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

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Monday, March 9, 2026

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Chair: Robert Morrissey





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

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• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, committee members. The clerk has advised me that we have quorum and that the sound for those appearing virtually has been tested. With that, I will open meeting number 27 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, February 4, the committee is meeting on Bill C-222.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders of the House. Meeting members will appear in person or virtually. Before we begin, there are a few rules. I would ask all members to please silence the devices that are with you during the meeting. Please refrain from tapping on the boom of your microphone, for the protection of the interpreters. You have the option of choosing to participate in the official language of your choice. In the room, make sure you're on the channel that gives you the language you wish to participate in. 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 corrected. As well, please direct all questions through the chair and wait until I recognize you by name before you participate or respond.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. As individuals, we have Nora Spinks, chief executive officer, Work-Life Harmony Enterprises Ltd.; and Carmen Wu, appearing virtually. From Metro Vancouver Empty Cradle Bereaved Parents Society, we have Nancy Slinn, director, and Peter Slinn, director. From SIDS Calgary Society, we have Sarah Cormier, chair, and Lee Cormier, member-at-large.

Each witness will have five minutes for their opening statement. Please remember to speak slowly so that the interpreters can correctly translate what you're saying.

We will begin with Ms. Spinks.

Ms. Spinks, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Nora Spinks (Chief Executive Officer, Work-Life Harmony Enterprises Ltd. As an Individual):** Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to join you today for this important conversation.

I am here today speaking in support of Evan's law.

As a member of this committee, you will hear from HR professionals and frontline managers who have grieving parents return to work before they are ready and sit in meetings crying quietly. You will hear from health care professionals who hold the hands of their grieving patients and know that on top of their grief, they will also lose access to EI benefits but know now is not the time to share that information.

Most importantly, you will hear from families who have experienced the unimaginable, the loss every parent fears: the loss of an infant and the loss of their hopes and dreams for a life that will not be. You will hear from families about their pain and their grief. You will hear about their experiences and frustrations with the EI system, which was never designed to include support for grieving parents. You will hear about what it feels like when they receive a letter from Service Canada, demanding that they pay back the benefits they inadvertently received, because they are no longer eligible and because they didn't inform Service Canada quickly enough about their loss in order to stop those payments in the first place. You will hear from them how under the current EI program, grieving families are excluded and prevented from receiving fair treatment.

My name is Nora Spinks. As the chairman stated, I'm the CEO of Work-Life Harmony. Today, I bring a policy perspective to this conversation. I've been informing federal family policy for several decades. In the past, I was involved in informing change to extend maternity and parental leave options to include both a 12-month and an 18-month benefit.

I was involved in developing the compassionate care benefit, which is now available under the EI program; the CCB provides people on temporary leave up to six months' worth of benefits to care for somebody who is at the end of life.

Recently, as the chair of the National Seniors Council, I was involved in advising the ministers of health and seniors on policy and benefits for older adults in Canada.

As the current chair of Veterans Affairs' ministerial family advisory group, I am involved in informing policies focusing on the well-being and quality of life of veterans and veteran families, such as the introduction of the veteran caregiver recognition benefit.

Good public policy is fair and equitable, without barriers to access and with minimal administrative burden. The late Jane Jacobs, an influential Canadian activist who shaped our policies designed to enhance quality of life, was once credited as saying that good public policy comes when decision-makers see in their mind's eye the people most affected by it.

Evan's law is good public policy. Evan's law reduces barriers to EI benefits and reduces administrative burden for grieving families. Evan's law recognizes and supports families that experience the unimaginable. Evan's law improves the grieving family's quality of life. Evan's law sends a message to all families, especially to grieving families, that the Government of Canada sees you, hears you and is here to support you in your time of unimaginable grief. With Evan's law, families will no longer have to remember to contact Service Canada when the item at the top of their to-do list is to pick out a coffin for their infant.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1535)

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Ms. Spinks.

We will now move to Ms. Wu for five minutes or less.

Ms. Wu, you have the floor.

**Carmen Wu (As an Individual):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Carmen Wu, and I'm here to share my experience navigating employment insurance after the stillbirth of my daughter, Olivia, in 2017. Olivia was stillborn at 40 weeks. At that time, I was already receiving maternity benefits. I knew that I would need to cancel the parental benefits portion of my leave.

When it came time to address my parental leave, I learned that I couldn't make the required changes online, so I went into a Service Canada office. I remember standing in line, knowing that when I reached a counter, I would have to tell the staff that my baby had died. The staff there were kind and compassionate and tried to help in every way they could. My experience is not about the individuals working within the system but the process requiring me to relive my loss in a very public setting at a time when I was barely functioning.

The people at the office told me that once my maternity benefit ended, I could return, and they would help me access additional time off. In that moment, I did not fully understand what that meant. I never went back to find out. When you're grieving the loss of a child, even the simple administrative tasks can feel overwhelming. Forms, timelines and eligibility requirements require a level of focus and clarity that many grieving parents simply do not have. I could not imagine having to stand in that line for a second time. I was fortunate to have a supportive workplace and family that allowed me additional time away from work. Not every parent has that, and even though I had that support, returning to work was mentally very difficult.

The changes proposed under Bill C-222 would help families like mine. It would allow parents who have lost their baby to continue receiving their benefits without having to re-explain their loss or reapply during the most painful time of their lives. It would give grieving parents the space to heal without the added burden of bu-

reaucracy. No grieving parent should have to stand at a government counter to explain that their baby has died in order to receive the time they need to grieve.

Thank you.

• (1540)

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

We will now move to Mr. Slinn and Ms. Slinn. I understand you're going to share your opening statement. Please proceed.

**Nancy Slinn (Director, Metro Vancouver Empty Cradle Bereaved Parents Society):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the honour and privilege of being here to share our statement with you this afternoon.

Because of my vision disability, I'm going to ask my husband to read my statement for you.

**Peter Slinn (Director, Metro Vancouver Empty Cradle Bereaved Parents Society):** I'm speaking for Nancy.

Over 30 years ago we experienced the stillbirth of our daughter Angel at 20 weeks' gestation. That's far enough along to have fingerprints and eyebrows but not far enough along to meet the world. At that time, and still largely today, this type of loss at 20 weeks falls into a legislative grey area.

Nancy was not eligible for maternity benefits. She was granted one week of leave by the employer. Within those seven days of notifying family and friends, arranging a funeral and burial, supporting our own six-year-old daughter as she went through her first experience meeting death, all of that had to occur ahead of processing our own physical and emotional trauma in the situation.

There were challenges to premature job re-entry. After a week, it's not a full recovery. It's a survival tactic...for the bank. Anyway, in Nancy's case, she was marked with extreme exhaustion and the constant threat of public triggers, such as encountering an infant on a public transit commute—that nearly broke her resolve.

Furthermore, Nancy witnessed the unique burdens placed on me, her husband, as I was expected to be strong despite having even fewer support structures than she did. Bill C-222 is essential because that can provide recognition for both parents, if needed, to give them time and financial security while healing from a trauma.

There's a growing need for this. When we took over the Metro Vancouver Empty Cradle Bereaved Parents Society in 2005, we hoped the need for such a group would eventually diminish, but instead, our outreach has grown. We have over 350 families on our mailing list, and this highlights a painful truth. Medical care has advanced, but the financial and emotional safety nets for grieving parents have not.

Thus, Nancy recommends that newly bereaved Canadian parents should not have to choose between financial survival and mental health, and urges the committee to pass Bill C-222 without delay. Let us ensure that the next generation of parents has the support that was unavailable to our family.

Now, in addition to that, I have my own observations that are worth sharing here. I found that, as a father and in working through Empty Cradle's peer support group, I did not find any clarity within Canada's Labour Code regarding workplace bereavement after a stillbirth. We had to wing it. Sadly, this has not changed much in the intervening time. I had to negotiate for an additional three days of leave—not much—and had to take those days from my allotted vacation time. Then, upon return, I faced the emotional trauma of workplace triggers. A few days after the stillbirth, a co-worker dropped by, not knowing that we had suffered loss, to show off their newborn child. I was not well equipped to handle this so soon after our loss.

A short-term return to work situation after a loss, therefore, has a few flaws, which often have an impact on workplace retention. While working with Empty Cradle, we have often heard of reduced emotional capacity, as grieving parents are less capable of managing workplace stresses or conflicts with co-workers, certain staff or clients, and this too has led to forced resignations. We've witnessed cases in which a teacher or a child care worker and others were forced to basically bail on their employment situations. Financial need had driven them back to work before they were emotionally or physically ready to do what their job routinely entailed. It is not economically efficient, in those cases, to have inadequate leave leading to unsuccessful reintegration and increased work conflicts, and, after having to leave a job, more difficult EI claims due to such job loss.

We recommend that, within the focus of Bill C-222, this committee carefully consider the following. How about timeline parity? Recovery from an infant loss typically requires a timeline similar to that after a live birth. Both situations involve significant physical and psychological demands, including the risk of postpartum depression, which is too often a factor after a loss, not just after a normal birth, and, if present, is usually detected weeks after the birth situation.

- (1545)

There are now also complex medical diagnoses. More recently, parents are being faced with ethical dilemmas regarding whether to even continue with a pregnancy after discovering a major health issue or a terminal condition. They so require the financial backstop of this bill to give them time to process consenting to a life-altering decision without having to think about the financial fears on top of their medical trauma. It is nearly impossible to discuss these situa-

tions with family, friends or co-workers around a pregnancy termination decision.

What about the gig economy? We understand that this may be outside the scope of this bill, but we must highlight that contract workers and gig workers will remain unprotected. I would encourage this committee to keep those vulnerable workers in mind for legislative scrutiny whenever any employment status loopholes are possibly detected.

In conclusion, properly worded legislation within Canada's employment framework will reduce or prevent job re-entry difficulties that we and so many others have faced in such situations.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair, for your time, and thank you to the committee and other witnesses for working to make Bill C-222 a robust support for all Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Nancy, if I may, for your opening comments, and thank you, Peter, for your supporting comments on this important piece of legislation.

We will now move to SIDS Calgary Society. We have Sarah Cormier, chair, and Lee Cormier, member-at-large.

Are you making the statement, Ms. Cormier?

**Sarah Cormier (Chair, SIDS Calgary Society):** We'll be sharing it. Thank you.

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

**Sarah Cormier:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Sarah Cormier. This is my husband, Lee Cormier. We are here today in two capacities—as advocates who have spent a decade fighting for legislative change, but most importantly, in our favourite role, as parents of Quinn Isla Cormier. Quinn died on December 28, 2014, from sudden infant death syndrome.

Our journey began with motion 110, a call to action that laid the groundwork for what we are discussing today. We have spent over a decade telling the story of our Quinn and her legacy, so that other parents wouldn't have to fight the government while they were fighting to survive their own grief.

When Quinn died, the world stopped. Standing at the Service Canada office less than a week after Quinn died, we were told, "Your child ceases to exist, therefore your benefits cease to exist." Under our current employment insurance system, the moment a child dies, a parent's eligibility to be supported vanishes.

I want you to imagine the administrative cruelty of that. Within days of losing Quinn, we were thrust into a world of grief and were seen as debtors in the eyes of the system. The current system is telling parents to navigate a complex bureaucratic maze at the exact moment we are most broken. The system is telling them that their role as a parent, and the support that comes with that, ends the second a child dies. Bill C-222 says otherwise. It says that the care doesn't end; it just changes form.

When we introduced motion 110 years ago, we were asking for a foot in the door. We were asking for the government to recognize that infant loss is a unique, devastating gap in our social safety net. The seven recommendations put forth in the 2018 parliamentary report "Supporting Families After the Loss of a Child" were very clear. I'd like to draw your attention to this recommendation: "ensure that there are ways to make reporting the death of a child [seamless], easier and less traumatic to parents to ensure that parents are treated with compassion".

In the 10 years since we started this work, thousands of Canadian families have fallen through that gap. They have missed payments. They have had to make the choice between paying for a funeral or paying their rent. They have been forced back to work while still in shock. Bill C-222 is the culmination of a decade of heartbreak and hope. It provides continuity. It ensures that maternity leave and parental leave remain intact, giving families the grace period they need to breathe without the fear of an EI clawback.

• (1550)

**Lee Cormier (Member-at-Large, SIDS Calgary Society):** We're often asked why we have stayed in the fight for 10 years. The answer is simple. We promised Quinn that her life would matter not just to us but to the laws of the country.

By passing Bill C-222, you're telling grieving parents across Canada that their government sees them. You're removing the financial penalty of child loss. We urge you to move this bill forward through committee and back to the House without delay. Let's finish what we started 10 years ago.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Sarah and Lee, for your compelling testimony before the committee today.

With that, we will go to the first round of questioning from committee members. We'll begin with Mr. Richards, who is joining us today.

You have six minutes, please.

**Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC):** First of all, to each of the parents here who has had the courage to share their horrible, tragic experiences with this committee for the benefit of this Parliament, thank you for your courage to come forward to do that and for the honour that brings to your angel babies, to Quinn, to Olivia, to the Slinns' daughter Angel and to all of the other angel babies out there. Thank you for your courage to be here. I know it can't be easy.

There are a few things I want to try to address. Let me speak first to the importance of the idea of a bereavement leave, which is es-

entially what this bill creates. It's not what it's called, but it's essentially what it's creating.

I'm going to ask you this, Lee. Tell me if you're not comfortable speaking about this, and it's fine if you're not. I know that you tried to return to work very shortly after Quinn's death. Would you be willing to tell this committee about the experience and what that was like? You had to make that choice given the situation you were in.

• (1555)

**Lee Cormier:** I think it was probably within two weeks that I made the decision to go back to work. Putting yourself in that situation... I mean, I'm a power lineman. I do dangerous work fairly regularly. The company that I work for definitely made it much easier. They made it important that somebody was with me all the time, to make sure that I was focused and safe.

You don't really have the ability to make good decisions early on, definitely. Even just struggling with day-to-day things is enough, without throwing work in, dangerous work, or any of those kinds of things. It definitely puts people into a scenario where you're just kind of floating through life, not really focusing on much of anything.

**Blake Richards:** Thanks for sharing that. None of us wants to have to imagine ourselves in the shoes that you were in. That's why this is so important. Maybe that just flows into the question that I want to ask next.

Over the last decade or so, I've worked with you. In fact, you were very humble. You were the impetus behind all this. How this all got started was when you came to tell me about your daughter Quinn.

Also, Nancy and Peter, I know we've worked together over the last number of years as well. I want to ask both of you to tell us a bit about the advocacy and what the roadblocks were that you faced as you fought through M-110 the last time the HUMA committee did the report. I want to ask you that because I think it's important for people on this committee to hear what we don't want to see repeated again and what we don't want to have happen, and for all members of Parliament to understand why it is so important that this passes, that this doesn't just become a report somewhere or fall by the wayside. This has to get done.

I want you both to have a chance to speak about the advocacy you've done and the roadblocks you've faced, so that we can make sure that those situations aren't repeated again this time, particularly with the committee process and whatnot.

Do you want to start, Sarah and Lee? Then we'll go to Nancy and Peter.

**Sarah Cormier:** In my testimony, I mentioned those seven recommendations from that initial report. Hopefully, those are somewhere that is visible to all of you. I feel as though the recommendations are straightforward and clear. They're great recommendations from the testimony of other individuals like us and from research. I feel as though the recommendations are very clear and beneficial for parents with all types of losses.

We aren't good employees. I'll be the first to tell you that I was not a good employee, returning after Quinn died. If we hadn't had the family that we do or the employers that we had at that time, we wouldn't be where we are today.

We've come across so many families that have had to make that choice. Do I pay my rent or do I have a funeral? Do I return to work? Who cares for my other children as they're navigating this?

The time it has taken is the biggest roadblock. We can't press enough upon you the urgency to move this forward so parents aren't falling through the cracks anymore.

**Blake Richards:** Thank you for that.

Hopefully, I'll get a chance to ask Carmen a question in a future round, because I did have a question for her.

For the last of my time, I want to give Nancy and Peter a chance to address how important it is to move this forward and that it doesn't get watered down.

**Nancy Slinn:** I would like to say that our losses occurred in the early nineties. There was absolutely nothing available to help parents. People did not understand. They didn't know how to deal with us. They didn't know how to talk with us.

When we found Empty Cradle two months after the loss of our daughter, we immediately began to get involved by being on the board and helping to run the support group meetings. We wanted to give parents an outlet, as someone they could listen to and who truly understood. I cannot believe that 30 years later, there is still not much support out there for parents who have endured a loss.

• (1600)

**Peter Slinn:** In the 41st or 42nd Parliament, when motion 110 was put forward, everybody voted for it at first and second reading. It went to committee. As a committee chair, Mr. Morrissey, I'm sure you understand that there's a lot of pressure to get things done. There was not a lot of time and, unfortunately, it was not perceived that the time could draw to a close. The chair at the time, Dan Ruimy, had a number of get-togethers for hearing it through, but time ran out.

It was a close Parliament. There was a call for an election, and that ended everything. We tried again in the next Parliament, and it ended again. That's what we're possibly up against this time. It is a close House. It's not 200 to 100 or something. We need to get this through quickly and keep a priority on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Richards, and Mr. and Mrs. Slinn.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

**Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** I'm very moved by your testimony. Being a parent myself and a new grandmother—my little granddaughter is six and a half months old—I can't even begin to understand how incredibly difficult it must be for you to be here today to share with us so generously your experience without it bringing up all those memories that I'm sure you try so hard to live with every single day of your life. Thank you very much for that.

Ms. Spinks, in your experience what are some of the best practices that employers can adopt to ensure that parents returning to work after a loss feel supported and respected?

**Nora Spinks:** There are three very distinct elements that need to be in harmony in order to support parents who are going through this experience. One of them is the benefits. That's what we're talking about here today. There are also the leave provisions. That's the job protection—remaining attached to the paid labour force. That's also important, along with the changes to EI or changes to the Labour Code, but not all employees are covered by the Canada Labour Code. We'll also need to see this roll out to the provincial employment standards and to all the collective agreements across the country. The third element is the employers. Employers also need support, training, resources and tools in order to inform and support their employees as they are returning.

As you said, this is something that is unimaginable. It's also something about which people often say they don't know what to say and they're afraid they're going to say something wrong. Part of having this law and these benefits is it gives people the training and the tools they need, and the language, so that they too can demonstrate how supportive they are and not close up for fear that they're going to say something wrong.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Mr. and Mrs. Slinn, from your experience working with bereaved families, are there additional steps governments could take to better support parents during this period? Obviously, the financial piece is very big, and it's something that parents don't want to have to deal with while they're grieving the loss and just getting used to the new reality, unfortunately. Besides that, is there something else that we could be doing?

**Nancy Slinn:** As a society, we do not understand how to handle grief. Most people's reaction, their attitude, whether they're employers or members of the public or even members of our own family, is, you're young. You can have another baby. These things happen. You're not alone. But you feel so very alone. You can never replace that child. We had two early miscarriages before we lost Angel. We lost Angel at 20 weeks. I can still tell you everything about the day that we lost our daughter and what happened and the reactions and how I felt.

I'm not alone. Last night, we met with a young woman who also lost her sons due to stillbirth in the 1990s. We had become pen pals before the Internet and support groups even existed. She told me the same thing. We talked long and hard last night about how she felt and how she could still remember everything about her children, about the experience. That, again, was over 30 years ago.

• (1605)

**Annie Koutrakis:** I would like to ask Mr. and Mrs. Cormier, and also Ms. Wu, to chime in. Could you provide us with your comments on the same question?

**Carmen Wu:** I couldn't say it better than what's already been said. In terms of my loss, it was nine years ago, and I would echo the same thing as the panel providing their statements here. It's very similar. Even within the nine years, people's understanding of grief, the taboo.... It feels like taboo. People going through grief feel the need to be normal. Everyone grieves differently, and the time when they're ready can be different depending on who it is.

**Sarah Cormier:** Originally, when we approached Mr. Richards, we said perhaps there would be some sort of sensitivity training, because I used the statement—this is forever etched in our minds—that your child ceases to exist, therefore your benefits cease to exist. We said to him right off the hop that maybe some sensitivity training.... That was in the initial stages of grief, and we know now that it probably wasn't the best statement that we made, but perhaps there could be some grief education for Service Canada employees. Of course, by sharing our story we're educating all the time, so just with more education for Service Canada, let's start there.

[*Translation*]

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

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

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

I, too, would like to offer my condolences to Ms. Wu, the Slinn family and the Cormier family. Ms. Koutrakis spoke as a grandmother, and she was deeply moved. For my part, a few days ago I celebrated my daughter's fourth birthday. She is the most precious thing one can have. What these families have been through is something we would not wish on anyone. They have my deepest sympathy.

During a speech in the House, I announced my support for Bill C-222. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that we are calling for a reform of the Employment Insurance Act, so that it is more feminist and more humane, and takes into account the difficult situations that anyone may face; there are many such situations.

I will now return to the matter that particularly concerns us today, namely, the situation our valued witnesses have experienced.

Mr. Cormier, my colleague Mr. Richards asked you a question about work-life balance and the support you received. I would like to hear more about that.

If any other witness—Ms. Wu or a member of the Slinn family—would like to speak to their expertise and their personal experience, I invite them to do so as well.

Ms. Spinks, I would like you to tell us about your expertise on work-life balance. In the response, training was mentioned, but how should employers adapt their practices to better support bereaved parents?

• (1610)

[*English*]

**Nora Spinks:** I have to reinforce what was said earlier, that you cannot educate and train enough. When this bill is enacted, as I fully believe it will be—soon, I hope—I think part of what will go

along with it will include training and resources and support for employers. If we implement Evan's law as it's proposed at this point, it will still be considered maternity and parental leave. It will be easier to get people to broaden and understand how they will implement something that they're already familiar with. Employers will need to understand how they can fit this new program into their existing benefits. If maternity and parental benefits get a top-up, then certainly grieving parents should get the same top-up.

There are a number of things employers can do. In particular, they can educate themselves and the managers and give time for co-workers to be ready for the re-entry of the grieving parent into the workplace. Service Canada is absolutely the first place for training and development to occur. Then it's people like co-workers and colleagues.

Organizations like those developed by the Slinns and the Cormiers are enormous resources. We don't have to reinvent anything. They already have these resources. The Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network out of Sunnybrook and others already have these resources. I think PAIL is up to 16 or 17 languages in terms of resources. We don't have to start over. If you enact this bill tomorrow, this material can get out through the community networks very, very quickly.

**Lee Cormier:** I think we've discussed a bit about training employers and other employees. I think a lot of it, though, really changes when you aren't forced to go back to work immediately. You have time to go through your grief. You have time to stabilize prior to going back to work. You don't have to go back to work feeling raw. It would benefit people if they had some time to process and work through a few things, including all the small things that trigger and that become substantially less than immediately after.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. and Mrs. Cormier, is there anything that could be added to Bill C-222 to address the specific needs of a family mourning the loss of a child?

[*English*]

**Sarah Cormier:** There aren't, not that I can think of at this moment. I should have prepared for that one.

**Lee Cormier:** I think overall it's—

**The Chair:** We have to move on.

We will go to Mr. Genuis for five minutes, please.

**Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Cormier, I don't normally do this, but if you want to continue the thought you were about to express, I will give you some time for that.

**Lee Cormier:** I was just going to say that over the last 10 years, we've seen things added on. We came with a certain intention when we started 10 years ago. I think everything that we've tried to work in has been covered. There have been some other things added that I think benefit, for sure, but I don't really see anything different at this time that we would be asking for.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'll go to you in a second, Mr. Slinn.

If I can just share a couple of thoughts from a preamble perspective, I want to thank all of you very much for being here. I think it's really powerful when people are able to turn personal pain into public advocacy. As parliamentarians, we need to hear your stories so that we can act on the insights that you share.

I know there are many more people who have these kinds of experiences of pain and who, for very understandable reasons, are not able to bring them forward or are not comfortable in bringing them forward. I know that all of you represent many others who would like their stories heard but are not able to share them.

I do want to thank my colleague, Blake Richards, who's subbing in at this committee. He's been leading on this issue for 10 years in Parliament.

I think the partisan aspects of this place get a lot of attention. They say sometimes that when there's conflict, that's what gets the attention, but this place is at its best when we can build on each other's work—when there's a good idea that comes from one party and then someone else takes it a bit further and someone else takes it a bit further. In reality, that's how we make the country better.

Thank you for mentioning motion 110. That, I think, was pivotal to starting this.

I wanted to ask a practical question around the application of this bill in Quebec. I don't know if anyone can help me with this, but my understanding is that Quebec has a different parental leave system. I wonder if there's anyone who can clarify the details in terms of how this bill would apply in the context of Quebec's distinct system of leave.

• (1615)

**Nora Spinks:** I can take that one.

**Garnett Genuis:** That's perfect. Thank you.

**Nora Spinks:** Quebec has a distinct parental leave program called QPIP. Quebec monitors and delivers all of that.

In some cases, the federal programs sort of overreach the provincial, and that's usually when there is something new or something innovative that's available in one part of the country that's not available in Quebec.

What's really important here is that there's really a focus on equity: What's available here is what we're going to see happen there. We're seeing that across provinces now. They offer unpaid days off for people to breathe—

**Garnett Genuis:** If I can just jump in, I understand the point you're making about jurisdictions learning from each other. Just so I understand, in practice, for this change to be operationalized as part of the Quebec program, it would require a law to be passed in Quebec. Is that correct?

**Nora Spinks:** That's correct.

This one is for people who are eligible for EI. They have to complete all the eligibility criteria for maternity parental benefits under the employment insurance program.

**Garnett Genuis:** Okay. That is an important clarification, just for our knowledge.

On this side, we have also talked about the need to deal with bereavement leave when a parent has died. That's different from the experiences we've heard about today, but we're proposing the addition of that concept to the bill, if there's agreement. Obviously, the key priority is getting this done, but if there's agreement, that's a concept we'd like to include as well.

I know that's different from the experiences you've represented, but I just wanted to raise that and ask if anybody has thoughts or reflections on a continuation of parental leave when the parent passes away and it would otherwise be cut off.

**Nora Spinks:** If there are two parents, they have the option to split the parental portion. The maternity portion is for birth mothers only.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry. Is that only if they're eligible?

**Nora Spinks:** Yes, it is if they're eligible.

If the mother dies and does not access their maternity benefits, it is possible that the father can receive the maternity and parental benefits. It's not like the parental benefits are lost. If it were embedded in the law, it would provide clarity for families and for administrators.

**Garnett Genuis:** That's only in the case where they'd both be eligible. Sometimes they're not both eligible.

**Nora Spinks:** That's correct.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Ms. Fancy for five minutes.

**Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.):** Through you, Chair, I want to thank the Wu family, the Cormier family and the Slinn family for talking about their stories and for building upon an absolutely horrific incident to bring about advocacy.

From a policy standpoint, I'd like to start with Ms. Spinks.

Thank you, Ms. Spinks, for your advocacy and your policy development.

Taking this in a different sense, are there any families right now, based on the current reading of this bill, who would not benefit from the adoption of Bill C-222?

• (1620)

**Nora Spinks:** In the intent of Bill C-222, no parents who are currently eligible for EI would be left out of this program, provided that they met the medical criteria for this to be a birth and the infant was lost within 12 months.

**Jessica Fancy:** In terms of the medical criteria, do you professionally have any further amendments to or recommendations on the bill as it stands?

**Nora Spinks:** Having done some background work for this particular bill, I would not add anything at this point. I do think that, as part of the implementation, there need to be funds allocated in the next budget to support organizations like the ones these folks represent in order for them to implement this for families, households and hospitals coast to coast to coast.

**Jessica Fancy:** Ms. Cormier, thank you for being here today.

You talked about sensitivity training and the supports and structures that employers can have within their culture and climate. Do you have any recommendations in terms of what that might look like for employers, from your perspective? I'm sorry, but it might be a big one.

**Sarah Cormier:** I'll elaborate on what Ms. Spinks said. Those resources are available for organizations like ours, such as SIDS Calgary Society, Lachlan's Light, Empty Cradle and PAIL. As the other gentleman said, we take our heartbreak and turn it into advocacy. There's no lack of resources out there. It's about mobilizing and implementing them.

**Jessica Fancy:** Ms. Wu, thank you for your courageous story about what it might have looked and felt like to go to Service Canada and make that statement as to why you were there. Thanks for sharing that personal experience with our committee.

How important is it that parents who lose a child while already on maternity leave, as you mentioned, or while on parental leave have the time and financial stability to focus on their grief?

**Carmen Wu:** I was very fortunate that I had the time and the finances, so I was able to decide for myself. Aside from my maternity leave, I took an additional two to three months off. My work was very supportive. Looking back at that experience, it was very impactful for me to be able to use that time to grieve. I cannot imagine what it's like for families who don't have that time or who feel that they have to go back to work due to finances. I can't imagine.

When I went back to work, as some people said here, I was not functional. Even after taking six to seven months off, I was not doing much. When I went back to work, everything was still in a fog. As mentioned, I was just floating. For families who don't have the time, I just cannot imagine.

**Jessica Fancy:** Thank you very much, Ms. Wu. When you look at families and vulnerability, where I come from in Nova Scotia it's quite a rural and remote area. I can imagine that feeling of isolation and the lack of support and wraparound services. I want to thank you in terms of your story and perspective.

**Carmen Wu:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

• (1625)

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

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

Ms. Spinks, Quebec has been a pioneer in recognizing these specific needs within its Quebec Parental Insurance Plan. I imagine it would be very good to see Bill C-222 aligned with this at some point.

You mentioned a law: Could you briefly return to that subject?

[English]

**Nora Spinks:** To my knowledge, there hasn't been any consultation with the Quebec government around QPIP and how this will impact what they're currently doing or thinking about. It's something that will need to be done.

[Translation]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I imagine there will be a way to consult on such a sensitive issue and reach a conclusion.

Ms. Wu, beyond financial benefits, what support services should be developed? Could these include psychological support or community services? How do you envisage the services that could be provided under this bill?

You touched on the subject, as have other witnesses, but I would like you to tell us more about it.

[English]

**Carmen Wu:** I can speak only to the experiences I had. As I said, I was very fortunate to have a lot of resources. Even then, it was very, very difficult to find support. It's not a subject that a lot of people are ready for. Being able to readily access information, having the support at work and at home, and having people and friends know what to say at that time would have been very impactful.

[Translation]

**Andréanne Larouche:** That's perfect.

Mr. and Mrs. Slinn, in your opinion, would it be appropriate and important to offer families a minimum period of guaranteed financial support to allow parents to grieve without financial pressure?

[English]

**Nancy Slinn:** Anything that would be offered would probably be gratefully accepted. When you are thrust into the world of bereavement after the loss of a child, you can't focus. You don't even know what is available or how to access what is available. Imagine: Now we can all go to our computers and look up resources. Thankfully, there are some resources available. When we lost our child in 1995, the Internet was something we could only dream about and imagine. It took us two months to find Empty Cradle.

The first group we discovered was something called Compassionate Friends. The main difference between Compassionate Friends and Empty Cradle is that Empty Cradle specializes in pregnancy and infant loss. Compassionate Friends deals with the loss of a child at any age. While we were trying to grieve the loss of a baby we had never even met until she was already deceased, we were confronted by parents who had lost their child to suicide, murder or car accidents. It was extremely traumatic. I believe that set my grieving back considerably, at that point.

To be able to have access to resources, information and compassionate people who truly do understand is very important.

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

Ms. Falk, you have five minutes.

**Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC):** Thank you very much, all of you, for being here and for being willing to be vulnerable and share something that can be very difficult, and thank you, some of you—again the Cormiers—for doing that again. In a sense, it's almost like a revictimization, because you're having to live that again and share that again. The loss of a child is unimaginable, simply unimaginable, so I want to thank you each for having the strength to come here and share your testimony.

Unfortunately, we've heard that our current EI program can add administrative stress and also financial pressure at exactly the moment when compassion and support are needed the most. We know this bill seeks to address that gap, and this change is long overdue.

Again, I would just like to acknowledge Sarah and Lee Cormier.

As you mentioned, you appeared before this committee on this issue almost eight years ago. Your testimony at that time left a profound impression on many of us who were sitting around this table. During your testimony, you shared that you were told by Service Canada, "Your child ceases to exist, so therefore [your] benefits will cease to exist." You will never know the impact that has had on me as somebody here in this place. I repeat that to many, many people, because it's unacceptable that bureaucrats or departments would speak like that to people who are dealing with such a sensitive issue.

I just want you to know that what you've shared isn't for naught. It really sucks, and I apologize that you're here again because the law hasn't changed. Even though people have tried to change it, it hasn't. I just thank you for your perseverance and your willingness to show vulnerability and be vulnerable in this place.

I think your testimony, then, really underscores the need for a more compassionate and empathetic approach in our systems all over the map when it comes to the government.

Sarah and Lee, if you don't mind my asking, through your advocacy and your connections with other families who've experienced loss, have you found that their experiences with the system have been similar?

• (1630)

**Sarah Cormier:** Yes. Thank you so much. Thank you for the question, and thank you for your kind words. It's very impactful for us.

I think we've come up against it. Over and over again, that's what we hear. The time is now, for sure.

I'll reference a colleague from SIDS Calgary who's been a member and the registrar since the early eighties. During these 10 years, he came to me with a piece of paper. It was the baby bonus in the 1970s or 1980s. It was \$25. One of his twins died, and he said, "I have to pay back.... Look, Sarah; it's on paper." He had a letter, a mailed letter to him, saying to pay back the \$25. His son died; his daughter lived. He had to pay it back—\$25. I think we've been dealing with this for far too long, for sure.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Peter and Nancy, just with regard to your advocacy work, are you finding that things are getting better when grieving parents have to deal with the government?

**Peter Slinn:** One of the biggest things is that everybody expects they will bury their parents.

**Rosemarie Falk:** That's right.

**Peter Slinn:** A number of us will have to attend a funeral for a sibling, an older brother or whatever—I'd better watch it because I'm number one—but nobody has their head around how they may have to deal with the death of an infant. It's unknown to them that this could even happen. This also affects employers trying to figure out how to deal with this situation.

Madame Larouche and Garnett Genuis asked what you can do to have our back in these matters and what else you can consider while you're thinking about this. It would be to include in the interpretive literature or website that goes with it how to do certain things that it has mentioned. Every employer has to look up how to deal with leave at the death of a parent. Just have a phrase in there about how, if there is the death of an infant or any offspring, they have to deal with this. It's just so that they can get their head around the issue before it is sudden—because it is sudden when you're a parent. You may have heard that your dad has cancer or that one of your friends is going through a health crisis that could end very badly. Some end very immediately too. However, in almost every situation of stillbirth neonatal loss, there is only a moment's notice that this is what's going on. You say, "My child died?"; and they say, "Yes, and you have to deliver him or her." You're not prepared.

• (1635)

**Rosemarie Falk:** You're not preparing for that when you're preparing for the birth of your child. It's the very opposite.

I will say, I was on the committee when we studied M-110. At the time, there were several recommendations, as was noted. I'm not sure how much the department or the minister of the time followed through. If not, it's high time that those be followed through on.

**Nancy Slinn:** May I add something very quickly? Thank you.

As Peter started to say, when we lose a parent, that's a connection to our past. Most of us expect we will lose a parent at some point. When we lose a sibling, that's a connection to our present. Sometimes that happens, and again, we understand. We've met this person, we've lived with this person, and we've known this person. When you lose a baby, there is not only the physical loss of the child but also the loss of all the hopes, dreams and plans you had already created for that child since you learned of their existence. They're all shattered.

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

[*Translation*]

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

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

First of all, I would like to commend the exceptional courage of all the witnesses, especially Ms. Wu, who explained what she has been through and spoke about the administrative complexities.

I will now turn to you, Mr. Cormier. You told us that you returned to work early. Do you believe employers have a role to play? Is this also a challenge?

[*English*]

**Lee Cormier:** I definitely do. I'm not exactly sure how employers fit into it. There are always some rules or regulations we can impose on employers. Really, for us, it's always been to be able to have the time after, and really, it was more of a bureaucracy thing or a government route.

Definitely, both of our employers understood. They gave us extra time and were willing to work with us. For sure, not everybody has that ability. Not everybody has the kind of employer who's available for them. It's difficult in that sector when you're talking about employer-employee relationships and how that all works. I feel like this is more open to.... The funding is already there, and the promise of that time is already there, so we can keep that going.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

Ms. Spinks, I know that nothing can replace a child. In your opinion, what changes could we propose to Bill C-222 to improve certain things or ease the burden during that extremely difficult time?

[*English*]

**Nora Spinks:** The bottom line is that support shouldn't be a matter of luck. We've heard about the employers that were supportive.

It shouldn't be luck. If Evan's law is enacted in the way it's crafted, it would extend maternity and parental benefits to those who have lost an infant. From an employer's perspective, other than training their staff and managers and creating a warm place for people to re-enter the labour force, there's not a lot of change that needs to take place.

The job protection in employment standards is already there. The benefits and supports that the employer offers are already there. If they are tied to EL, maternity and parental, and those are extended to these families, there's a minimal requirement for employers to do anything differently from what they were already doing with their other employees on maternity and parental leave. All the mechanics for how they leave and when they come back are already there. What's important is that we make sure that there are wraparound supports in the workplace, in the community and in the home, so that the midwives, the pediatricians, the family physicians, the community mental health service providers and all of those people know how to support these families as they re-enter the workplace and as they confront yet another set of emotions as they go back to work.

This is so that they're not forced to go back too early, and when they do go back, they can stay employed instead of what usually happens, which is just quitting if it becomes unbearable and leaving the labour force altogether. It's not just cash benefits. It's labour force attachment. It's their own mental health and well-being, and it's sending a message to everybody that you're not in this alone. No matter what you're going through, there are resources and supports available to you.

I have one last comment. When you hear about 10 years, 20 years or five years, there are about 1,600 families that go through this experience every year. As Nancy so eloquently stated, you never forget. This is 1,600 cumulative, not 1,600 done and move on to the new 1,600. It's 1,600 additional every year.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** Mr. Chair, I would like to take a few seconds to acknowledge the level of empathy shown by my colleagues here today.

**The Chair:** Your speaking time is up, Mr. Joseph.

[*English*]

Mr. Richards, you have five minutes.

**Blake Richards:** Carmen, I said I hoped I'd get a chance to ask you the question I wanted to, and now I get that chance. Sometimes it seems like the questions get asked more of the people in the room, so I hope you don't feel like you haven't had the chance to fully participate.

I wanted to ask you—and I'll probably open it up to others as well if there's time—to speak to the impacts. You talked a bit about having to stand in that line. Sarah and Lee have talked about the horrible comment that was made to them about their child ceasing to exist and their benefits ceasing to exist as a result. I wanted to give you a chance to speak to the impacts of that.

You're already dealing with the most traumatic thing I could possibly imagine as a parent. I can't imagine anything that would be worse than experiencing what you've experienced, and then you have to go and deal with a cold, heartless bureaucracy. I wanted to give you a chance to speak to the impacts of that and what it does to a person.

**Carmen Wu:** Thank you for the question.

In terms of impacts, I would say time moves differently when you're grieving, and no one really understands that. When you are that person going through the grief and trying to manage your friends', family's and others' feelings, it does something to you. It changes you, I would say.

Looking back at my experience of going back to work within the six months, I thought at that six-month point that I was good. A year later, I looked back at the other six months and thought, "Oh, I was not good." A year later, I keep looking back. I'm still grieving at some points.

It's hard to put the impact into words, but it certainly changes a person, and it changed those around me who had to support me at that time.

**Blake Richards:** Thank you for sharing that.

That takes me to a couple of comments I heard from you, Nora, and I will ask you a question related to them.

You mentioned that this happens to 1,600 families every year. That means that over the last 10 years since we've been fighting for this, there have been 16,000 more families who have experienced it. That's why I spoke earlier to the importance of this getting done. We can't have this stalled again.

You also made the comment that some people, just by circumstance, are able to get the EI benefits as they exist now. That was one of the things I was alluding to earlier, when I talked about the roadblocks that were put up. Excuses were made at the time, and one of those excuses was that families can get this through what's there now. Sometimes there are families that are able to get it, but there are lots of families that aren't, and that's what I think you were referring to when you said it shouldn't be about luck. I want to give you a chance to speak to that and how important it is that there aren't excuses, or that this might work. We need to have something very clear, which I think this is.

I want to give you a chance to speak to the importance of that and not having more families go through the experiences that Carmen, Sarah, Lee, Nancy or Peter have gone through.

• (1645)

**Nora Spinks:** When there is infant loss in a family, everybody is affected. When there is infant loss in a workplace, everybody grieves.

We need to move this bill forward. We need to make sure people understand the essence of this bill. We know if you care for one, you care for many. If we support those parents in their grief, that ripple goes beyond, to their extended family, to their neighbours and to their co-workers and colleagues. This bill gives people not only the financial support they need, but all of the social support that comes with that.

We're never going to be able to prevent infant loss. What we can prevent is retraumatizing families. We can prevent the harm. We can prevent people being forced back too soon. The words you've heard today—heartbreak, shock, harm, trauma and cruelty—change you. We can change all of that by getting this bill out of committee, getting this bill voted on and getting this bill enacted.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Koutrakis, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

[*English*]

I would like all of our witnesses to chime in on this.

What message do you hope this legislation sends to families that may face this tragedy in the future?

I'll start with Mr. and Mrs. Cormier.

**Lee Cormier:** For us, just among ourselves, but working together with SIDS Calgary Society and within the political system, it doesn't have to be a political thing. The message should be that the government is looking out for us. The government is trying to take care of us and make things better. I think that's where we have to go with this: This is for everybody. There's nothing political about this. It's for everybody.

**Sarah Cormier:** I will echo that, for sure. Thank you for the question.

"We see you." That's what I think every bereaved parent wants to hear. They want to hear that they are seen by their government, by their friends and by their family. "You're seen, you're held, you're safe and we have you." That's what every parent wants to hear.

**Nora Spinks:** It's not the government's place to tell you when you're ready to go back to work after infant loss. You are the only one. You and your family members, your loved ones, are the only ones in a position to say, "Now's the time. I'm ready to go back."

What this legislation does is acknowledge and recognize that no two families are alike and no two grieving processes are alike. It's very different when we're talking about a return to work after a broken leg. We know exactly how many weeks it takes for that bone to heal. Grief and loss of an infant.... It's not the government's place to say when is the right time to go back.

By enacting Evan's law, we will be in a position to say: "You're not invalid. You have access to all the benefits you would have had access to. We're here. We support you." Those messages ripple, not just within those individual families but also within all of the other families in our communities. The more clear the message is that you matter, that we care, that we can't imagine.... We've heard that hundreds of times since this debate began decades ago: "You can't imagine it."

What we can imagine is what it would be like for a family to know that their benefits are going to be deposited into their bank accounts as expected, that nobody is going to claw them back, and that they don't have to relive their story over and over again. That, we can imagine. That, we can control. The people in this room, at this committee, in Parliament and in the Senate can make this happen and can do this quickly and expeditiously. We can move this through so that it doesn't get lost again, since the nineties. We can get this through now. This is important.

• (1650)

**Nancy Slinn:** It shows that we support you. We may not know every way to support you or how to support everyone, but we are willing to learn and to help in a way that we can now, to make your life easier in the future.

**Peter Slinn:** One of the situations is in health care. For people who are in cancer care, their job satisfaction is, "I saved 25 lives this month." We had a meeting, an Empty Cradle peer support meeting, and there were five couples there. Of them, all five found the same situation. The health care workers in maternity wards want to be in a happy place. Obstetrics is a happy place. There were glances back and forth between staff members: "Oh, this is a day I wish I wouldn't have come to work." The way terminologies are used.... "You've had a spontaneous abortion." Well, yes, you did. It's a miscarriage, and that's a terminology, but don't use that in front of parents. Use something sympathetic.

They're finding that banging against people who are not really on their side is an issue. Their employer says, "Oh, we just had to give you another holiday in September, and now you want how many months?" It's things like that. If they can feel that the government is there for them, that when they talk to Service Canada, it will be, "Oh, that must be horrible; we have something for you," that would be all the help they would expect from Service Canada and Canada employment.

**Carmen Wu:** I was going to say the exact same thing that Nancy was saying. When you're going through grief, it is such an isolating experience, and everyone grieves differently. When that person is

grieving and is asking for help or looking for help and resources, the system we have should be supporting them

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Once again, I would like to thank the witnesses for attending and offer them my deepest condolences.

Bill C-222, also known as Evan's Law, aims to ensure that humanity and dignity come before red tape. The state must not add suffering to suffering. That is why we will support this bill which, I would remind you, aims to address certain gaps in the federal employment insurance scheme.

However, we must ensure that Quebec workers under federal jurisdiction have the same protections as others. Finally, a parent should not have to choose between grieving and being able to survive financially.

Ms. Spinks, in 30 seconds, can you tell me whether certain families, such as those whose members are in precarious employment or are self-employed, risk being excluded from the planned measures? Is this something we should be considering?

• (1655)

[*English*]

**Nora Spinks:** Right now, the people who are excluded in this program are excluded in maternity and parental benefits and/or compassionate care benefits. There are two major parts to employment insurance. There are regular benefits, which people receive when they are not working. Then there are special benefits. Maternity and parental benefits fit under there, along with compassionate care benefits and others. These special benefits are there because they are compassionate, caring and nurturing benefits. As a country, we've decided that we're going to do this. What happens to families who don't have access to EI benefits is another set of issues that we need to deal with, separate from the EI benefit, but the EI benefit gives us the wedge that supports families as they are grieving and being forced to go back to work.

I'm not sure I'm answering your question, but I'm hoping to frame it by saying that this law is one of compassion, care and honouring what people are going through. It's not judging or forcing them to feel a particular way. We can't help people feel, but we can help people with some of the things they're trying to do—stay in the paid labour force, receive their benefits and not have to choose between a funeral or rent. These are some of the basics that this law allows and makes possible for families to access. The families who won't have access to this include those who experience pregnancy loss before viability. Those families would be eligible for sick leave, not maternity and parental benefits.

[Translation]

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

[English]

With that, I will thank the witnesses for appearing.

To all of you appearing today, thank you for your heartfelt testimony. Surely this time the bill will get back to the House in due haste so that it can deliver the objectives it was intended to deliver. Thank you for appearing and for being so candid with the committee members on their questions.

With that, we'll suspend for several minutes.

• (1655) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1705)

**The Chair:** The committee is resuming for a business section. We have some decisions to make. I will begin with the easy one. It's the adoption of a press release the clerk has circulated to you regarding Bill C-222.

Are members in agreement to have it published? I see consensus. You should have it. It was circulated. I'm seeing thumbs up.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Good.

We have two items that have to go back to the Liaison Committee. They were circulated last week. The first one is for the study on Bill C-222, a budget of \$35,400. The second is on the Cúram software, at \$500.

Do we have approval for these two budget amounts?

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, do you have a question on the budget?

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, you just raised the issue of the Cúram software, and I would simply like some reassurance. We have received an email from the minister's office stating the following:

Given PSPC's limited role in this area, the minister's office believes that the minister's appearance would add no value to this meeting. [...]

Yet we are talking about a major problem concerning the Cúram system, which affects tens of thousands of seniors. During her testimony before the committee, the minister said that 85,000 senior citizens could be affected by delays or payment issues relating to old

age security benefits. There is also talk of cost overruns, which have risen from \$1.7 billion to \$6.6 billion, an increase of 277%.

We must get to the bottom of this issue, which is of concern to tens of thousands of older people, some of whom rely on their benefits to pay for their housing, medicines and food. For them, this is crucial. It is not merely an administrative issue. To restore confidence, I would like to remind the committee that on February 5, 2026, it adopted a motion explicitly calling for the appearance of the ministers concerned. Here is the text of the motion I tabled:

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

Ms. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment and Families, accompanied by officials;

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 (OAS) benefit claims and to provide an update on past and future cost overruns; [...]

I would remind you that we in the Bloc Québécois have shown ourselves to be open-minded. Initially, the motion referred to February 26, but, at the Liberals' request, we agreed to postpone it to March 12 to accommodate the government. We have also learned from the media that public servants were given clear instructions not to discuss the Cúram case. In the circumstances, we believe the committee should shed light on this matter to get to the bottom of it. We really want the ministers to come and answer our questions in person to be held to account, as they are the ministers responsible.

We are still awaiting essential information. We had also managed to reach an agreement in committee to request figures regarding the number of people affected in each province. We would like to receive these figures before the ministers appear, so that we can carry out our work in a serious and informed manner.

I would therefore like reassurance on this point. It is essential that the ministers appear for two hours each, as provided for in the motion, by the specified date, namely March 12, so that they can provide explanations to the seniors affected by the payment issues linked to the Cúram software.

• (1710)

[English]

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

[Translation]

**Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to set the record straight, because people keep talking about cost overruns, when in fact there have been no cost overruns. Every day, we repeat the same thing in the House: There have been no cost overruns. Unfortunately, the opposition continues to repeat this.

Cúram software enables benefits to be paid to 7.7 million Canadians. It is a modernized software system. We agree that there have been challenges, which is to be expected when rolling out a system as complex as software that processes payments for 7.7 million Canadians. The department is working on it. The motion calls for the implementation of an action plan, and one is already in place.

A task force is looking into complex cases, which are resolved within 24 to 48 hours. Every day in the House, Minister Hajdu, who is the minister responsible for this issue and who is working specifically on it with her colleague, the Secretary of State for Seniors, asks MPs to provide her with the names of those affected so that we can follow up. That said, we are not receiving those lists.

I want to make sure this is very clear: I am in no way downplaying the impact on the seniors who are affected. We are working day in, day out and we have an action plan to achieve this. The minister will be appearing before the committee. In fact, I believe the date of her appearance has already been set.

I would like us to stop spreading incorrect information. Firstly, we can stop talking about cost overruns. There has been no cost overrun on this project. It is a major project affecting 7.7 million Canadians. From the outset, it was anticipated that things would turn out as they have. There have been problems, but we are resolving them.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Genuis wanted to speak.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, I won't say much on the substance of this program.

On the central point around testimony, I agree that it doesn't make much sense for two ministers to come and testify concurrently. I don't think that's a great use of their time. Ministers are busy people. We want to maximize the opportunity for interaction when a minister comes to the committee.

It would make a lot more sense to me to have one minister come to answer questions, then another minister come to answer questions, rather than having two sit at the table at once. A minister would still have to sit there for the full hour but with proportionally less interaction with the committee. It would make more sense to have an hour each, or even 50 minutes each, so there's more opportunity for actual questions and answers.

We can get into debating the policy, but I think the gist of the intervention, for Ms. Larouche, was the concurrent scheduling. I don't think the concurrent scheduling makes sense.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Well, if we don't have a budget, neither problem will present itself.

**An hon. member:** The budget was approved.

**The Chair:** No, it wasn't.

Was the budget approved, just so we're clear? Is there unanimous consent on the two budgets I presented?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I'm seeing the adoption of those two budgets.

The invitation has been extended. As chair, I've fulfilled my responsibilities.

Mr. Genuis, do you want to speak?

**Garnett Genuis:** Thanks, Chair.

With respect to our deliberations on Bill C-222, procedurally, if we want to expand the scope of the bill, we need the approval of the House in order to do so. I have drafted a motion that would request the approval of the House to do that. I want to note that this doesn't oblige us to adopt any amendments, but it would give the committee that option.

The motion reads:

That the committee report to the House its recommendation that, during its consideration of Bill C-222, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code (death of a child), the committee be granted the power to expand the scope of the bill with a view to making provision for cases where a claimant in receipt of Employment Insurance parental benefits dies during the benefit period.

I'll move that now.

Again, that doesn't constrain the committee in its decisions. We have been clear that we don't want to move forward with amendments if those amendments will make a royal recommendation impossible. We want to work with the government on this. It's up to the government to decide, ultimately, whether to accept these amendments or not. This motion would simply give the committee the power to adopt those amendments.

I'm happy to suspend, if people want to look at this. I'm sorry. I honestly intended to give notice of this during the first part of the meeting. I got carried away. We would support a suspension.

**The Chair:** Remember that I make those decisions, Mr. Genuis.

The committee can report to the House as it chooses.

On this, I would remind committee members that you all heard the testimony. I've been hearing that those who presented want this bill dealt with in due haste and presented to the House, without anything that may delay it. That occurred in the past.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, if I—

**The Chair:** I have the floor, Mr. Genuis. I'm speaking, and then I'm going to Madame Desrochers, who had her hand up.

The committee chooses its particular direction.

We have Madame Desrochers, and then I will go back to Madame Larouche and Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead, Madame Desrochers.

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

I want to remind all members of the committee that we just heard very difficult testimony on the impact of this issue, which is outstanding, and on how long it has taken to deal with it. We all committed to the witnesses—in front of the witnesses—to deal with this hastily, yet we are bringing one more delay. We're proposing, once again, to reopen and expand a bill that has received royal recommendation.

I'm trying really hard to understand the strategy and the compassion. I'm having a bit of a hard time with that.

• (1720)

**The Chair:** I have a speaking order. I believe it was Madame Larouche, then Mr. Genuis and Ms. Falk.

Go ahead, Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, we have just moved on to another subject, but before I turn to the motion, I would like to return to my previous question, to which I have not received a reply. I have allowed others to speak, but, with all due respect to Ms. Desrochers, she is not a minister, and my question was addressed to you, Mr. Chair.

I fear we may not have time to discuss the timetable, and I want to make sure I receive an answer to my question: Will the ministers indeed be appearing to give evidence separately, for two hours each, as the motion requests?

As I said, we received a response from the minister's office stating that Public Services and Procurement Canada had a limited role and that the minister's appearance would add no value to the meeting. However, at this point, it is fair to say that the government is attempting to downplay the matter. To shed light on this, I put the question to you again: Can we ensure that the motion adopted by the committee will be respected?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Larouche, the committee extends the invitations to ministers. Ministers choose to respond as they choose. That's the extent of the committee's power on the particular motion. The ministers will respond to the committee.

Have they responded to the clerk?

They have responded to the clerk. They will both be appearing for one hour at the same time.

With that, I will go to Mr. Genuis and then Ms. Falk.

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

Before I make further comments on this motion, I think maybe what Ms. Larouche was conveying was that perhaps the committee could convey back to the ministers a preference for them to appear separately as opposed to concurrently. If people agree, then we could agree to convey that message to ministers. If there's not agreement to do that, then I guess we will simply have conveyed our own personal preferences in the process.

We have a motion on the floor now. Is there agreement of the committee to convey that preference to ministers or is there not?

**The Chair:** I will suspend for a moment.

• (1720)

(Pause)

• (1725)

**The Chair:** We are back in session.

Just before I give the floor back to Mr. Genuis, there was a discussion before the committee. The only motion before the committee was the one of Mr. Genuis. That's just for clarification.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor, and then it will be Madame Desrochers.

**Garnett Genuis:** I have some comments I want to make in follow-up on the motion, but before I do that, maybe just to close the loop on the previous item, was there agreement of the committee to convey the message to ministers, as discussed? If there isn't agreement, we'll go back to the motion. If there is, we can convey that message.

**The Chair:** Again, Mr. Genuis, can you clarify for the committee what you're seeking?

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm just seeking to know whether there's agreement by the committee to convey the message to the ministers that we would prefer it if they appeared separately as opposed to concurrently. Is that agreeable to the committee?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Just so we're clear now, the committee has agreed to convey a message to the two referenced ministers to appear separately.

**Garnett Genuis:** Okay.

With respect to this motion, there are a couple of questions I wanted to respond to—

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Chair, before we discuss the motion, I would like to ask a brief question to clarify matters.

Finally, does the committee agree to remind the two ministers concerned that we would like them to appear separately for two hours each, as proposed in the motion, or will the ministers appear together for one hour, as you mentioned, Mr. Chair?

I just want to clarify the committee's position before we move on to something else.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** What I read was that there was unanimity to express to the ministers that they appear separately.

• (1730)

**Garnett Genuis:** With respect to this particular motion, we are dealing with two different cases of bereavement.

There is the case in which a child dies, and there is a provision for bereavement leave for families in that case. There is also the case of where a parent dies. There are grieving families in which a parent passes away and the death of that parent immediately ends the eligibility for that EI parental leave. This was brought to my attention by a colleague. Mr. Jivani spoke about this in the House during debate on this bill. I

I'm not sure how to read the comments from the other side. Mr. Jivani spoke about a situation in his constituency in which a parent who was receiving EI parental leave benefits passed away, and immediately there was a loss of those benefits.

Our proposal has been to add that element to this bill. We've also been very clear that if that addition would prevent the bill from getting a royal recommendation, we won't proceed with it. In order to be able to do this, there are a number of procedural steps that we would have to follow that take some time. It is precisely in the interest of avoiding delay that I suggest we adopt this motion, which refers it to the House. The House can then empower the committee to make those amendments if there's a will to make those amendments.

We are eager to pass this bill as quickly as possible and to make this bill help as many families as possible. We are not going to make the perfect the enemy of the good, but we want to put this forward as an idea for including more grieving families that would be affected.

Having said that, it's after 5:30, so if members feel that they're not ready to resolve this matter now, I want to put this on the table, because I want to be clear that this is something that we are going to work towards doing. At the same time, if the government clearly signals that this would be an impediment for getting a royal recommendation, we'll accept that. We want the bill to pass, and we want the bill to help as many families as possible.

This procedural motion requests the authorization of the House to allow the committee to make those changes if it so wishes. Adopting this motion now allows those follow-up steps to happen in a timely fashion. We can adopt this now, or we can decide to park it until a future point, or members can defeat it, which would, I suppose, be a clear signal as well on what they wanted to do. Any of those three options are available to the committee.

I did want to make sure this was clear and on the table, and that we were identifying our intention to try to provide some support for families who are also dealing with the loss of a parent.

**The Chair:** Next, we have Ms. Falk, Madam Desrochers and Madame Larouche.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We heard earlier today how Parliament works best when we have one party, say, putting an idea forward and there is an accepting of other ideas from other parties to the greater benefit of Canadians.

I do want to remind Madam Desrochers that when this committee did its recommendations on motion M-110 back in 2018, it was up to her party and the Liberal government at the time to enact those recommendations. Have they been done? Have they not been

done? I lean to the "have not been done", because it seems that there are parents experiencing the same thing.

When the other side is talking about delays, and I mean a delay because they're allowing or making a delay happen, I see the amendment being proposed as helping more people who are in the most difficult time of their lives, where they have maybe lost a child and a spouse at the same time and now have no recourse in getting financial benefits, (a) which they have they paid into, and (b) where they are now dealing with expenses.

I've seen this with my own bill, Bill C-318, which my office and I did a lot of work on. It was then taken by the Liberals and nothing was done with it. It was not enacted.

Ms. Desrochers, through you, Chair, I don't appreciate the lecturing about delays. We are literally here trying to make life better for Canadians when they are in the most difficult time of their lives. I do not appreciate, Chair, through you, the comments from Ms. Desrochers on delays.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Madam Desrochers.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you for your comment.

I'd like to remind my colleague, MP Genuis, that he does have a motion on notice in the House on this very topic, and it's already on the Order Paper. He is absolutely welcome to raise it in the House today or tomorrow, as he sees fit.

I don't think we should take additional time on this on this committee. We have a very heavy agenda ahead of us. In addition, I don't think we should be doing anything to jeopardize the swift passage of this bill. We've heard today from witnesses and we've heard from your colleague, Blake Richards, who has worked on this issue for 10 years, that they don't believe we should expand the scope of this, and they want us to move forward swiftly with this bill.

I would say, through you, Mr. Chair, that the member is also welcome to present a private member's bill on this topic if he so wishes, but again, this bill has received....

I don't know what's so funny, Mrs. Falk. You're saying this is a serious issue. It is a serious issue.

**Rosemarie Falk:** You're contradicting yourself. That's what's funny.

**The Chair:** Order.

**Caroline Desrochers:** I don't think we should delay this further. The bill has a royal recommendation, and we know that changing the scope of the bill will put this at risk. Are we really there for those grieving families, or are we just saying we are?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Madame Larouche.

[Translation]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I don't wish to prolong the debate, Mr. Chair, but we have just received the text of the motion, and I want to fully understand the impact it could have.

The aim is not to be disrespectful to anyone, but I simply want to analyze the situation. If I understand correctly, this could prolong the study, because it would require the House to agree to debate a report and then issue broader instructions. However, the House is currently holding very few debates on committee reports. So I do not know where this could fit in.

Mr. Genuis, I understand your intention to broaden the scope of the bill. The aim is very noble, but today we have seen the importance of this bill. It is a long-awaited bill. Please understand me correctly: I am not saying this in a negative sense. I am simply wondering to what extent this might delay the clause-by-clause consideration.

I am putting forward an idea for consideration: Perhaps this would be best examined by the subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. There might even be an agreement between the various parties.

As we have only just received the text of the motion, I have not yet had time to form an opinion on the consequences it could have.

**The Chair:** Mr. Joseph, you have the floor.

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

I listened to the witnesses the whole time they were here. That was not the case for Mr. Genuis, who was going in and out. I do not

know if he missed anything, but the witnesses were clear. His colleague was also clear: he wants Bill C-222 to be passed as quickly as possible.

During the testimony, my colleague expressed a great deal of empathy. I am not saying that he was not sincere. However, can my colleague tell us what point is served by delaying the adoption of this bill? Let us show a little respect for the witnesses who were here a few minutes ago.

• (1740)

[English]

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Genuis and then Madam Goodridge.

**Garnett Genuis:** Yes, Chair, I think we're venturing into some not good territory here, and I'm sorely tempted to respond to Mr. Joseph's comments, but I think that in the spirit of being constructive it would be better if we.... It seems that members need a bit more time to understand what this motion is, and that's fine, so I'd move that we adjourn the meeting now.

**The Chair:** Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

I'm seeing nods, so yes, with that, the committee will adjourn.

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