before a decision is taken with respect to whether a program is going to proceed. If the government were considering whether or not to undertake a particular program, it might make sense for the committee to choose to study that program or to study, broadly speaking, a policy area and, in the process of that study, come to some conclusions and recommendations for the government about whether and how to proceed in that regard. Another logical time would be after the program has been in operation for a period of time—let's say a number of years. This would then allow the committee to evaluate the implementation of an existing program.

I would say that both kinds of studies would, in their own ways, be fruitful. One would study a hypothetical policy that hasn't yet been implemented, and another would study the implementation of a policy and how that implementation is or is not in alignment with objectives.

It is curious timing for the government to propose this particular study, because the government has—

**Caroline Desrochers:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Garnett Genuis:** Ms. Desrochers, you're welcome to get on the speaking list—

● (1715)

**The Chair:** Order, members.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you. Things aren't as courteous as they usually are on a few fronts here at HUMA today. I'm sorry to see that, but I hope we'll be able to get things back on track shortly.

Where was I? The concept or implementation could be studied. The government has put forward this study at a time when the BIA includes legislation on the issue, proposing to make the program permanent. It's a program that's still, obviously, at quite a nascent stage. There isn't anything like a long-running implementation to study, but the government has also committed itself to a policy path. I'm curious about what, exactly, the objectives of the study are. It may just be that the government wants to congratulate itself for having announced something that, for all intents and purposes, it is in the process of bringing out.

Part of the context for this issue, I think, is the broader problem of food inflation. This is an issue we should be studying as part of the work of this committee—that is, the dramatic inflation in food prices we have seen. This is part of the context for why parents are struggling to afford nutritious food for themselves and their families. The Liberal response has been, “Well, we're going to ignore the context”, which is that more and more families are struggling to provide food for themselves and their kids. Instead, they're just going to focus on the announcement the government has made.

As Conservatives, we want to look at the root cause here: Why is food so much more expensive than it used to be in Canada? Canada's food price report for 2026 forecasts that overall food prices will increase by 4% to 6%. Food inflation here is double what it is in the United States.

Members will recall that Minister Patty Hajdu was before this committee recently. I asked her why food inflation in Canada is double that of the United States. Initially, she said it was tariffs, but she couldn't identify which tariffs. I think members know there are no tariffs targeting food. Then she went on to say that it was climate change. It's hard to explain how, because of climate change, food inflation is dramatically higher in Canada than it is in peer countries.

• (1720)

**Caroline Desrochers:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Garnett Genuis:** Ms. Desrochers is covering herself in glory with more heckles, it seems. I welcome her, as I said previously, to add her name to the list.

**The Chair:** Stick to the subject matter.

**Garnett Genuis:** The food inflation this country is experiencing is very significant. It is causing a great deal of hardship for families across this country. It's not surprising to me that Liberals want to heckle a discussion on food inflation. Their excuses—their desire to blame exogenous factors—obviously don't hold water. They don't reckon with the fact that if there were exogenous factors, other countries would be affected by them as well.

What is clear is that Liberal policy decisions have led to a significant increase in food inflation. This is at the core of the challenges that families are experiencing with respect to affordability.

**Jessica Fancy:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Clearly state your point of order.

**Jessica Fancy:** I'm feeling that my colleague across the way, right now, is misinterpreting the members of this committee. He's taking what we're doing within our purview.... They talked about administrative burden before, and—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fancy.

**Jessica Fancy:** It's a misrepresentation.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, please stick to the subject matter of the motion up for discussion.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm not sure Ms. Fancy disagrees with my point. Disagreeing is not a point of order, but she's welcome to disagree.

**Jessica Fancy:** It's a misrepresentation.

**The Chair:** Order, members.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor on the subject matter of the motion. Stick to that particular subject matter.

**Garnett Genuis:** This is a motion dealing with the school food program. At the heart of the discussion around the school food program is the problem of food inflation and the fact that food is becoming more and more expensive under the Liberal government. Food inflation is creating a situation in which families are more desperate. Having more federal bureaucrats involved in overseeing programs at the provincial and local levels is not going to address the root cause of the problem. The root cause of the problem is—

**The Chair:** Excuse me.

Do you have a point of order, Mr. Joseph?

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** Could my colleague stop talking about other topics, Mr. Chair?

I don't want us to waste time talking about other things. He needs to speak to the amendment, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**Laila Goodridge:** He was just talking about it.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis has the floor, and he's on subject.

You have the floor, Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Chair, for that confirmation.

I want to share some other quick facts regarding how Liberal policies have led to food inflation and why food inflation is a critical aspect that we need to be looking at as part of this discussion.

“Canada's Food Price Report” for 2026 forecasts that “overall food prices will increase by 4% to 6%.” The average family of four is expected “to spend up to \$17,571.79” on food in 2026. I guess that's double for the average family of eight, for those in my situation. That's “an increase of up to \$994.63 from last year”, so close to a \$1,000 increase in food prices year over year that families are facing. Also, food prices are “27% higher than they were five years ago”.

The price of beef soared in 2025, with a 19% increase in the first quarter of 2025 alone. This stabilized in later seasons, but prices are still up 23% from the five-year average. Canadian food prices in January 2026 soared 7.3% over January 2025 according to Statistics Canada.

We have seen massive increases in food prices that are really biting. Parents I talk to don't actually want the ever-expansion of state involvement in their lives and those of their children. They want to go back to an economic situation in which a larger number of families were able to afford to provide for their kids themselves.

We are becoming a country where it is harder and harder for families to provide food for their kids. A Liberal solution is more government intervention in their lives, in particular more federal government intervention, in an area that is, I think, more properly managed at other levels of government and is certainly administered at other levels of government. This is a choice the government is making, which is to make it harder for families to afford food and to therefore say the government will take over that function. We think most Canadians would like to be in a position where they can afford food themselves.

As part of any consideration of this matter, our view is that food inflation is an important component of the study. As I've said, after talking to colleagues off-line—and I'll underline it here on the record—we would be happy to do a fulsome study that looks at issues around food inflation, as well as the school food program. The government can offer more federal government involvement as its solution to the problem of escalating food costs, but we're going to propose reversing the Liberal policies that have driven up food costs in the first place. Conservatives are pushing for policies that will lower the price of food so that families can afford food themselves, and we're happy to have that debate in the context of a study.

I think an important question, as the consideration of this motion unfolds, is whether the Liberals are open to including, as part of their study, consideration of the issue of food inflation. I would be happy to work either officially on the floor of the committee or informally off-line to try to come to a consensus. We think the issue of food inflation, and linked to it some of the programs the government has put forward to try to respond to food inflation, could be a legitimate area of study. However, to not consider food inflation as part of this study would be missing a critical piece of the pie—no pun intended.

Chair, I want to make some comments about the other motions before the committee in terms of prioritization, but I know a few other members have their hands up. If you can add me to the list at the bottom, I'll give other members an opportunity to weigh in.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I do have a speaking order. Before I go to it, I just want to focus members on the discussion.

We are discussing the motion of Madame Koutrakis, as amended by Madame Larouche. The discussion is on the amendment of Madame Larouche to the motion of Madam Koutrakis.

We have a speaking order. I have Ms. Goodridge, and then I have Ms. Desrochers, Ms. Koutrakis and Mr. Bailey.

We have Ms. Goodridge on the amendment of Madame Larouche.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The conversation we're having is so critically important. When you start looking at this, you see that 10 years ago families didn't struggle to feed their kids, by and large. Ten years ago, there weren't millions of kids using food banks. We're in a circumstance, a situation, because we've had out-of-control food inflation. The solution from the Liberals was to nationalize a school food program and create a bureaucracy here in Ottawa to put into play what has been, up to this point, primarily in provincial jurisdiction.

The piece that is fundamental here is that even in these spaces that are in provincial jurisdiction.... For me, as a former provincial member, I believe that respecting jurisdiction is incredibly important if we want to move forward on things that are logical and make sense.

I've said it before at this committee and I will repeat it. In my province of Alberta, the province I come from, we've had a school food program for decades. One of the challenges, and the challenge that I hear—whether it's from families in Fort McMurray, Cold Lake, Lac La Biche or particularly Fort Chipewyan in the far north of my riding—is the inflation they are feeling and how that is impacting their groceries.

When I was first elected and became an MP, I would come to Ottawa. I would go to the grocery store. The closest grocery store to the place we found to rent was the.... Of course, now I can't remember the name of it, but it was a very expensive grocery store. In coming from northern Alberta, when I went to that grocery store, I thought it was really cheap. I was ranting and raving about how lovely the produce was and how I found it to be wonderful.

When I was chatting with some of my Ontario colleagues, they were saying that it was the most expensive grocery store and that I should go a few blocks farther, where I'd get to a much cheaper grocery store. My husband and I realized that there was a much cheaper grocery store just a few blocks farther, and we started doing that.

This just goes to show that food inflation actually ripples. What we are—

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Ms. Goodridge. The relevancy—

**Laila Goodridge:** It is absolutely relevant, and I'm just getting to the point.

**The Chair:** The debate is on the amendment by Madame Larouche, which is on timing—on the number of meetings. I would ask those speaking to stay in order and focus on what's before the committee. At this time, it's the amendment by Madame Larouche, which references timing.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

The reason I was talking about this is that it goes to the piece of the amendment by Madame Larouche to lower the meetings from eight to four. This entire process of a school food program is primarily in provincial jurisdiction. Respecting that this program has just been announced and isn't necessarily in application all across Canada, perhaps having an eight-meeting study right now is a bit proactive.

The reason I was talking about inflation and the difference I saw at the grocery store here compared with the grocery stores in my riding is that it's really easy for people to see numbers and see things where.... For example, 80.6% of Canadians say that food is their top expense pressure. We have—

**The Chair:** Relevance.

**Laila Goodridge:** Mr. Chair, I think that is completely relevant.

One of the reasons we need a school food program is that the government has allowed food inflation to go so ridiculously high that families can't afford to put food on their own table—

**Caroline Desrochers:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** There's a point of order.

**Caroline Desrochers:** We are not talking about food inflation right now. We're talking about the study on the national school food program.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Desrochers.

I would again remind members that currently we're debating the amendment by Madame Larouche, which moves to reduce the number of meetings on the subject. Please focus on the amendment on the floor, which is on timing.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

They don't like it when we talk about food inflation, and they don't like it because they don't want to admit that that's why they have come up with this plan.

Conservatives fundamentally believe that we should be confronting the food affordability conversation. The fact that we would moving this down to four meetings.... Part of the amendment, I believe, is about the fact that this is within provincial scope and jurisdiction. It's very frustrating that the members opposite do not want to acknowledge that this is done by provinces and should be done by provinces, because the provinces run schools.

I come back to this fundamental piece: If we are not actually looking at the concept of the inflation of food, we are missing the root cause of the problem. The root cause of the problem isn't that schools need food; it's that kids are hungry. Kids could be less hungry if food were easier to get. It is so ridiculously frustrating that the members opposite refuse to consider that this might be part of the conversation.

I would recommend that members around the room vote for the amendment by my colleague Madame Larouche, because this is a space where Liberal members want to do something so they can talk about how proud they are of all the money they've committed to spending.

The reality, however, is that we have so many kids lined up at food banks. One in three kids is using a food bank in Canada right

now. There are 2.2 million food bank uses in a month, and 33% of those uses are by children. This is very concerning. This is not just a statistic. These are kids who are going to school hungry. These are kids who don't have food to eat in general. These are parents who are skipping meals so their kids get food.

This is so much more complex than just creating a temporary solution and looking at the national school food program. My biggest argument is that we need to truly break this into a piece.

I come from a background of health and safety. In health and safety, you can fix a problem at its end, or you can fix the root cause of the problem. If you fix the root cause of the problem, the problem doesn't regenerate.

What the Liberals have proposed so far—and what they want to study—is to look at something down the line. It is potentially a solution, but it does not actually address the root cause of the problem. They're not aiming to. That is terrifying to me, and I think all Canadians should be terrified.

We're in this unique space of having out-of-control food inflation that is twice as high as what we see in peer jurisdictions, like the United States and Europe, in part because our government keeps spending taxpayer money. The more money it spends, the more that inflation goes up. The more that inflation goes up, the harder it is to buy food. The harder it is to buy food, the more the government has to spend to provide programs like this. Then it becomes a cycle.

• (1735)

**Caroline Desrochers:** On a point of order, can we get back to the motion, Mr. Chair?

**Garnett Genuis:** On the point of order—

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, you do not have the floor.

I would remind Madame Goodridge that the subject matter is Madame Larouche's amendment, which is on the number of meetings.

Are you continuing, Madame Goodridge, with the amendment on the number of meetings?

**Laila Goodridge:** I will cede the floor to one of my colleagues. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Desrochers, you're next.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I find it amazing that the opposition is so opposed to any program that provides relief to Canadians, including the national school food program. I take offence at the member's statement that we are ignoring the struggles of Canadians, when Canadians know very well which party has been there for them with the dental care plan—it's funny that the members across are laughing—with the child benefit, with pharmacare, with child care and now—

**Garnett Genuis:** I have a point of order, Chair.

Not a single member was laughing. She claimed we were laughing.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** There was not a single member laughing.

**Caroline Desrochers:** I'm just returning the courtesy from earlier.

**The Chair:** I'm bringing—

**Garnett Genuis:** It's a point of order.

**The Chair:** —the committee members back to relevance, which is Madame Larouche's amendment.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Chair, on the point of order, we're supposed to be honourable members, and she was making a verifiably false claim about our response to something she was saying.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Madame Desrochers, you have the floor, but I'm going to be very clear—

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm not finished.

I'm going to be very clear that the amendment being debated is on timing—on the number of days in the motion. Please restrict your comments to the amendment. Then we'll deal with the main motion.

**Caroline Desrochers:** To the point of how many meetings we need in order to discuss the national school food program, I want to go back to the member who said that we waited too long to present this.

We've been trying to discuss this motion for the past three weeks. All the opposition has been doing is obstructing and preventing a discussion on the national school food program, including the number of meetings. It's preposterous for members to say that climate change and world events have no impact on food price. I don't know if there are farmers in any of my colleagues' ridings, but if you talk to them, I'm pretty sure they'll tell you that, yes, climate change and drought and all of those events do have an impact on food price.

I'll go back to the number of meetings. I do want to get to this. I do want to stay on point.

The member across is under a misconception that there is a big bureaucracy and administrative burden to the food program, even though this committee heard otherwise from witnesses during the study for the budget implementation act. The study we're proposing—this touches on the number of meetings—would allow us to shed light on whether there is actually a burden and whether there is a better way of administering it. However, we're not even allowed, we're not even able, to discuss and move forward with this study, unfortunately. We understand that the opposition is continuing to obstruct every initiative we are putting forward to help Canadians. It's just preposterous and very unfortunate.

On the number of meetings, I think Madame Larouche is proposing four meetings, perhaps. We agree to that. That's a good number of meetings.

I will stop there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1740)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Koutrakis, go ahead on the amendment of Madame Larouche, which is on the number of meetings we would undertake for the study.

Please, all members, keep your comments to the number of meetings.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to remind our colleagues that there are three good reasons that it's time to study the school food program. One, Bill C-15, which is the budget implementation act, contains a section, division 36, that is dedicated to the national school food program. My colleague across the way said that typically before we study a piece of legislation, or it's passed through the budget, all the work has to be done before that, but what that means is that Parliament is already examining how a federal program should be structured and funded. Studying school food now ensures that committee recommendations can directly shape the bill before it becomes law.

School food programs are facing unprecedented demand—we've all agreed to that—due to Canada's cost of living crisis, which has dramatically increased the number of families struggling to afford food. Canada is the only G7 country without a national school food program, and my colleagues have voted against the budget.

As we discussed in previous meetings—thank you for the reminder, Mr. Chair, to get to the point—we initially requested many more meetings. We agreed to what Madame Larouche is proposing today as an amendment—four meetings—because this is an important study. We want to move forward with this study.

There is nothing preventing our good colleagues from the Conservative Party from inviting witnesses to come here and speak to inflation. It's just that we do not support expanding the national school food program study to get into the subject matter of food inflation, which is so much more broad.

As my colleague Madame Desrochers said, there are so many different factors. My colleague Ms. Goodridge said it's because of food inflation and the policies the Liberals have been putting in place for the last 10 years that food inflation is so high, and this is why we need a national school food program. Well, she herself testified that provinces already have national school food programs. For the years those food programs have been in place, is it because of food inflation, or to make sure that children don't go to school on an empty stomach and are given opportunities to learn without any stigma attached or discrimination such that everybody gets a good meal and children learn and provide us with their best selves going forward?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Before I go to Mr. Bailey, I'm going to remind members that I'm going to get increasingly short when you stray off. Currently before the committee is the amendment by Madame Larouche to move from eight meetings to four meetings.

Mr. Bailey, you have the floor on the amendment, which is on the dates.

**Burton Bailey:** I'm going to take myself off the list, but I'd like to be added back on the list after.

**The Chair:** Was it Madame Larouche or Madame Goodridge?

Madame Goodridge, did you have your hand up?

**Laila Goodridge:** I believe Madame Larouche had her hand up.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** No, that's fine. I just wanted to listen to what was going on.

[*English*]

**Garnett Genuis:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, can you read out the list you have for the amendment right now?

**The Chair:** I have just Ms. Goodridge right now.

**Garnett Genuis:** I have asked to be added.

**The Chair:** Okay, it's whichever one of you.

Do you want to go, Mr. Genuis?

**Garnett Genuis:** Okay.

I wanted to respond to a couple of points with respect to the agenda. This amendment deals with how the committee prioritizes its business and the number of meetings it allocates to different items. I was trying to rough this out. By my count, we have eight studies currently active in some form right now. We have between six and eight, depending on how you count them.

We have the study on Bill C-222, the legislation from Mr. Beech, which is a Liberal private member's bill, though it's certainly one that we support. We have the study on housing. We have the study on youth unemployment. We have the study on section 107 of the Labour Code. We have the study on temporary foreign workers. We have the study put forward by Ms. Larouche on issues with seniors' benefits. Those are six studies, at a minimum, that are currently active before the committee.

We have not yet received Bill C-20, the government's legislation on Build Canada Homes. That's a seventh study. It's not for me to know the government's legislative prioritization, and that can change from time to time, but I expect, based on how they're scheduling it, that it's a legislative priority for them and is therefore one we're going to be seeing here at committee soon.

We then have the study on Bill C-15, which in many respects is incomplete. Ms. Koutrakis pointed out quite correctly that part of our study on Bill C-15 dealt with the school food program, which is very true in a way. However, that underlines how odd it is that in the middle of a study on the BIA, which included the national school food program and the provisions therein, the government moved a motion to study the national food program, which was already at that very moment under discussion as part of the budget implementation act.

Because our study on Bill C-15, in certain respects, was cut off, we might be able to agree to do a further study of the subject matter of Bill C-15, because I think there is more work required with re-

spect to the training sections, as well as with respect to the sections dealing with food prices and food inflation—

• (1745)

**The Chair:** The amendment currently before the floor is moving from eight meetings to four meetings in that motion—

**Garnett Genuis:** That's correct.

**The Chair:** —not the overall calendar of the committee.

**Garnett Genuis:** Respectfully, as we consider the overall scope of what's before this committee, I think that needs, to some extent, to inform the decisions we make about which studies are undertaken.

On the face of it, this committee could keep piling on studies and we could commit to members of the public, potential witnesses and ourselves that we are going to undertake a limitless number of studies, but that would not reflect the reality of the constraints we have. If we were to work through just the studies we presently have before us, I don't think we would be able to complete our business, frankly, by the end of the calendar year, and certainly not by the summer, if we work through the existing studies we have already approved.

If nothing else, there certainly isn't any urgency in the government trying to force this issue at a time when we have eight other studies already on the table, depending on how you count them, and already approved.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, stick to the amendment. It's to go from eight meetings to four.

**Garnett Genuis:** The government having put forward a study with eight or even four potential meetings still doesn't seem at all, from our perspective, to take into consideration the breadth and extent of the work that is already before the committee. As we consider the number of meetings, we have to consider these other items we have.

We could proceed with looking further at the issues with Bill C-15. We have to deal with legislation. Our view is that whether it's private members' bills or government legislation, we should prioritize that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, the amendment simply references changing the number of meetings allocated in the motion put forward by Madame Koutrakis from eight to four.

• (1750)

**Garnett Genuis:** Yes, Chair, and—

**The Chair:** It's not on the overall business of the committee at the moment.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, the committee's decisions about the number of meetings it spends on any given item have to take into consideration the other ways the committee could possibly spend those meetings. That necessarily follows.

The decision to have a meeting on one subject is a decision not to have a meeting on another subject. The way in which motions have been moved sometimes seems to ignore that scarcity principle. Whether we decide to have four, eight, 40 or no meetings on a given subject, that inevitably crowds out discussion of other items.

Our view is that the primary responsibility of committees is to deal with legislation, and that really is regardless of the subject matter. There may be a study that is, on the face of it, on a subject that is more important than the subject of a particular piece of legislation. Nonetheless, my view would be that a committee should still prioritize, in that case, the legislation, because the legislation is the application of the hard power of the committee, whereas the act of a study does not involve the legislative power of the committee.

When determining how many meetings to have on any potential study and how to allocate the scarce amount of time we have before us for meetings, I think our priority will have to be on legislation. Coincidentally, all of the legislative items before this committee, or prospectively before this committee, come from the government or Liberal private members. We have Bill C-15, which we could continue looking at, even though it is now in clause-by-clause consideration at the finance committee. We have Bill C-222, and we likely have Bill C-20 coming.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, stick to the amendment of Madame Larouche.

**Garnett Genuis:** That's what I'm speaking to, Chair.

**The Chair:** No, you're speaking to legislation and things that may come before the committee.

**Garnett Genuis:** No, I'm speaking to the choice of the committee with respect to how many meetings to allocate to which item. If you'll—

**The Chair:** Please focus on the amendment of Madame Larouche.

**Garnett Genuis:** Outside of legislation, we have already allocated a few dozen other meetings to other items. Actually, I should have added a ninth, because that is the discussion of estimates.

I hope there can be some room for establishing a calendar that takes into consideration the nine studies we're already working with. I suspect that if members were to take that calendar seriously, that would inevitably inform the decisions they're going to make with respect to the number of meetings they're working on in this meeting.

Chair, I want to give verbal notice of a different motion. I'll do that very quickly. The motion reads:

That the committee report to the House that it opposes discrimination against students in the distribution of student grants based on the type of regulated institution where students are studying. The federal government should align with decisions about eligible institutions made by the provinces and territories.

**Caroline Desrochers:** I have a point of order.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm just providing a verbal notice of that motion. I'm not moving it, of course, but for now it's there.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I will move to the next speaker on the list.

Members, please do not stray from the amendment of Madame Larouche, which is simply focused on the study motion of Madame Koutrakis and having eight meetings or four. That is the amendment. We're going to stick tightly to it.

The floor is open to anybody who wants to—

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, that's what I was doing, but I'll cede the floor now.

**The Chair:** You ceded the floor.

**Garnett Genuis:** You can add me to the list, though, again.

**The Chair:** That's fine.

I have Mr. Bailey, Ms. Fancy, Ms. Goodridge and then Mr. Genuis on the amendment of Madame Larouche.

Mr. Bailey, you have the floor.

**Burton Bailey:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm new to the committee, but if you're going to do a study, you can't cut it short; you must go to the root cause. Being in the health committee, I'm questioning whether some of the topics that some of our colleagues were discussing wouldn't be better handled by another committee, but that's my own opinion.

When we start talking about proper food handling, salmonella and things like that—

• (1755)

**The Chair:** Again, we're on the amendment.

**Burton Bailey:** I'm speaking to the number of meetings. If you want to discuss this, you cannot cut them down to four when you're bringing up things like nutrition and talking about kitchens and how food is going to be prepared. I don't know if you're familiar with the outbreak of salmonella that happened in Alberta. I think these things need to be discussed.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bailey, we are on the amendment, which is about going from eight meetings to four.

**Burton Bailey:** I am discussing the importance—

**The Chair:** That's the debate. Does the committee want a study of four meetings or eight?

**Burton Bailey:** As I said, I'm new to this committee, but I believe you need to be looking at over eight meetings.

When I start to consider all the health aspects of the food lunch program, I am considering nutrition, the proper handling of food and the actual kitchens. After what we learned in Alberta about the salmonella outbreak, you really need to consider having extra meetings.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next we have Ms. Fancy, on the amendment of Madame Larouche.

**Jessica Fancy:** The educator in the room finally gets to speak on the program we have.

I think the Conservative Party politicizing—

**The Chair:** We're on the amendment to the motion.

**Jessica Fancy:** —the number of days within this meeting and politicizing feeding students is absolutely shameful. I will discuss what my colleague across the way, Mr. Genuis, said on the need to do a further study about food inflation and the need to do another study about—

**Burton Bailey:** I have a point of order.

**Jessica Fancy:** I was going to give you a positive there, Mr. Genuis, by letting you know that—

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Order to both.

Again, committee members, the amendment is clear in this debate. Does the committee want eight meetings or four for the motion of Madame Koutrakis? The debate will stay solely on eight meetings versus four or I will move to the next speaker.

**Jessica Fancy:** I would like to add something in regard to going from eight meetings to four, which we are very positive about and supportive of. To speak to what my colleague across the way said about having too many other studies and about the food inflation study, we have to remember that the Prime Minister just announced new measures to make groceries and other essentials more affordable for Canadians. He did that a couple of weeks ago.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fancy.

I'm now moving to you, Ms. Goodridge. You're next on the list and you're not at the table.

I'm moving to Mr. Genuis, totally on eight meetings versus four.

**Garnett Genuis:** I think we could look precisely at the measures the Prime Minister announced as part of a study of food inflation. My understanding is that you guys are not interested in having that happen.

**The Chair:** We're on the amendment, Mr. Genuis. I already cut off other speakers. If you don't...we'll go to Madame Larouche and we'll vote on the amendment.

**Garnett Genuis:** The amendment proposes that the committee devote a minimum of four meetings to this study instead of eight meetings. As the study as currently proposed is to be only on this one particular program and the government seems to be allergic to a discussion of the root causes, I think the reduction is warranted. I don't know that eight was ever really a serious proposal anyway.

Having said that, a study with more meetings, if the discussion were about food inflation, might be warranted on this broader topic. I think the question of whether food inflation is considered part of this study does play out in terms of the number of meetings we set.

What I would like to know procedurally is whether I can move a subamendment that deals with a different section of the motion if it relates to the same subject matter or subject matter that I see as being related to the point under consideration.

I wonder, Chair, if you can clarify that, because I would be interested in moving a subamendment that brings in the concept of food inflation, but I don't know if I can. Does the subamendment have to change the word "four" in some way or can it be related?

● (1800)

**Caroline Desrochers:** That's another amendment.

**The Chair:** Any subamendment has to relate to the amendment by Madame Larouche.

**Garnett Genuis:** How is that relationship defined, Chair?

**The Chair:** The reference is to eight versus four meetings, so if you want to subamend it to change the number—

**Garnett Genuis:** The only subamendment allowed would be to change that number to something else.

**The Chair:** Yes, or I'm going to a vote on the amendment by Madame Larouche.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'll move a subamendment then to move it from four meetings to three.

**The Chair:** No, we would have to vote on the amendment by Madame Larouche before we would—

**Garnett Genuis:** I don't think that's correct, respectfully. If I can, I'll just explain.

If we vote for this amendment, then you likely will not allow another amendment to the number of meetings, because that would be amending a section that had already been amended. The only way for me to present a third option for the number of meetings is to subamend that same word. I don't think there's any other way to do it. I think procedurally this is the appropriate way of doing it.

**The Chair:** Okay. We have a subamendment on the floor amending the amendment by Madame Larouche, which moved the number of meetings from eight to four. The subamendment by Mr. Genuis would move it to three meetings.

**Garnett Genuis:** Can I speak to that subamendment as well?

**The Chair:** You can speak briefly.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'll limit my comments on this to the length permitted by the rules with respect to moving subamendments.

As I said in a different context, there are many issues presently before the committee. In determining the appropriate number of meetings for consideration of this matter, the committee does have to take into consideration the other business before it. It cannot make decisions about the number of meetings on a particular matter in a vacuum irrespective of the other matters that would possibly be considered.

The three meetings, unless they're to take place at a period outside of when they would regularly be scheduled or during the summer in a break week, would inevitably be at the expense of other meetings. Members will recall that I did propose summer meetings last summer, and I was apparently in the minority in wanting to devote my vacation time to the important work of HUMA. It was very sad.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Members, excuse me. I'm suspending the meeting because of a lack of decorum, to the call of the chair.

The meeting is suspended.

*[The meeting was suspended at 6:03 p.m., Monday, February 23]*

*[The meeting resumed at 8:17 a.m., Thursday, February 26]*

• (8015)

**The Chair:** Good morning, committee members. If you could, take your seats, please.

I am going to resume meeting number 26 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Before we begin, I want to remind members in the room to please silence your devices and refrain from tapping the mic, for the protection of our interpreters.

You can participate in today's meeting in the official language of your choice. In the room, please select the correct channel and make sure you're on it so you're getting the correct interpretation. If you're appearing virtually, please click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface and choose the official language of your choice. If there is an interruption in interpretation services, please get my attention and we'll suspend while it is being corrected.

We are resuming debate on the motion by Madame Koutrakis on the national school food program, as it is currently being amended by Madame Larouche and subamended by Mr. Genuis. The subamendment is to change the number of meetings proposed by Madame Larouche from four meetings to three meetings.

I will now open the floor for discussion. I see a couple of hands.

I have Mr. Genuis and then Madame Larouche, or was Madame Larouche first?

**Garnett Genuis:** It doesn't matter to me. If she wants to speak first, that's okay.

**The Chair:** Okay. I will start with Madame Larouche, and then it's Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead, Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, before starting the meeting, we had a discussion to sort out a formality before moving on to the discussion on Ms. Koutrakis's motion.

At the last committee meeting, I made a request that we again ask the Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement to come and testify before the committee. We voted to have both ministers appear for two hours. We also received a letter from Minister Lightbound, saying that he wasn't sure if he was going to come.

If possible, I would like us to reiterate that the study on the Cúram software is relevant and remind Mr. Lightbound that a motion was passed by unanimous consent to request that he appear. Before we discuss the motion, I just want us to deal with this formality.

• (8020)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** At the moment, Madame Larouche, we have to deal with the motion that was on the floor when we suspended, but I will return to the item you referenced.

At this stage, I'll give the floor to Mr. Genuis on the subamendment we had when we suspended.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There have been some good discussions among parties in the interim, so I'll try to dispose of this in a way that's as quick as possible.

You will probably find unanimous consent to deem the subamendment withdrawn and the amendment adopted, which would leave us with four meetings.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Do I have unanimous consent to withdraw the subamendment? I'm seeing a thumbs-up from everybody.

(Subamendment withdrawn)

**The Chair:** Please repeat the second part, Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** It is that the original amendment from Ms. Larouche be deemed adopted. I will then have another amendment to propose after that.

**The Chair:** Yes, we'll dispose of it.

Do I sense agreement on the second item?

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** We will now return to debate on the main motion by Madame Koutrakis as it was amended.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Chair.

We have an amendment to propose, which we sent late last night. The translation is not ready, so I will read it out.

**The Chair:** Can you read it slowly into the record so it can be interpreted?

**Garnett Genuis:** Yes.

First of all, it's to add the words "food price inflation and" in the opening section, so it would read, "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on food price inflation and the implementation and long-term permanence of the National School Food Program". It continues from the there.

Then there are two paragraphs that remain unchanged: "that the study examine the design, governance", etc., and "that the study explore the impact of", etc. Then we're proposing a new point after the word "communities", and that point would be "that the study examine the root causes of hunger, including high food price inflation".

**Caroline Desrochers:** Do you mean extremely high food price inflation or just high food price inflation?

**Garnett Genuis:** I mean high food price inflation, yes: "that the study examine the root causes of hunger, including high food price inflation".

There's one more little change. This one is certainly not a hill to die on, but I think it's an improvement. It's to add the words "and economists" after "nutrition experts", so the section would read, "that witnesses include, but not be limited to, representatives from the Coalition for Healthy School Food, Breakfast Club of Canada, La Table des Chefs, Indigenous organizations, public health and nutrition experts, and economists".

Those are the three changes that we would like to move. I suppose we can wait for distribution if we need to, but I hope it was clear in the audio.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, what I'm going to do is suspend for a couple of moments, and the clerk can prepare that so everybody knows what they're voting on, if that's agreeable.

I will suspend for a couple of moments while committee members consult on Mr. Genuis's amendment.

• (0825) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (0835)

• (8035)

**The Chair:** Thank you, committee members. The committee is resuming the motion.

We left on a discussion of a proposal by Mr. Genuis, so I'll give him the floor.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, I'd like to make a slight revision. My apologies. What happened is I had written some suggested language for an amendment, and then I took it back and made some further changes to it that I didn't think were substantial. It's probably cleaner to go back to, in some respects, the version I had originally written so that people don't feel like there are things being changed on the fly.

I'll move my amendment as it was, except taking out some of the language in the additional bullet point. The additional bullet point, as I'm now proposing it, would read, "that the study include high food price inflation." That's a shortened version of what it had been when I previously stated it.

• (8040)

**The Chair:** Does everything else remain the same?

**Garnett Genuis:** Everything else remains as originally proposed. That's the amendment.

**The Chair:** I have Madame Koutrakis with her hand up.

Go ahead, Madame Koutrakis.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to my honourable colleague Mr. Genuis for working with us on this to make sure we go forward in the spirit of collaboration and everybody understands what we're voting on.

I'm just wondering if we can ask him to read it out one more time completely so we know exactly what the amendment will look like.

**The Chair:** I will ask Mr. Genuis to read the version that he will be asking the committee to adopt or reject.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

**Garnett Genuis:** I would add the words "food price inflation and" to the first line after the words "study on", so it would read, "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on food price inflation and the implementation and long-term permanence of", continuing from there as before.

Then we have the two bullet points, unchanged, ending with "Indigenous, northern, rural, and remote communities". Then I would add the line "that the study include high food price inflation", and add the words "and economists" at the end of the subsequent line about witnesses.

**The Chair:** I was following through on that.

Madame Koutrakis, do you still have your hand up?

**Annie Koutrakis:** I'm sorry. It was a legacy hand.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Has everybody had the chance to absorb Mr. Genuis's points? I'm seeing no opposition.

Seeing no further discussion, we'll call a vote on the amendment by Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** I think we can deem the amendment and the main motion adopted unanimously, unless people want to go through the process.

**The Chair:** I'm fine. I'm getting the thumbs-up.

Do we have unanimity on the amendment by Mr. Genuis and the main motion, as it would be amended?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** Procedurally, I have to go back to where we suspended on Monday, but go ahead, Mr. Genuis, briefly.

**Garnett Genuis:** When we suspended, you were going to come to me next for the motion I was going to move.

Again, there have been some discussions among parties, and I understand there was some desire for some new language here. Rather than propose the motion that was on notice and then have an amendment, I think you'd find unanimous consent for me to propose the revised version, which reflects a consensus of the committee.

The revised version is as follows:

That the committee report to the House its request that the government reconsider its policy in the distribution of student grants based on the type of regulated institution where students are studying. The federal government should align with decisions about eligible institutions made by the provinces and territories.

**The Chair:** I'm seeing no opposition in the committee room to the motion put forward by Mr. Genuis. If there's no discussion on the motion, I would ask for a vote or an indication of unanimity.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Larouche, did you want to speak?

**Garnett Genuis:** Ms. Larouche, do you want to talk about Mr. Lightbound now?

• (8045)

**Andréanne Larouche:** Yes.

Mr. Chair, as I said, this shouldn't even be debated in committee, because it's to follow up on a motion that was passed unanimously.

I will reread the motion that was adopted by the committee:

That the committee invite the following individuals to testify for two hours each:

1. Ms. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment and Families, accompanied by officials;
2. Mr. Joël Lightbound, Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement;

To answer the committee's questions about the Cúram software with the goal of developing a rapid and effective action plan to resolve problems in the processing of the Old Age Security, or OAS, benefit claims and to provide an update on past and future cost overruns; and that the ministers testify no later than February 26, 2026.

It's simply because we received a letter from Mr. Lightbound. He was invited, there was a discussion and March 12 is fast approaching. I would like the clerk to take steps on behalf of the committee to invite Mr. Lightbound again, to reiterate that we still want to question him and to remind him that this is a motion that was unanimously passed by the committee.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Larouche.

Madame Goodridge, go ahead on the motion.

[Translation]

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for reiterating her support by moving this motion. I think it's really important.

Retired people have a hard time getting government support, but we also see that the software budget has been greatly exceeded. I think it's important to hear from the minister to really determine what the problems are. We believe that solutions may have been found.

[English]

I just want to again thank my colleague from the Bloc for bringing this forward.

One of the interesting pieces I have found since we started talking about this issue is that there were people waiting eight to 11 months—or longer—to get their payments from OAS, but every time they called Service Canada, they got a bit of a runaround. They were told that they would be prioritized and not to worry

about it. Many of these people did that because they're compliant people. Only when we started talking about this did people say, "Well, actually, I've been waiting for a long time for this."

I know that recently the minister has been a bit better at getting things fixed quickly, but I think we absolutely should be studying the root causes of what has gone on here, and we need to hear from the minister as to how this happened.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Madame Desrochers.

[Translation]

**Caroline Desrochers:** I would first like to reiterate that we obviously support having Mr. Lightbound come to the committee. We support my Bloc Québécois colleague's request.

However, I just want to correct some things that are still being said in committee, but that are not necessarily fair.

First, 7.7 million retirees are currently receiving pension cheques. They were transitioned to the Cúram system. Yes, I know it's very important to the 80,000 or so people who were affected, but these cases are in the process of being resolved, and quickly.

Second, there are no cost overruns. We talk about this issue every day in the House of Commons, during question period. We set the record straight every day, and every day we hear the same incorrect information, even though we keep saying that it is incorrect. I know it makes for good social media clips, but it's unfair to mislead Canadians.

Let's put it in perspective. There are 7.7 million retirees who were transitioned to the system. It went very well. There were no cost overruns, from what I understand and from what my colleagues tell me. What's more, ministers talk about it every day in the House of Commons.

There you have it. That's all I wanted to say. Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm seeing no further discussion on the motion of Madame Larouche requesting the minister to attend committee. Do we have unanimity, or do I need to call a vote?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** At this time, committee members, the agenda we were operating with on Monday is what I'm returning to, so we'll suspend for a few minutes while we transition to committee business. Thank you for your deliberations in the early part and getting the essential work of this committee under way uninterrupted.

We'll suspend for a couple of moments while we transition to committee business to do some planning and make some decisions.

[Proceedings continue in camera]





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