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Chair: Dominique Vien



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• (1105)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 33 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, December 10, 2025, the committee will resume its study on the abuse and financial vulnerability of senior women.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I have, quickly, a number of housekeeping items.

Please wait for me to recognize you before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. At the bottom of your screen, you can select your language of preference, which would be English or French. If you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For those on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Before we get into our meeting today, I want to go through some housekeeping.

We need to approve a couple of study budgets. There were two study budgets distributed yesterday to all members. These were for \$500 each. They are for the study of the main estimates 2026-27—our meeting on May 7—and the study of the subject matter of Bill C-16, which is today's meeting.

Do members approve the two budgets proposed to you guys?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Okay, that's great.

Also, we're looking at the study of anti-feminist ideology. Version one was presented to members on April 17. The committee will consider the report on Thursday this week, and again for one hour on Thursday, April 30.

Are members okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Could members please send in their recommendations, in both languages, for this report by noon on Monday, April 27, so the analysts can prepare their recommendations? Is that okay with members?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Okay.

At this time, I will introduce our speakers.

I welcome our witnesses. By video conference, we have Bénédicte Schoepflin, executive director, Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. We are also in anticipation of having Deborah Rose, Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Centre, and Loriane Estienne, director general, Proche aideance Québec.

We'll start with opening remarks from the Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, for five minutes.

Please go ahead, Ms. Schoepflin.

Bénédicte Schoepflin (Executive Director, Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse): Thank you so much. I hope everybody can hear me.

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Bénédicte Schoepflin, and I'm the executive director of the Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, often known as CNPEA. CNPEA is a national organization that is working to prevent the mistreatment of older adults and to advance their rights and their well-being across the country.

In Canada, approximately one in 10 older adults experiences some form of mistreatment each year, and we know that this number is an underestimation. Older women are disproportionately affected, particularly when you consider the intersection of gender, age, potential disability, caregiving roles and economic insecurity, among other factors. The abuse of older women in Canada is often hidden, under-reported and insufficiently represented or addressed in policy. As our population ages, these gaps risk leaving more women without the safety, autonomy and dignity they deserve.

Economic abuse, or what we often call financial abuse, is a key concern. It includes things such as the misuse of powers of attorney and undue influence, and it's often a mechanism for coercive control. It restricts access to financial resources and undermines autonomy. For many older women, it might lead to reduced access to care and medication, to housing instability and to long-term financial insecurity.

Like most forms of abuse in later life, financial abuse often occurs in a relationship of trust. It takes place at the hands of partners but also adult children, caregivers and others in positions of authority. These dynamics are shaped by dependency, by social isolation and, in some cases, by cognitive decline. It is frequently linked with psychological abuse, coercive control and social isolation.

Of course, when we are thinking about these issues, we also have to remember they're compounded by broader systemic gaps. Older women remain largely invisible in gender-based violence frameworks, including in the national action plan to end gender-based violence. Canada generally lacks a coordinated national framework to monitor and address elder abuse across systems. There are also critical gaps when it comes to supports and safety. For instance, nowadays many shelters or transition housing options are not adapted to the needs of older women, particularly if they have any mobility challenges or care needs. As a result, many women are left with no viable option but to remain in unsafe situations.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated prevention-focused approach that reflects the realities of older adults, especially older women, and strengthened systems across the sectors. Based on our work across Canada, we would like to highlight a few key priorities. There are more in our written submissions. I hope to get a chance to talk about some of them.

First, establish a coordinated federal approach to elder abuse prevention. This includes a framework for data collection, for monitoring and for cross-sector collaboration.

Second, invest in prevention and public awareness. This means having sustained, accessible education to address ageism, to end elder abuse and to build capacity across communities to help recognize, respond to and prevent mistreatment, including financial abuse.

Third, strengthen safety support systems. This means expanding access to safe and appropriate housing options, legal assistance and community-based senior services.

Fourth, increase support for aging at home and support for caregivers, recognizing the essential role that caregivers play, as well as the risks that can arise in situations of dependency. Many situations of abuse occur in contexts of stress, dependency and lack of support, so strengthening caregiving systems is essential to the prevention of mistreatment and abuse of older women.

Fifth, ensure that federal initiatives adopt an intersectional approach. This means explicitly addressing the experiences of older women within the national action plan to end GBV, as well as integrating dementia-informed and disability-inclusive approaches.

At its core, the issue is not just about protection. It's about dignity, autonomy and the right to live free from abuse at every age.

• (1110)

Older women are not a homogeneous group—there is no such thing—and they are not defined by vulnerability. They are rights holders whose experiences, voices and leadership must be reflected in the policies and systems that affect them.

We cannot afford to treat abuse in later life as a private issue or an afterthought any longer. Of course, the CNPEA stands ready to work with federal partners to advance solutions to ensure that older people and older women in Canada can live free from abuse.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much for those remarks.

Now we'll move on to our next witness, Loriane Estienne, for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Loriane Estienne (Director General, Proche aideance Québec): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, members of the committee.

My name is Loriane Estienne. I am the Executive Director of Proche aideance Québec, a provincial network of around 150 community organizations that support more than 49,000 family caregivers across Quebec. With over 25 years of experience, our network's mission is to provide dignified support to people caring for a family member with a disability.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting us to contribute to this important study. We are here today because family caregiving is at the heart of this study, not only as a risk factor that is too often overlooked, but also as an essential yet fragile protective mechanism.

I'll start with a fundamental distinction. In Quebec, the 2020 Act to recognize and support caregivers provides a broad and inclusive definition.

Thus, a family caregiver is any person who provides significant support—without being a paid professional—to a member of his or her immediate circle, whether due to aging, illness, disability, or social hardship.

At the federal level, recognition remains primarily tied to access to benefits, which often involve cumbersome and complex procedures for family caregivers and are subject to more restrictive eligibility criteria. This discrepancy creates significant blind spots, namely the lack of broader recognition of family caregiving as a reality in its own right and an essential social role. Access to federal programs remains limited to specific situations, leaving out a significant portion of people who nevertheless fulfill this role.

Caregiving takes many forms, which are still insufficiently accounted for in the design of current programs. First, caregiving may lead to financial vulnerability. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and we wanted to highlight a less visible aspect. For many family caregivers, these [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] make it hard to fulfill their role. Family caregiving is often seen as an act of love, and it is.

• (1115)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I'm sorry. I'm going to pause for a second. I believe the interpretation is not really coming through at this time.

Your sound is breaking up. Why don't you try moving your boom upwards a bit?

[*Translation*]

Loriane Estienne: Is that better?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Yes, it is. Please continue.

[*Translation*]

Loriane Estienne: Family caregiving is often seen as an act of love, and it is. However, all too often, it also leads to financial hardship. Those involved [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] food, personal care products and home modifications. These expenses are not accounted for or reimbursed anywhere.

Of course, there are also financial repercussions: reduced working hours, temporary or permanent job loss. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] cover only 55% of a person's earnings and only for a limited time. That revenue loss has to be made up somehow. For a family caregiver, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] pension entitlement, less financial capital—

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I'm so sorry.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, can we suspend for a few minutes to check the witness's Internet connection?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): There is a connection problem. I'll ask you to work with our IT team to see if your connection can be a bit better, because we're missing half of what you're saying.

I will suspend for a minute to figure it out.

Thank you.

• (1115)

(Pause)

• (1120)

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I will bring this meeting back to order.

Ms. Estienne, you still have almost three minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Loriane Estienne: Okay.

I'll go back to my first point.

The financial insecurity of older adults was well documented, but we wanted to add a more visible dimension. We have to ask ourselves whether this insecurity began well before retirement.

Caregiving is often seen as an act of love, which it is, but it often leads to financial hardship, and those involved bear very significant costs such as transportation, food and home modifications. These costs aren't accounted for, and people aren't compensated for them. Added to this are income-related consequences, such as reduced working hours, temporary or permanent job loss, and benefits that cover 55% of wages and are only available for a limited time. That gap needs to be filled. When an older adult becomes a family caregiver—which is very common—they face multiple vulnerabilities. Family caregiving does not merely provide support; it also exposes caregivers to real financial risks.

Second, family caregivers are an essential defence against abuse, yet they are becoming increasingly vulnerable. Family caregivers play a front-line role in preventing elder abuse because of their regular presence. They enable early detection of abuse, help the person with administrative and financial matters, and reduce the risk of fraud. However, this protective role is conditional on the family caregiver being supported. A caregiver who is exhausted and financially precarious and who lacks official recognition of their role cannot maintain perfect vigilance. In some cases, they themselves may become the target. Caregiver exhaustion and isolation can also create conditions for unintentional abuse or make it easier for an abusive third party to target the older adult. Neglecting family caregivers weakens the only human safety net available to many older adults.

Third, this is an unavoidable societal issue, and this troubling situation will get worse in our rapidly aging population. The number of family caregivers is growing rapidly. Their profiles are becoming more diverse. They include working members of the “sandwich generation,” older adults who are themselves caregivers, and those providing long-term care. These individuals make an immense contribution to enabling seniors to remain in their homes. They directly alleviate pressure on health care systems, and there's no denying that our system needs this. Society benefits, but family caregivers often continue to pay the price.

In conclusion, this is a decisive moment for the federal government. Income support programs for caregivers must be accessible, flexible and grounded in real-life experiences, particularly those of women, who make up the majority of family caregivers and whose numbers are growing as caregiving situations become more burdensome and demanding. This reality directly exacerbates existing economic and occupational inequalities. It must also take into account a broader definition of what constitutes caregiving and include anyone who provides significant support.

To effectively combat elder abuse and financial vulnerability, we must address the root causes of these issues. This means recognizing the real costs of informal caregiving, adapting federal benefits to real life and systematically integrating informal caregiving into all policies related to seniors.

Protecting vulnerable seniors means supporting those who care for them.

Thank you very much.

• (1125)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much.

Next, from the Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Centre, we have Deborah Rose.

You have five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Deborah Rose (Executive Director, Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Centre): Good morning.

My name is Deborah Rose, and I'm the executive director at the Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Centre. We are an indigenous-led, community-based charitable organization that has served first nations, Métis and Inuit seniors in Edmonton since 1986.

Each year, we support more than 3,000 people through culturally grounded programming, wellness supports, housing advocacy and opportunities for connection and belonging. Our work is rooted in dignity, culture and community. Every day we walk alongside indigenous senior women, who are strong, resilient and deeply valued. However, they face increasing vulnerability.

I'm here today to share what I see at the ground level.

Indigenous senior women are experiencing multiple forms of abuse that often go unseen and unreported. We see financial abuse with families, in which seniors feel pressured to share their limited income with their children and extended families.

Many are living on fixed incomes, such as old age security and CPP, which are not keeping pace with the rising cost of living. We are seeing senior women skip meals to afford rent. We are seeing them give up grocery money to support family members. Way too often, they stay silent because of love, obligation and fear of losing those relationships.

Financial vulnerability is closely tied to isolation. Many indigenous senior women are living alone, disconnected from family or community and without access to culturally safe supports. This in-

creases their risk of abuse and leaves them more vulnerable to scams.

Scams targeting seniors are becoming more aggressive and sophisticated. Many of the seniors we serve are not comfortable with technology and face language barriers. When they are targeted, they often do not report it because they feel shame or do not know where to turn.

At the same time, safe and affordable housing remains a critical issue. Many indigenous senior women are living in unstable and unsafe housing conditions. There is a serious lack of culturally appropriate housing in which they can feel secure, supported and connected to community.

These challenges are compounded by the lasting effects of migration and residential schools. Many indigenous seniors carry a deep mistrust of the system and do not feel safe accessing mainstream services. As a result, even when supports exist, they are often out of reach.

From a community leader's perspective, I want to be clear that indigenous-led, community-based organizations are doing this work. However, they are doing it with limited, short-term funding that does not match the scale of need.

We need a shift.

First, we need increased and targeted federal income support for senior women, especially those living alone. No senior should have to choose between food and housing.

Second, we need to sustain investment in indigenous-led organizations to deliver elder abuse prevention, financial literacy and scam awareness programming in culturally relevant and accessible ways.

Third, we need safe pathways for reporting abuse that do not rely solely on policing but are rooted in community trust and support.

Fourth, we must invest in culturally grounded indigenous seniors housing. At the Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Centre, we are working towards a model that combines housing and a community hub, in which senior women can access programming, meals, cultural connection and support all in one place.

• (1130)

Finally, we must address food insecurity as part of financial vulnerability. Through our nourishing our elders initiative, we see first-hand how access to healthy and culturally appropriate food reduces stress, improves health and strengthens independence.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much, Ms. Rose. I appreciate that.

I would ask all witnesses to please turn on your cameras so that members can see you when they address you.

We'll start our first round of questions with Ms. Cody.

Please go ahead, Ms. Cody. You have six minutes.

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Thank you.

I want to thank the witnesses on this most important topic for coming today.

My first question is for you, Ms. Schoepflin. In recent years, governments have begun to recognize coercive control as part of intimate partner violence. I'm hearing that for seniors, particularly older women, coercion often occurs in caregiving or dependency relationships rather than traditional intimate partnerships.

Do you believe the way in which our laws and policies currently understand coercive control is too narrow? Should it explicitly include seniors and other vulnerable adults who may be coerced through dependency, housing or financial control rather than physical violence alone?

Bénédicte Schoepflin: I'll start by saying that I think it's a great thing that coercive control is finally being recognized, named and associated with intimate partner violence. As some of you may know, CNPEA is part of a group of organizations called the Elder Justice Coalition, which has been speaking and engaging with MPs and senators, including during a day on the Hill in early February, to talk about Bill C-16 and to put forward that we believe an amendment to the bill would be best in order to recognize the realities of older victims of coercive control.

As you said, for older people, very often coercive control will take place at the hands of someone who is not necessarily an intimate partner. If that's not recognized in the language of the bill, then we risk leaving a lot of victims of coercive control unprotected by the bill.

Connie Cody: Thank you.

Recently I was able to speak to the chief of police in Thunder Bay. He was telling me how he sees elder abuse ranking third in crimes of abuse, next to intimate partner violence as the most common and child abuse as the second most common. This committee has also been hearing from shelter providers and women's crisis centres, which speak of significant increases in cases involving senior women who are experiencing situations of coercion or exploitation. Frontline workers also believe human trafficking is a real concern. However, this is often categorized as elder abuse, homelessness or financial exploitation.

Could you expand on this from your experience? Is there anything more you'd like to share on this, especially on the human trafficking conversation?

Bénédicte Schoepflin: Let me start by saying that I use the term elder abuse, but some people might recognize it as mistreatment, which is abuse and neglect. It is a prominent issue. It has been prominent for a long time. It is increasing, as you were saying, and it is being noted by services across the country. There are a million reasons for this. Obviously, there's an aging population; people are struggling; and we are entering the largest wealth transfer in history, which is triggering maybe the worst instinct in people at a time when people are having a hard time financially.

On the human trafficking aspect, I don't think I can provide as clear a picture. I'm a little less familiar with the ins and outs of the issue. I know that it has arisen in recent conversations with people who are on the ground in different provinces and territories.

Unlike intimate partner violence and violence against children, elder abuse is still not fully understood. Very often it will be misinterpreted or dismissed because there's some residual unconscious ageist bias and we're likely not to hear or see and receive what is happening in a situation.

• (1135)

Connie Cody: Thank you for that.

Ms. Estienne, we have also seen much higher levels of burnout for caregivers. It's easy to see why. The cost of living is so much higher than it used to be, and salaries, especially for caregivers, haven't kept up. Is there a link between rates of caregiver burnout and rates of increased elder abuse?

[*Translation*]

Loriane Estienne: Absolutely.

Caregiving is a risk factor for all aspects of burnout. People who take on this role inevitably see their physical and mental health deteriorate as a result. It depends on the specific nature of the role they must take on with respect to their loved ones and the needs of those loved ones.

In Canada right now, one in five caregivers is over the age of 65. Not only are they aging, but they are dealing with the stress and vulnerability inherent in the role of a caregiver.

[English]

Connie Cody: I have another question.

Senior women are frequently targeted by scams involving urgent requests, impersonation or emotional pressure. In your view, what responsibility should financial institutions and social media platforms have to flag or stop suspicious activity?

[Translation]

Loriane Estienne: That's a big question. I think it all comes down to the importance of fully understanding what family caregivers have to deal with and how they can help protect more vulnerable seniors against fraud.

As I said, these caregivers must get support so they don't find themselves in a vulnerable situation as well. They have to keep providing support and prevention for their loved ones who are unable to care for themselves—especially older women who are more vulnerable to this type of fraud.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much.

We're moving on to our next questioner.

Ms. Nathan, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Juanita Nathan (Pickering—Brooklin, Lib.): Thank you to all the panellists here today.

My first question would be for the Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse.

We talk about seniors as a single group, but vulnerability is not evenly distributed. With an intersectional lens, considering factors such as gender, immigration status, disability and rural isolation, which groups of senior women do you think are currently falling through the cracks of federal protections?

Bénédictte Schoepflin: I'll start with the baseline. We do not have enough disaggregated data when it comes to mistreatment of older people. I really wish I did and could give you a laser-focused answer.

This said, as a general group, older women are overlooked already. If you consider the intersection of identities that you were just mentioning, things get worse because the available services that are relevant and that are even simply accessible are very sparse.

I don't think we can really compare and contrast and say that these ones have it worse than these ones. Right now, older women are generally facing way too many obstacles to basic safety and stability.

I would say for sure that the intersection of ageism and ableism is compounding the obstacles to accessing the necessary supports. Then we're talking about—as you said—language barriers and isolation from being in a rural area, etc., which really make services even scarcer.

Juanita Nathan: For the next question, I will go to Deborah Rose.

Much of the discussion around elder abuse focuses on individual vulnerability. Your work highlights systemic factors.

How do colonial legacies and ongoing socio-economic inequalities shape the risk of abuse for indigenous senior women in ways that federal policies may be overlooking?

• (1140)

Deborah Rose: The availability of funds and financial resources, whether this be old age pension or CPP, is critical for providing enough resources so that senior women can address and live their lives accordingly.

I would also like to say that we need to come together federally, provincially and municipally. We need to band together to find the resources that are available for caregivers and those in supporting roles. At our centre, social workers and supporting roles... As a non-profit, we don't have the financial resources to pay what the government would perhaps be able to pay for a social worker.

It's an all-around critical issue that there are not enough financial resources and people resources in the non-profit sector to support these women effectively.

Juanita Nathan: I'll tag on to that, taking on an intersectional perspective. How do gender, indigeneity and urban displacement interact to increase both financial and housing vulnerability among the seniors you serve?

Deborah Rose: I only got part of the question.

Juanita Nathan: I was trying to find out about, from an intersectional perspective, how gender, indigeneity and urban displacement interact to increase both financial and housing vulnerability among the seniors you serve.

Deborah Rose: When we're looking at gender-based violence and diverse individuals, it becomes even more critical. Their voices are less heard. Although our community and, I think, our society are becoming more open, there are many fears around acknowledging that you are being mistreated, that there is abuse and that you are facing these things. There's a lot of fear involved. How do we break down those barriers? I think that would be a challenge.

Juanita Nathan: My final question is this: What does culturally safe policy look like in practice? Where do current federal supports fall short in meeting the lived realities of indigenous senior women?

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Please answer in 10 seconds or less.

Deborah Rose: Oh, my. Okay. I can't even breathe in 10 seconds or less.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Why don't you send us a written response, if that's okay with you?

Deborah Rose: Yes, that would be great.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you. I appreciate that.

[Translation]

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My big takeaway from today's testimonies is that family caregivers do a whole lot of invisible work. Most of the witnesses spoke about family caregiving and the fact that this work receives too little recognition even though it is essential.

On that note, I'd like to give a shout-out to Quebec's Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale, or AFEAS, which has spent more than 25 years campaigning to have the first Tuesday in April recognized as national invisible work day. This would be a day for everyone to reflect on what we can do better to encourage volunteers and to recognize the work done by parents within families and by family caregivers.

I hope this will come to pass. I presented a report to this committee on invisible work. One of the recommendations in that report was to designate the first Tuesday in April as national invisible work day. I'm bringing this up now because we weren't in the House that day, so I wasn't able to make the statement I would have liked to make, unfortunately. The point is that the House must recognize a national invisible work day.

I'll start with Ms. Estienne, from Proche aideance Québec.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here. I will have questions for the others later.

Ms. Estienne, based on what you've said, it's clear that we need to do better when it comes to leave and benefits for family caregiving.

How should the government do that? Should it enhance the tax credit? One thing the Bloc Québécois has done is vigorously campaign for improvements to employment insurance.

What is the best approach, Ms. Estienne?

• (1145)

Loriane Estienne: I think the first step is to fully and completely recognize what a caregiver's role represents and the invisibility of its effects on people, mainly financially. The financial consequences for caregivers are largely made invisible and, above all, largely uncompensated.

Indeed, there would have to be a complete review of the entire employment insurance benefit system for caregivers. It exists, but it isn't tailored. It certainly lacks flexibility. In addition, the many different realities of being a caregiver are staggering, but our programs are too rigid and can't adequately respond to all of that.

Add to that the administrative burden, which is truly very heavy. The process is complex, and it's difficult to understand how to access these benefits. One in five caregivers who are entitled to the benefits and are trying to get them don't receive them.

There's a lack of understanding regarding the benefits. There are gaps in the ease of access to benefits, the tailoring of benefits and the enhancement of benefits.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I'm so sorry, Ms. Estienne, but the interpretation is not coming through right now. Your connection is not very stable.

Madame Larouche, is it okay if the witness provides written responses to your questions?

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I gather that employment insurance has to be improved in terms of the number of weeks. That's obvious. There has to be more flexibility in terms of tax credits and more help with accessing them. The paperwork also has to be simplified, because it's true that people often don't know about the tax credits and don't use them.

Before I go any further, I'd like to name the community network—

Loriane Estienne: The same is true for the employment insurance system.

Andréanne Larouche: I made a note of that; that's clear. Employment insurance reform is one of our key issues in the Bloc Québécois. We recognize that these people need additional help. We'll talk about this again, Ms. Estienne, if I'm unable to ask you any more questions.

What I was going to say is that I recognize the concerns of the community sector. I had the opportunity to work in the community sector in a previous life. I helped my friend, who was a volunteer, start one of the first respite homes for caregivers in Quebec, a Maison Gilles-Carle. We recognized that caregivers needed respite. They had to be able to rest. I commend all the community groups that have been at the end of their rope in recent weeks. The people in the "Le communautaire à boutte!" movement are doing exceptional work for caregivers and seniors.

Ms. Rose, I'm going to turn to you now, because another key issue for the Bloc Québécois is that of seniors' fixed incomes, which aren't enough. It's clear that seniors are unable to make ends meet. That's why the Bloc Québécois introduced a bill on this in the last Parliament. The bill wouldn't have solved everything, but there's currently an inequality between pensioners aged 75 and over and those aged 65 to 74. Seniors who are 75 and over had their benefits increase by 10% several years ago now. Given inflation, that's not a lot of money. However, people aged 65 to 74 didn't even get that 10% increase.

You say that we need to think about retirees' fixed incomes.

Do you think this inequality between retirees is acceptable?

At the very least, shouldn't all seniors, from 65 years old, be entitled to the same amount for their pension?

Ms. Rose, the question is for you, because you talked a lot about seniors' income. In fact, the Bloc Québécois has introduced another bill to ensure that the pension amount is the same for all seniors.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on that, in 30 seconds.

[*English*]

Deborah Rose: Are you talking to me?

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Yes, Ms. Rose.

If not, Ms. Schoepflin could answer my question.

I'll come back to you later, Ms. Rose.

Ms. Schoepflin, in under 30 seconds, should we consider giving the same amount to all seniors from the age of 65?

• (1150)

[*English*]

Deborah Rose: What I can hear is muffled.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I apologize.

That concludes your time, Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, I understand that there are interpretation issues, but have you stopped the clock each time there has been an interruption?

My six minutes of speaking time was frequently interrupted because of interpretation issues. I saw that Ms. Rose had misunderstood, but I saw Ms. Schoepflin nodding. I would like to hear her opinion, in recognition of the interpretation problems. I'd like Ms. Schoepflin to have at least 15 or 20 seconds to respond.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I appreciate your comments, Madame Larouche. I didn't interrupt you.

Ms. Schoepflin, if you want to go ahead for 30 seconds, please do so now, or you can send in responses in writing.

[*Translation*]

Bénédicte Schoepflin: Okay. I'll be brief, and I'll answer in French to make things easier.

Yes, I think that retirees need access to meaningful amounts of money as soon as possible to enable them to live properly. It's as simple as that, even if it seems simplistic. I can send you more details in writing if you'd like.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much for that.

Now we'll go to our second round of questions, starting with Ms. Roberts for five minutes.

Thank you.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

I want to state some numbers for all the witnesses to understand.

Inflation rose 2.4% in March, up 1.8% from the previous month. Gas prices are up 21.2%. Grocery prices are up 4.4%. Fresh vegetables are up 7.8%. We have the highest food prices in the G7, with 2.2 million people using food banks each month; 8.3% of food bank clients are seniors, up from 6.8%.

I'll start with Ms. Rose.

Could you please tell me how you feel this is impacting our seniors and their fixed incomes?

Deborah Rose: It's severely impacting their well-being. People are going about with less. There were some comments about human trafficking, and I think some seniors are feeling pressured and forced into this area to get some funds to survive. There is also food. Seniors are not driving their cars anymore. Many are sleeping in their cars because they do not have the financial resources even to be at the base level.

With the increases in rent and in food prices, we've seen a lot more theft, unfortunately. There's a higher risk of people getting caught stealing food.

Anna Roberts: Ms. Rose, I'm glad you brought up human trafficking. I recently did an undercover stint with police officers, pertaining to human trafficking. You're absolutely correct in stating that seniors are now being forced into human trafficking just to survive. Thank you for bringing that up.

Ms. Schoepflin, do you feel that the inflationary situation we are currently facing has a high impact on our seniors?

Bénédicte Schoepflin: Absolutely. It is leading people to cut down on food, and maybe they can skip their medicine. It is also leading people to enter living arrangements, perhaps in a shared setting that they would not have done otherwise. They may welcome somebody in to help them out, or they move into a different setting with other people, with roommates or new partners. This is a risk factor for people, because they might find themselves living with people who are taking advantage of them. Sometimes it starts off as helping or pretending to help, but then it devolves into abuse, control and further use of their financial resources.

Anna Roberts: Thank you for that response.

Ms. Estienne, one of the things I hear from the Liberal government is about all of these wonderful plans they have for seniors. If these plans are so wonderful, why are seniors still struggling on fixed incomes? What would you add to that?

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Loriane Estienne: I think there's going to have to be genuine alignment and a genuine understanding of these people's financial reality, especially in a context where they're filling a caregiving role that comes with a lot of invisible costs. I think this is an invitation to reflect and work in a complementary and genuinely co-operative way to define policies that adequately and truly address the realities of seniors and senior caregivers.

[*English*]

Anna Roberts: Ms. Rose commented that seniors now have to share their incomes. I hear this a lot. Seniors say that they're trying to help their children because of the lack of income and the high inflation situation we are faced with in Canada. You mentioned shared income. Are you hearing a lot of that?

Deborah Rose: Yes, we are. As someone mentioned, we're finding that they are moving more people into their homes, or they have family members who aren't able to feed their children, their grandchildren. They are giving away their income out of fear, which leads to more mistreatment of seniors.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much.

We're now moving on to Ms. Ménard for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to our experts for taking the time to prepare and be here this morning.

This study was put forward by our colleague Connie Cody, and it has really brought everybody together. MPs have shown a great deal of interest in this study, and it certainly shows that work is taking place across party lines on these important issues.

Ms. Schoepflin, I believe it was you who talked to us about the importance of working from data.

Even in this committee that's very solution-oriented, we sometimes hear that research funding is a misuse of public funds. Let me say at the outset that I disagree with that view.

What does data enable you to do? Is it the federal government's responsibility to support research?

Bénédicte Schoepflin: Basically, what counts is counted, I think, based on the expression, or what is counted counts. It works both ways.

In our experience, when we engage in discussions with the government, we're very often asked very specific questions about the data. We're asked what the percentages are for this and that, and when we can't give those percentages because they're unavailable, it's problematic.

It's a bit of a vicious circle. I think it's very important to have access to this disaggregated data, which enables us to understand, more or less, how those risk factors affect certain sections of the older population or how they manifest.

Right now, these people get discussed as if they were all the same, whereas seniors are human beings, all very different, with different life experiences and different prevention factors. To have tailored approaches that meet people's needs, then, we have to understand what those needs are and who we're addressing.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you very much.

Ms. Estienne, you proposed a very concise definition of caregiving, according to the Government of Quebec. We're here at the federal government. You may have highlighted the fact that Quebec's definition and Canada's don't match.

Given our role, it's certain that we're probably trying to come up with a definition that's consistent with all the provinces and territories, but I'm curious. Don't hold back.

What definition would you like to see at the federal level?

You talked about the need to adapt the definition.

Could you briefly shed some light on that?

Loriane Estienne: I think it will depend on the importance of having a common definition and a common understanding of what this role is and what its consequences are, in fact. I think it's really about aligning those things.

Now, I think that Canadians tend to associate this role of caregiver with the essential role of support staff, which is represented by paid professionals who provide care. In fact, what I wanted to do by introducing the Quebec definition was simply to represent the provision of unpaid and underpaid care. From the perspective of today's study, that's the point I wanted to make.

I also think there are federal and provincial benefits available for caregiving. In Canada, one in five people act as a caregiver, which has an impact on their lives. It's essential to perhaps draw inspiration from the Act to recognize and support caregivers, which was passed in Quebec. Work should be done together with experts who recognize this role on a daily basis.

However, I don't think there's a right or wrong definition, as long as we have a common language and recognize this reality and the impact it has on the people who play this essential role, which, I would point out, helps unclutter our health care system.

• (1200)

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you very much.

Ms. Rose, you have talked a lot about the devastating consequences of isolation for senior women.

Is there anything specific to senior indigenous women as a group?

What's unique to this group?

Do you see a potential solution that the federal government could target to close this gap a bit?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): You're on mute, ma'am.

Deborah Rose: Create an opportunity for gathering information, data and resources on the floor with cultural acceptance, not through a mainstream way of gathering information. It's more about creating opportunities for more conversations versus....

Actually, I lost the question because I was on mute.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much, ma'am.

[Translation]

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to go back to some of the things that were said.

In her first recommendation, Ms. Rose talked about income support for seniors. Ms. Schoepflin answered my question about the bill to increase seniors' pensions from age 65.

Ms. Estienne, I saw you nodding, so I'd like to know what you think about the potential impact of increasing incomes.

In Quebec, for example, there are a lot of seniors who live solely on fixed incomes, that is, on old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

There should be a law to increase the income of people aged 65, so that all seniors get the same amount and can earn a bit more money without having their guaranteed income supplement benefit reduced.

What would be the impact on their financial situation?

Loriane Estienne: I'll go back to the [Technical difficulty—Editor] that comes with this role.

I think it's absolutely necessary to take into account the impact of this role, given that one in five caregivers is age—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I sincerely apologize. We don't have interpretation.

Can you please try again? Why don't you try turning off your video and speaking?

Could you speak now?

[Translation]

Loriane Estienne: Nearly one in five caregivers are aged 65 or older. That means it's important to address the additional vulnera-

bility of the caregivers, which comes on top of the fact that their income is already too low.

As part of this discussion, it's essential to think about increasing, boosting their incomes. These people are living in poverty. If we add to that the fact that they're caregivers and that this role is likely to become more common because of the aging population, we'll end up with a segment of the population facing a huge social and financial crisis.

For that reason, caregivers have to be considered as a factor that worsens the impoverishment of people aged 65 and over. It's important to take into account the fact that caregiving is a social role that will become more prevalent in this segment of the population.

That has to be considered when it comes to conducting a review. The goal is to increase all the benefits available to people aged 65 and over.

Andréanne Larouche: I will conclude by talking about another aspect that has an impact on the situation of seniors.

Do financial institutions currently have enough tools to detect fraudulent transactions and to work on the issue of fraud targeting seniors?

• (1205)

Loriane Estienne: Unfortunately, I don't have an exact answer for you. However, I will undertake to do some research and share the results with you.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

This concludes our first hour.

I will suspend briefly as we let our Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Minister Fraser, settle in.

We are suspended for a minute.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I call this meeting back to order once again.

Thank you, folks. Welcome to the second part of our meeting today.

Again, you guys know the Zoom rules, etc. Please follow along. Please wait until I recognize you before speaking. All comments should be addressed through me.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, April 16, 2026, the committee will begin its study on the subject matter of Bill C-16, an act to amend certain acts in relation to criminal and correctional matters regarding child protection, gender-based violence, delays and other measures.

We have with us today the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Justice and Attorney General. We also have, from the Department of Justice, Owen Ripley, senior assistant deputy minister, policy sector; Matthew Taylor, senior general counsel and director general, criminal law policy section; and Nathalie Levman, senior counsel, criminal law policy section.

We will start with opening remarks.

Minister Fraser, I invite you to go ahead, please, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Thank you, everyone.

It's a great pleasure for me to be here to discuss the very important Bill C-16,

[*English*]

the protecting victims act.

Before I get too far into my remarks, let me say that it's an honour to be before this committee. When I was first elected, I spent about two and a half years as a member of the committee. I found it to be uniquely collaborative, and I contributed many recommendations, with multipartisan consensus, which have since become policy.

I know the work has continued, and I was pleased to see some of the work that this committee has done on gender-based violence, femicide and coercive control. I expect we'll have an opportunity to discuss each of those items in some detail today.

[*Translation*]

Before I begin, it's important for me to ensure that the committee understands the context of this bill.

It's partly a strategy to address public safety. It has three pillars.

First, we need to strengthen our criminal laws.

Second, we have to make sure that police officers and people working in the community are supported by the government's measures.

Finally, it's essential to make investments to prevent violence and crime.

• (1210)

[*English*]

There are three main pillars to the strategy, at risk of oversimplifying things.

The first is strengthening Canada's criminal laws, and this bill falls into that category.

The second and third pillars, though, are equally important, and without all three, the strategy will not be the success that I think we all wish it to be.

The second strategy, again, for those listening in English, is the need to support those on the front line, such as law enforcement and community organizations. In the context of this bill, it's impor-

tant to point out the many women's organizations that are providing services to those fleeing violence.

Finally, we need to make the upstream investments to help build healthier people and healthier communities. Those include affordable housing with a unique understanding of the needs of different people, including families who may be fleeing a violent household, as well as mental health and addictions, with programs that are aimed at prevention, particularly for at-risk youth.

This particular bill has many measures. I'll try to focus on some of those that may be of the greatest interest to this committee.

First, it tries to deal with different aspects of intimate-partner violence. You will have seen much coverage in the news around the construction of a new femicide offence. This would treat murders that are committed in a number of contexts as constructive first-degree murder charges, including hate-motivated murders, murders committed in the context of coercive control and murders committed in the context of the commission of a sexual offence.

You will also have seen significant coverage that followed a recommendation of this committee on the issue of coercive control. This is extremely important, because not only does it give the opportunity to punish crime after it has happened, but the offence has also been fashioned in a way, pursuant to expert advice, that may actually be preventative of violence. We have the opportunity to capture behaviour before it becomes violent and capture violence before it becomes fatal if we do this right.

In addition to these offences, you will see significant changes when it comes to the restoration of mandatory minimums for certain penalties following the Senneville decision at the Supreme Court of Canada, which has effectively vacated the mandatory minimums that existed for a particular offence. We want to restore them in a way that is constitutionally compliant.

You'll have seen as well that we're making changes to ensure that intimate images created by artificial intelligence, or deepfakes, without the consent of the person whose likeness is portrayed in the image would be treated on par with the circulation of intimate images that exist in the real world without a person's consent.

Other significant aspects of this bill are dedicated to protecting kids, including making changes to sextortion and a range of different offences.

In the interest of time, as I see I have one minute, I would be remiss if I didn't at least introduce the important issue that we're dealing with when it comes to delays in the court system, given how often they impact cases involving sexual violence.

These delays are leaving far too many people without justice, not because a person has defeated the charges at trial or been found not guilty by a court but because the clock has run out. When we're dealing with circumstances in which a victim of sexual crime may be living in the same community as the perpetrator and has a shadow hanging over them due to the termination of court proceedings as a result of delay, there is room for improvement.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for listening.

I look forward to continuing this conversation with you and answering your questions.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much, Minister. You were right on the dot timewise. I really appreciate that; thank you very much.

We'll start our first round of questions with six minutes for Mr. Brock.

Please go ahead.

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Minister, and welcome Mr. Ripley, Mr. Taylor and Ms. Levman. Thank you for attending today.

Minister, there are three areas I want to speak about: the Jordan decision, the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and mandatory minimums.

Minister, how can victims, especially women—who are disproportionately harmed by Jordan stays—be confident that they'll receive balanced, timely justice under the changes being made in Bill C-16, rather than having resources and personnel provided to rapidly support and address judicial delays?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thanks very much.

I think you'll need both for people to have confidence that the system is going to function. Of course, the resources you're referring to largely fall within the purview of provincial governments across Canada, which have authority when it comes to the administration of justice.

However, there are things that we can do and that we should do.

One is to address substantively the issue of delays by changing the process, including, for example, streamlining the process through which evidence is adduced in cases involving sexual violence.

When we seek to streamline the process, we'll have fewer cases that suffer from delays that will come up against the Jordan timeline, but we recognize it still may be possible, even with the streamlined process and more resources, that certain complex cases will still hit the timeline. In those circumstances, we're directing the

court to consider remedies other than a stay to ensure the courts will have the discretion to protect the interests of justice in ensuring that victims have the opportunity to see a case to completion.

I'm happy to dig into greater detail, if you wish.

• (1215)

Larry Brock: Okay. That's good. Thank you very much, Minister.

During the consultation phase of Bill C-16, was there ever any consideration or were any submissions made to the government to extend the guidelines, in light of the complexity of criminal litigation?

Hon. Sean Fraser: To extend which guidelines...?

Larry Brock: I mean to extend the period, such as 18 months to, let's say, 24 months, or 30 months to 42 months. Was there any consideration of that?

Hon. Sean Fraser: There has been some consideration, but most of it fell not within extending the lengthier timeline, because we're dealing with different timelines based on the complexity of cases, but to bringing more cases into a longer timeline, when the factors around complexity exist. You see it, typically, in sexual assault cases, drug cases or organized crime.

There will be other examples, but I see that you'd like to move to your next question, and I'm happy to take it.

Larry Brock: Yes, I would.

We've heard witnesses over the past several weeks, at this committee and, most definitely, at justice, emphasize the importance of supporting legislative changes with training, education, awareness and adequate resources to ensure that victims receive the wraparound services and support they deserve. Does Bill C-16 allocate to law enforcement and the justice system any new resources to address this aspect?

Hon. Sean Fraser: This bill implements criminal law reform. Those kinds of supports would not fall under a bill that amends the Criminal Code. That said, this was contemplated specifically, for example, in the context of coercive control. While working with the provinces, we identified a delay in the coming into effect.

There's a parallel conversation. I don't want to speak for Minister Valdez. We are advancing additional resources for some of these kinds of initiatives. The final projects will depend on budget decisions yet to be taken.

Larry Brock: Thank you.

This past Monday at justice committee, we heard testimony from the federal ombudsperson for victims of crime, Dr. Roebuck. He explained that, despite his office's providing detailed recommendations for inclusion in Bill C-16 to better protect victims of intimate partner violence and coercive control, many recommendations were ignored. Did you consult with Dr. Roebuck in drafting Bill C-16, yes or no?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes, extensively, and most of the measures that are included in the reforms came from the ombudsperson's office.

Larry Brock: Okay. Thank you.

Did you exclude any of the doctor's recommendations—specifically, any that would add enforceable rights for victims?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I expect some were recommended that are not in there, but we maintain an open channel of communication with the ombudsperson, and we look forward to continued engagement and changes, where appropriate.

Larry Brock: Okay.

He indicated that enforceable rights under the Victims Bill of Rights are not addressed in Bill C-16. Is there a reason they are not?

Hon. Sean Fraser: We wanted to establish best practices and clear expectations that a victim should have. Sometimes there are jurisdictional issues when it comes to the processes that are implemented by courts. However, making clear what is inside the Victims Bill of Rights as a baseline of expectations, with the ability to register complaints when the expectations are not met, is a good first step in this space. We can always do more to improve the experience for victims in the criminal justice process.

Larry Brock: Thank you, Minister.

What message does it send to women who have survived intimate partner violence and are looking to the courts for justice when they discover that their rights, while protected in theory, are not enforceable under law?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Let's take a step back and realize that the bill we are discussing and debating represents a series of changes that are generational in nature when it comes to taking more seriously threats made against women and violence committed against women in Canada. The message we're trying to send is that justice will be done. You will have an opportunity to have your case heard, to have it prosecuted to completion and to have justice served after an offence has been committed.

Larry Brock: Thank you, Minister.

I have time for one further question. Bill C-5, which became law in 2022, hollowed out Canada's justice system by striking down mandatory minimum punishments for 14 unique violent offences, including discharging a firearm and weapons trafficking. Why did you specifically exclude these offences for consideration in Bill C-16?

Hon. Sean Fraser: The changes that touch on mandatory minimums included in this bill were motivated by the Senneville decision. Very quickly after that decision, we reoriented portions of the bill that would specifically address this issue. Given that the theme

of this bill is, really, touching on gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, the mandatory minimums we sought to restore were the ones that had been struck down by the court, not those that had been removed through an act of Parliament.

• (1220)

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much.

We're moving to Mr. Chen for six minutes, please.

Go ahead.

Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister Fraser, Mr. Ripley, Ms. Levman and Mr. Taylor, for appearing before this committee today.

Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, last October the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the one-year mandatory minimum penalty for the offence of possession or access to child sexual abuse material. In response, you introduced Bill C-16 a few weeks later, restoring the minimum penalty and all others that had been invalidated by the courts. How does this bill ensure that these restored mandatory minimums will withstand judicial scrutiny and be enforced in practice?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thanks for the question, and this is an important one. I don't think it sat well with anyone that a serious crime could potentially not meet the punishment that parliamentarians have agreed would be appropriate, and we wanted to change that. We directly responded by taking guidance from the court—but not only the court. We adopted an approach that has been endorsed by members of different political parties, including the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party of Canada and, of course, now through the legislation, the Liberal Party. When there was a multi-partisan consensus that reflected the potential direction the court had shed a light on, we determined this was the best path forward. That includes giving some limited discretion to the courts when it would be grossly disproportionate to have the mandatory minimum carried out. Typically this would happen, in my view, in circumstances that were not likely envisioned by the drafters of the original mandatory minimum that has been struck down.

There are other ways you could do that. For example, you could ring-fence more tightly the definition of the underlying offence. However, when we discussed this with certain stakeholders, they indicated to us that this might change the interpretation that has emerged through a body of case law on important offences that is designed to protect the victims of crime—specifically, sexual crime. The path forward will reinstate mandatory minimum penalties, not only for the offence that you mentioned but also for a series of others that have previously been struck down, while reflecting a very limited amount of discretion in those circumstances in which the penalty would be “grossly disproportionate”.

Shaun Chen: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate your touching on the safety valve.

Why is it important that this bill move forward quickly to better protect children from sexual predators at this time?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I don't know that there could be a more obvious reason to move more quickly than this: Every day that there is delay in implementing a change, there's the potential for an innocent person to be harmed, for another child to be made a victim, for another person in intimate partner violence to be abused. There appears to me to be widespread support for the vast majority of this bill from different political parties. I expect that after a rigorous study, both in the House of Commons and the Senate, this bill will become law.

We have to ask ourselves this: Are we willing to jeopardize the safety and well-being of the people who would benefit from this bill when there are victims experiencing injustices in real time? There are court cases emerging in my home province, in Ontario and elsewhere—I expect the pattern will continue—around the use of AI deepfakes to create intimate images. There are judges specifically drawing attention to the fact that, because we have not yet implemented the change included in this bill, there is no basis upon which a person can be convicted for committing completely heinous behaviour, creating AI deepfakes of intimate images of a person without their consent.

These problems are happening every single day in our community. Kids are being exploited. Women are being killed. People are being abused. We have an opportunity to make a difference. I would suggest that it would be inappropriate to delay for any reason other than necessary improvements that should be made to the bill.

Shaun Chen: Minister, it sounds as though this approach of restoring mandatory minimums, with the addition of a safety valve, underscores the importance of maintaining a principled, evidence-based and multi-party approach to criminal law reform, particularly when it comes to measures designed to both protect the public and ensure compliance with the charter. As you have just outlined, there is an evolution in the types of crimes that are now occurring, including the proliferation of deepfakes. Could you speak to the challenges that are currently being faced in the system when it comes to addressing them?

• (1225)

Hon. Sean Fraser: Your question touches on a number of issues. I think we'll only have time, with the one-minute signal I'm being given, to deal with the last aspect of it.

Technology changes, and law too must change if we're going to offer protections that people expect and so richly deserve. I've given a summary on the issue of AI deepfakes and why we need to change more quickly. However, this is not the only place in which this bill or other initiatives across government are seeking to adopt laws to respond to modern threats. Look at some of the changes included in this bill with regard to criminal harassment since people have the ability to track another person using GPS on their phone. This is a threat that didn't exist with everyone in society a few years ago, but now it's pretty easy if you have your phone set up in a way

that shares a location with another person. We must have laws that reflect changing practices and emerging threats.

We have an entire bill, Bill C-22, designed to give access to digital evidence of crimes...that are being used for very serious offences, such as extortion, carjackings and home invasions, and for organized crime in planning large-scale criminal operations. Whether for AI deepfakes, criminal harassment or lawful access, it would be a disservice to Canadians if the Government of Canada didn't adopt laws to reflect the threats that reveal themselves as technology changes the world in which we live.

Shaun Chen: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

[*Translation*]

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, Minister, for being here today to answer our questions on Bill C-16.

I'd also like to mention that an open letter was published this morning on the issue of femicide. In fact, this letter was addressed mainly to the Government of Quebec, but we should remember that since there have now been nine femicides in Quebec, that's already more than all the femicides committed last year.

I'd still like to emphasize the fact that, even though this letter is more about a bill that I hope will be debated soon in Quebec City, the federal government should also go down this road with Bill C-16, which we're discussing today. In fact, Quebec is often a forerunner when it comes to violence against women. I'm thinking of the "Rebuilding Trust" report in particular.

What we want is for there to be "not one more".

Minister, if Bill C-16 isn't accompanied by a substantial tax transfer to the provinces for court funding, wouldn't that be a way to shift the political responsibility from the federal government to the provincial governments and the judges?

You know that the Criminal Code falls under federal jurisdiction and that the administration of justice falls under Quebec's jurisdiction. If there aren't any transfers to acknowledge that there will be consequences for the justice system in Quebec and the provinces, I find myself wondering the following question.

Isn't it your responsibility, at the federal level, to ensure that the means are provided?

Hon. Sean Fraser: First of all, regarding your comment on the issue of femicide, I want to emphasize that every femicide is a tragedy. Since the start of the year, it's shocking to see that there have been as many as nine femicides, and it's unfortunate that this problem persists.

Thank you, Ms. Larouche, for sharing your concerns on this matter. I haven't read the article you referred to, but I'll have a chance to do so this afternoon.

I personally believe it is essential to consider the proposals the provinces have made to me.

At the same time, when I make changes, it's necessary for the provinces to acknowledge them. They're also responsible for the administration of justice within their jurisdictions.

If there are challenges at the national level—such as issues with data, for example—the federal government can contribute by providing funding to move things forward on a given issue. However, when it comes to the administration of the courts, for example, that falls under provincial responsibility. The provinces aren't telling me they need a lot of funding to adopt regulations when changes need to be made.

We continue to discuss with the provinces to understand the appropriate role the federal government should play.

Andréanne Larouche: Yes, but I'll still point out that this is a good illustration of the fiscal imbalance. We pass laws here, but subsequently, the Government of Quebec is responsible for providing the necessary financial resources. That's why I was talking about substantial fiscal transfers to Quebec and the provinces.

Minister, in May 2024, your predecessor, Arif Virani, stated in the House of Commons that Bill C-392, which had been introduced by the Bloc Québécois, constituted an attack on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that the Liberal Party would always protect the rights enshrined in the charter. At the time, the Liberal government flat out rejected the use of the notwithstanding clause by other parties. However, Bill C-16 takes a different approach. It pursues the same objective: to limit procedural rulings.

Minister, in what way is your approach in Bill C-16 constitutionally more legitimate than the one your own predecessors condemned?

• (1230)

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm not aware of my predecessor's comment.

Does your question concern time limits?

Andréanne Larouche: Actually, if you had been listening, you'd know that what I was saying was that the Liberal government flat out rejected the use of the notwithstanding clause by other parties to—

Hon. Sean Fraser: All right. I understand your question now.

I'll answer in English to clarify the details.

[English]

First, I thought the use of the notwithstanding clause would be less appropriate in these circumstances, in terms of making a difference. One of the main reasons is that it is temporal in nature, so it

wouldn't permanently change the law. It would only allow a law to exist for a five-year period, after which it would be sunsetted.

The approach that we've taken—again, reflected with support from comments in public from members of different parties—creates an opportunity to permanently change the law and give Canadians confidence in the long term that they are going to have a constitutionally compliant law and that there would be a mandatory minimum penalty in place for heinous crimes, such as the one that was at issue in Senneville.

In my view, it was a better approach—before you even get into philosophies about the notwithstanding clause. As a matter of ordinary consideration, we would be best served by trying to operate within the constitutional framework and ensure that, wherever possible, we have rights. Where we're going to bump up against what would normally be permissible, we use the abilities provided in section 1 that allow us to establish reasonable limits on that right.

To use a notwithstanding clause would signal that our desire is to go beyond a reasonable limit. I think we should avoid that whenever we can.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: How much time do I have left?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): You have 20 seconds.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I will come back to the Jordan decision later, during my next turn, Minister.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much, Madame Larouche.

We'll move on to Ms. Roberts for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you for joining us today.

You made a comment earlier, and I hope I've written this down properly. You said that people are being killed and that we have a responsibility to protect our citizens. I would include women in there.

I want to quote something for you. Ninety-three per cent of human trafficking is against women, and 76% of intimate partner violence is against women. In 2024, we had a meeting to address the urgency of this issue. Cait Alexander was one of the witnesses, along with Megan Walker. Unfortunately, they were shut down by your government because it didn't want to address the issue.

It is important. I agree with you that we must protect women, so why do these numbers continue to escalate? Bill C-16 is not assisting in protecting women. How are we going to change that?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you for the question.

I would disagree with your characterization, respectfully, with regard to the bill's protection of women. Femicide, specifically—by definition—impacts women disproportionately. A coercive control law is being put in place because we have heard, through deep engagement, including the recommendations of the Mass Casualty Commission in my own province and the County of Renfrew inquest.... Different voices have been calling for these changes because of the disproportionate impact that violence against women has on Canadian women. You will see measures around criminal harassment, AI deepfakes, intimate images and sextortion, which all disproportionately impact women in Canada. This is why many of these pieces were put in place.

We don't want to communicate that this bill, and this bill alone, would solve all these problems. We know there needs to be a broader strategy that includes frontline support—community organizations supporting victims fleeing violence—and upstream investments in the long term to help build healthier communities.

This is part of a multipronged strategy, but it's all trying to solve the same problem.

• (1235)

Anna Roberts: I appreciate that, Minister. I'm sorry. As you know, we have limited time.

Please understand one thing: Women are still afraid after being sexually assaulted or abused through intimate partner violence. I've talked to many survivors. They feel the government is not doing enough to protect them. Seniors are being violated, as well, by individuals.

Why can't we incorporate into the bill a protection to ensure that individuals who violate women are held to account? There's not enough in this bill to ensure that individuals who commit these crimes would be kept behind bars and not let out on bail.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you.

There are two aspects of your question that I hope to address.

One is that both the spirit and letter of this bill would lead to stronger penalties and new offences that would incarcerate violent offenders who commit violence against women with greater regularity. A constructive first-degree murder charge for cases of femicide is a good example of how penalties would be enlarged. The establishment of a coercive control offence would capture a set of behaviours that are not currently criminal. The establishment of a new offence regarding AI deepfakes and intimate images without consent is something that courts are actively calling for.

Separate and apart from this bill, there are other initiatives across government, including the bail and sentencing reform act. The act would address a potential conviction for behaviour that is morally culpable and that would become criminal. It would also lead to additional challenges when it comes to people who've been charged, particularly violent repeat offenders who've been charged with violent offences against women.

I think we want to achieve the same thing, but I wouldn't give short shrift to measures included in the bill.

Anna Roberts: Can you explain to Cait Alexander, who has left this country because she still fears for her life, why she cannot come to Canada because of a situation this bill wouldn't protect her from? How do you explain it to an individual who was left for dead and whose parents had to come and rescue her? She is not comfortable coming back to Canada. This is a Canadian citizen. Do you feel this bill would eventually protect these women?

I don't know. You tell me.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I think this bill, upon obtaining royal assent, would have a meaningful impact on the way criminal justice responds to gender-based violence. Some measures—for example, coercive control—very deliberately have a delayed coming into force, to allow the system to catch up. Others, however, will have an immediate impact, and royal assent is the only thing getting in the way of having certain behaviours become criminal offences.

I'd point again to the comments coming from the bench with regard to AI deepfakes. There are some differences that will be felt immediately; others will be implemented over a period of time as systems catch up.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much, Ms. Roberts and Minister Fraser.

We are moving on to Ms. Nathan, please, for five minutes.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, thank you to the minister and everybody else who's here today.

I will start my questions with mandatory minimums and safety valves. The introduction of a safety valve is framed as a constitutional solution to mandatory minimum penalties. What evidence gave the government confidence that this model will withstand future charter challenges?

Hon. Sean Fraser: There's guidance that has been provided by the court itself and some of the decisions as to how a government could go about adopting legislation that would more clearly frame the scope of a mandatory minimum, which would protect its constitutionality. We believe that, in addition to receiving that guidance and significant volumes of public and academic commentary on the issue, there is a path to protecting mandatory minimums. As a government, we support the establishment and restoration of the mandatory minimums that had previously been struck down by the court.

I took great comfort, when we were determining the best path forward, from public comments that different parliamentarians from different parties made on the record. This includes comments from parliamentarians who have a deep appreciation of and history with the justice file in their careers, both before politics and during their time as members of Parliament.

I would cite Mr. Caputo for repeatedly advocating for members of all parties—his own, the Liberal government and the NDP—to adopt a safety valve to protect the constitutionality of mandatory minimums. Mr. Fortin with the Bloc has made similar proposals and comments before.

When we have a multipartisan consensus that seems to be emerging—or at least, seemed at the time to be emerging—I thought it was an appropriate course not only as a matter of law that would protect constitutionality but also as a matter of multipartisan collaboration that could potentially lead to a change that would have the necessary support to become law. Even if the numbers are there, I always think it's a good idea, when possible, to have the broadest base of support.

From my perspective, the combined political support through public statements issued in the past, guidance from the court and commentary on the issue of mandatory minimums would protect some residual discretion in the court, but only for those circumstances in which the mandatory minimum would be grossly disproportionate. That would typically arise, in my view, in circumstances that were not likely imagined by the drafters of the legislation at the time of its initial adoption.

• (1240)

Juanita Nathan: Thank you for that answer.

How will courts be guided in determining what constitutes cruel and unusual punishment in practice? Is there a risk of uneven application across cases?

Hon. Sean Fraser: The answer to your question is the Constitution. There is a document that binds governments in courts and provides a very clear outline on the rights and freedoms that all Canadians are owed. I'm very grateful for the fact that Canada, as a country, respects the independence of its institutions and upholds the rule of law.

There is always the possibility, when you have judges from disparate backgrounds, different regions or different linguistic or legal cultures that you may have people reasonably disagree on the interpretation of a provision in the Constitution at any given instance, but this has always been the case, and it will always be the case. At the very core, knowing that they're all drawing their inspiration

from the Constitution and the jurisprudence with which the provisions therein are interpreted gives me faith that Canada is better equipped than most countries in the world to understand the nuances of these challenges, to ensure that we protect rights and advance public safety in Canada at the same time.

Juanita Nathan: Thank you.

I want to talk a bit about court delays and system capacity.

Bill C-16 is in part responsible for the decision of *R v. Jordan*. How confident are you that these reforms will meaningfully reduce delays, rather than shifting pressure elsewhere in the system?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm confident that it's going to have an impact, but I don't want to minimize the impact this problem is having on real people. There has been coverage suggesting that nearly 10,000 cases have been thrown out for delay in this country.

When you talk to people who have been impacted by the cases, they are survivors of sexual violence. They are people who are impacted in communities with sophisticated organized crime taking place. All crime is serious, but these are not simple charges of shoplifting that are being dismissed for delays. They are violations of people's bodily integrity, and it's incumbent upon the government to reflect the seriousness of the impact on victims in the laws that we adopt.

I have faith that it's going to have an impact, because we're changing the procedure in areas that we know are sucking up a lot of court time, but we're also giving clearer guidance to the courts to extend the timeline for cases that are more complex and directing courts to consider remedies other than a stay.

Put yourself in the shoes of a victim who has to get up every morning in their community knowing that the perpetrator of sexual violence committed against them lives down the street. This doesn't feel like justice to me.

We have an opportunity to say that having the time run out is no longer going to allow you to live freely in your community. If the charges are not proven, it is a separate matter, but in circumstances in which the prosecution has not been brought to termination at the end of a trial, it does not feel like justice to have a perpetrator living down the street with impunity when the victim lives next door.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much.

We're moving on to Madame Larouche for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Incidentally, Cait Alexander, who has already appeared before the committee and whom Ms. Roberts mentioned, supported Bill C-392, which was proposed by the Bloc Québécois and aims to provide a framework for the *Jordan* decision. The bill was introduced by my colleague in the previous legislature, Denis Trudel.

That's exactly what I'd like to return to. Groups have testified on this matter before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. They argued that the provisions of Bill C-16 relating to the Jordan decision run counter to nearly 40 years of Supreme Court jurisprudence holding that a stay of proceedings is the consequence of an unconstitutional delay.

Are you claiming that this substitution of the remedy is justified under section 1?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I didn't hear the question.

• (1245)

Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, can we suspend the meeting? It's not acceptable that the interpretation of my intervention can't be heard.

Hon. Sean Fraser: If I need to stay five more minutes, that's fine.

Andréanne Larouche: May I repeat my question?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: May I repeat my question, Madam Chair?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Go ahead.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Groups have testified before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. They argue that the provisions of Bill C-16 pertaining to the Jordan decision run counter to nearly 40 years of Supreme Court jurisprudence holding that a stay of proceedings is the consequence of an unconstitutional delay.

Are you claiming that this substitution of the remedy is justified under section 1?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: We have the opportunity to advance changes that exist within the Jordan framework but will result in fewer cases being thrown out.

From my perspective, I think we've done this in the right way, a way that respects the jurisprudence of the court but that nevertheless will generate different outcomes. I can't accept that we will see 10,000 more cases potentially being thrown out without having the opportunity for the cases, in serious crimes, to be brought to their natural conclusion.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I'd like to ask a second question to conclude my turn.

Paragraph 11(b) of the charter, which you claim to defend, protects both the accused's freedom and the integrity of the trial. If a court finds that a delay is unreasonable under the Constitution, but is ordered to seek an alternative remedy rather than dismissing the case, how can that be consistent with the Constitution Act, 1982?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes, I think there are a number of different ways, and the manner in which something would comply will depend heavily on the facts of an individual case, as I'm sure you could appreciate.

My view is this: We're not saying that, at the end of this trial, the person must be convicted. We're saying first that we're going to address the challenge of delays by looking at the process that courts put in place. Streamlining the evidentiary process in cases of sexual assault is one way in which we're going to shrink those timelines.

In addition, clarifying what's going to be treated as complex within the Jordan framework is going to allow for more certainty that complex cases will be done within the time.

Finally, when we do have a smaller number of cases that will bump up against the timeline, we're not saying that you have to convict the person. We're saying that you have to look at alternative remedies. My view is that it is a better approach than the law as it currently exists has, and it will result in cases being prosecuted more quickly. This reflects your concern of expeditious access to justice for the system, the victim and the accused, along with respect for the ability of the court to offer a decision on the merits at the end of the trial process.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much.

Madame Larouche, just so you know, I gave you almost an extra minute there to compensate for the time.

We're moving on to Ms. Cody, please, for five minutes.

Connie Cody: Thank you, Minister, for coming to committee today.

We've heard from many witnesses during our current study who say that senior women are particularly vulnerable to coercion, control, exploitation and even human trafficking. Often they're subject to this abuse from family members, caregivers or other external parties—not intimate partners. In fact, the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council testified that, in its data, 55% of elder abuse is committed by family members, compared to 24% by intimate partners. However, clause 28 of Bill C-16 defines coercive control as specific to intimate partner relationships, and it excludes other family and caregivers. This means the majority of elder abuse cases fall outside the scope of this legislation.

As elder abuse is on the rise, do you believe that the definition of coercive control should be expanded to include other family and caregivers? If not, could you explain why?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you for the question. I think it is an important one.

I fully accept the problem as you articulated it, which is that seniors are facing the challenges that you've laid out.

I have some reservations about sticking the same issue in respect of seniors or elder abuse in the context of a bill that was designed around the concept of intimate partner violence. There are a few reasons for this. This is not to say we should never do it; it's to say that I believe there's work that needs to be done first.

We developed the proposed policy in the context of intimate partner violence, and I don't know that the system can be copied and pasted into a different context. We heard from experts during the development that the behaviours are predictive of future violence in the context of an intimate partner violence relationship. I don't know with certainty that it will apply precisely the same way, and I would like the opportunity for such policy work to take place.

In addition, we put in a delay of coming into force to allow systems to accommodate. This is a best practice that emerged in other jurisdictions that have done it and are now moving on to see if they can implement similar changes to reflect the challenges in respect of seniors.

We're following international best practices. I would like an opportunity to do the policy work. We're acquiescing to requests by provincial justice systems to get ready for a major change such as this.

• (1250)

Connie Cody: Thank you, Minister.

Women are no longer feeling safe in their own homes. Just the other day, someone in my community of Cambridge was sexually abused by a stranger who entered her home in the middle of the night. People tell me that they don't feel heard, and they are asking why government places more emphasis on the rights of criminals than on the rights of innocent Canadians. Bail systems turn people out in a matter of hours, sentences feel more like a slap on the wrist than meaningful punishment and police resources are simply overwhelmed by repeat offenders who never face accountability. Over and over, these people tell me the government is out of touch with the reality of their daily lives.

Can you tell the committee how this bill would instill confidence in the survivors who feel that justice is not being served?

Hon. Sean Fraser: First of all, I'm very sorry that such an experience has impacted your community. Sadly, we've seen horrific acts of violence committed against women in every community in this country. Mine is no different. We need to do more to help give confidence to Canadians that the system is going to respond.

It's important to understand that there's no one criminal law we can change that will create confidence among Canadians that everything's going to be fixed overnight. This is part of a broader strategy that is going to deliver better public safety outcomes. This includes the largest strengthening of Canada's criminal laws in decades. It includes this bill but is not limited to this bill.

We are also making sure that there's additional support for the front line, whether it's 1,000 new RCMP, 1,000 new border officers or support for law enforcement in which they are given the authority they need to prevent crime. At the same time, we support community organizations that are helping victims directly. Finally, we

need to make upstream investments that are going to help build safer communities.

To give a few examples, this bill specifically has new offences around coercive control and intimate images, as well as new changes to the treatment of murders impacting women uniquely, with the changes around femicide. There are 80-plus changes in this bill, 80-plus more in the bail and sentencing reform act and new changes coming to deal with hate crimes. The plurality of bills advanced in this Parliament have been on public safety. It is a top priority.

Connie Cody: Minister, I'm sorry to interrupt. We are running out of time. I have one quick question, if I may.

How is AI changing the environment of perpetrators' ability to connect with potential victims? Is this addressed in the bill?

In your view, what responsibility should financial institutions and social media platforms have to flag or stop suspicious activity?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I have seconds remaining, according to the chair.

Very quickly, there is a specific change around the use of AI when it comes to intimate images. That is part of the path forward. There is a separate but related conversation we need to have about how content might be regulated, including when these images are put up. It's not just criminalizing the behaviour and prosecuting the perpetrator but also making sure that the victim has the potential to have images that have been put up without their consent removed.

This is a broader conversation taking place across government. I think it's a very useful time for parliamentarians in this committee and other committees to be considering what future threats these changes to technology may put before Canadian women and Canadian victims more broadly.

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much.

Last, but definitely not least, we have Ms. Ménard for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you for joining us today.

I have had the great honour of serving as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Women and Gender Equality for nearly a year now.

During the drafting of Bill C-16, you, as Minister of Justice, were committed to working closely with the Department for Women and Gender Equality.

Can you tell us why?

Hon. Sean Fraser: It's essential to recognize that there's no miracle solution.

This bill is very important. The new offences are very important. However, when we work with departments responsible for providing funding to support programs on the ground, we have an opportunity to have a greater impact on people. Just think of the opportunities this provides for those living in rural communities. Without federal funding for community organizations, it's simply not possible for victims to receive essential services.

We have opportunities to work across departments to ensure the delivery of programs and keep communities healthy. It's essential to understand the importance of building housing that meets the needs of families.

• (1255)

[*English*]

If we build one-bedroom apartments, housing starts may go up as a result, but if we don't have a three-bedroom apartment for a woman and her children fleeing violence, we have missed the mark.

[*Translation*]

When we work with other departments, we have the opportunity to provide greater support to victims of violence.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you.

For over a year, I've had the opportunity to speak with numerous community organizations working to prevent violence against women and also fighting to protect women's rights. There hasn't been a single conversation where the criminalization of coercive control wasn't praised.

That said, some concerns remain. We're hearing them right now in the public sphere. There are still doubts about the criminalization of coercive control and the possibility of conflating parental alienation with so-called normal family practices.

How can we reassure people that what has been put in place is indeed intended to curb criminal behaviour and not normal acts?

[*English*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Allow me to respond in English.

When you think of real stories, it becomes an emotional conversation.

I'm guessing that there's not a person sitting around this table who doesn't intimately know someone who's been impacted by gender-based violence. For some of us, it is a co-worker. For others, it is a family member. I grew up with people who have been killed by an intimate partner. I went to school with them and played with them when I was a kid.

Through extensive engagement with people who have dedicated their lives and careers to understanding this issue, we have learned that there are warning signs. We have the opportunity when we read those warning signs to prevent the relationships from becoming violent and to literally save the lives of women who may be killed by their intimate partners.

This is not about somebody asking their spouse, "How much money is in the bank account this month?" It is not about someone asking, "Are you going to be home in 20 minutes or 30 minutes?" when the kid's hungry and they need some help. This is about behaviour that would reasonably cause a person to fear for their physical and psychological safety. This is violence in the home, committed against children, against their significant other or against their pets. This is about sexual coercion taking place in the context of a relationship. This is hardly normalized behaviour that takes place in a family conversation. This is about conversations that we know, through rigorous study, are a predictor of violence that too often leads to death.

We have an opportunity to protect victims of crime, to protect women fleeing violence and to save the lives of innocent people in this country. If we don't take the opportunity sitting before us now, I know I will regret it for the rest of my life. I expect other parliamentarians would as well.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you so much for joining us, Minister. I'm extremely proud of this bill. I hope we'll be able to persuade all members of Parliament. We're taking a big step forward as a society.

Thank you, Minister.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Iqra Khalid): Thank you very much.

That concludes our questioning of you, Minister. Thank you so much for being here, and thank you to everybody who accompanied you today.

With that, our meeting is adjourned.

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