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# Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 038**

Thursday, May 7, 2026

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Chair: Dominique Vien





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• (1530)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 38 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

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

If you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For those on Zoom, please use the raise hand function.

A reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair. Thank you in advance for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee is commencing consideration of the main estimates 2026-27: votes 1 and 5 under the Department for Women and Gender Equality, referred to the committee on Thursday, February 26, 2026. The committee will vote on these motions at the end of the meeting.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Department for Women and Gender Equality, we have the Honourable Rechie Valdez, MP, Minister of Women and Gender Equality and secretary of state, small business and tourism; Ms. Frances McRae, deputy minister; and Ms. Gail Mitchell, assistant deputy minister, who will be with us for the second hour.

From the Department of Industry, I would like to welcome Mr. Etienne-René Massie, assistant deputy minister, small business, tourism and marketplace services.

The minister will be with us for the first part of today's meeting. The deputy minister and assistant deputy ministers will be with us for the full two hours.

Minister, you know the drill for our meetings. As you know, you will be given a maximum of five minutes for your remarks, after which we will proceed to a round of questions.

You have the floor, Minister.

[*English*]

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

Good morning, Madam Chair and honourable members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the invitation to be here today.

[*English*]

Before I begin, I want to share my profound devastation and heartbreak over the woman who lost her life in Gatineau this week, marking Quebec's 10th femicide this year.

[*Translation*]

These femicides are heartbreaking and a reminder of the gravity of this crisis.

[*English*]

It is a privilege to appear before this committee on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Just over a year ago, I had the honour of being appointed Minister of Women and Gender Equality. In this past year, I've had the opportunity to meet with women, girls, community leaders and frontline workers across this country. The experiences people have shared with me over the past year, their strength and their trust, have shaped my work and strengthened my voice in this role.

A year into this mandate, my purpose remains clear: to help build a Canada where safety, dignity and opportunity are real for every woman, girl and gender-diverse person, no matter their circumstance. I trust that this commitment is shared by everyone at this committee. I really want to thank the members of this committee, from all sides of the House, for the work you have done to advance gender equality and to elevate the voices of advocates, survivors and communities across this country.

[*Translation*]

Your work has helped ensure that these voices are reflected in the conversations we have and the policies we shape.

[English]

From your work to protect victims and survivors of coercive control to your report on the red dress alert for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls to your most recent efforts to move forward with Bill C-225, or Bailey's law, which will enhance legal protections for victims of gender-based violence, this committee has shown what is possible when collaboration comes before partisanship and when public service is guided by purpose.

[Translation]

We share a common goal: To build a Canada where everyone can live free from violence and free from fear.

[English]

That is why we owe it to every woman, girl and 2SLGBTQI+ community member in this country.

I am here today to speak about Women and Gender Equality Canada's 2026-27 main estimates and the values behind that work. The main estimates outline how our government will continue advancing safety, equality and opportunity. They sustain programs that prevent gender-based violence, support survivors and strengthen the systems people rely heavily on. Through these investments, WAGE can maintain community partnerships, respond to emerging priorities and deepen collaboration across governments and sectors.

Progress toward gender equality is advancing, but it's certainly not complete. The impacts of gender-based violence and systemic inequality remain uneven, falling hardest on those who have been historically underserved and overlooked. These realities demand action that is consistent, coordinated and backed by resources that last.

For 2026-27, Women and Gender Equality Canada will receive \$414.6 million, including \$345.6 million in grants and contributions. The resources they contain give life to the national action plan to end gender-based violence, allowing federal, provincial and territorial, and community partners to move forward with vision and action. This also includes funding from our most recent budget, which provides ongoing and stable funding to the sectors that have asked for it.

In parallel, through Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, we are advancing reforms to the Criminal Code that address femicide and coercive control, helping ensure that the justice system can intervene earlier and respond more effectively.

These approaches go hand in hand, through steady investment working alongside legislative progress and strong national leadership. At the heart of this work are local organizations on the front lines. They create safe spaces and offer hope. Whether supporting youth at risk of sexual exploitation, providing culturally safe spaces or strengthening supports for 2SLGBTQI+ communities, these organizations turn policy into protection and funding into real support.

• (1535)

[Translation]

For those seeking safety, these investments are not abstract. They are essential supports and services people rely on when they need them most.

[English]

The stability provided through these estimates ensures that organizations can continue that work with confidence, because safety is foundational. People cannot participate fully in their communities, workplaces or public life if they are not safe, and they cannot thrive without equal access to the tools and opportunities that allow them to succeed.

Looking ahead, the investments reflected in our budgets and the main estimates will continue that work. They will allow the department to support critical programs, provide meaningful support and deliver meaningful change.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. That brings us to the end of your opening remarks.

We're now ready to proceed with the round of questions.

Good afternoon, Mrs. Roberts.

**Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC):** Good afternoon, Madam Chair.

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

[English]

**Anna Roberts:** Thank you very much to the minister. I have a few questions for her. I know I have limited time, so I'll try to be quick.

Minister, in response to my letter outlining my concerns around human trafficking in this country and asking for you to provide an update on its status in Canada, you outlined programs and funding under the national strategy but failed to provide an update on the implementation of the 22 recommendations from the February 2024 committee report, "Act Now: Preventing Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People in Canada".

Can you tell this committee how many of these recommendations have been fully implemented to date? What is the timeline that you expect for their full implementation?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you for that question.

I just want to first acknowledge that human trafficking exploits the most vulnerable in our communities.

I thank the member for sending that letter. We have provided a response to the letter.

The Minister of Public Safety leads Canada's national strategy to combat human trafficking, which has funded an investment of \$57.22 million over five years, with \$10.28 million ongoing. From this, Women and Gender Equality received \$10 million to create the human trafficking initiative. This initiative funds organizations that will prevent human trafficking, and it supports victims and survivors, particularly—

**Anna Roberts:** I'm sorry, Minister. I have only a few minutes.

My question is, can you confirm whether all 22 recommendations from the status of women committee were implemented? If not, which recommendations will not be included? Could you just give me a number?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Madam Chair, again, through the work through this national plan, and in addition to the national action plan to end gender-based violence, the government is doing everything it possibly can to ensure that we are addressing human trafficking across the country.

I already responded to the member just the other day.

What I can share is a story, because both of us are in the province of Ontario, which has Victim Services of Durham Region. It seeks to improve how hospitals identify and respond to human trafficking. I do want to share the good news: It has worked to train over 300 health care professionals, has introduced trauma-informed tools and has embedded victim advocacy directly into hospital settings—

• (1540)

**Anna Roberts:** Excuse me for interrupting, Minister. I want to know the number out of 22. I'm obviously not going to get that response, so let's go on to the next question.

While the government is failing to stop these transactions, the lives of children, of women and girls, are being destroyed. Survivors and frontline organizations have told this committee they need action, not just announcements. IRCC detected human trafficking cases from 2019 to 2020. Nineteen large-scale investigations were conducted. Ten were conducted from 2020 to 2021 and from 2022 to 2023. The Global Coalition to Fight Financial Crime has reported proceeds of up to \$498 billion.

If incidents and court cases are increasing, how can this government evaluate whether the strategy is actually working?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** The government is doing everything it can through the human trafficking initiative. We're working very closely with the Minister of Public Safety through his national strategy to combat human trafficking. We are ensuring that we're doing everything we can, through our investments, to provide supports to organizations on the ground that are doing the work, in order to prevent human trafficking and to assist further.

With regard to the question, I provided the letter, but I'm happy to share that we're working directly with the Canada Border Services Agency, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and Public Services and Procurement Canada to ensure that we are supporting this and doing everything we can to prevent human trafficking in this country.

**Anna Roberts:** That's a lot of money. We're talking about \$500 billion U.S. I don't see any evidence of reducing that.

Let's go on to the next question.

I recently completed an undercover operation with York Regional Police. They are concerned about punishments for these criminals, which do not reflect the serious nature of the issue of human trafficking.

Given the low rates of guilty findings and the ongoing concern in law enforcement that current consequences are not acting as sufficient deterrents, does the government believe the existing sentencing framework for human trafficking offences is adequate, yes or no?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** A third of our legislation is focused on making sure we're keeping Canadians safe, whether it's our bail reform or the fact that we're hiring 1,000 CBSA officers and 1,000 RCMP officers. We're going to make sure we're keeping Canadians safe, and we're going to do that through our national strategy to combat human trafficking in this country.

**Anna Roberts:** What would you tell the police officers on the front lines who continually hear the stories of these human trafficking victims? The victims are afraid to come forward because we're not keeping the traffickers in jail; we're letting them out.

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I have two points, Madam Chair.

First, I want to thank our law enforcement agencies, particularly the Toronto and Peel police, who are doing the good work on the ground. We're going to give tools and resources to our law enforcement agencies, specifically through the legislation we put forward on bail reform, to make sure violent repeat offenders do not—

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** That wraps up your answer, Minister, for the first round with Mrs. Roberts.

Good afternoon, Ms. Ménard. You have the floor.

**Marie-Gabrielle Ménard (Hochelaga—Rosemont-Est, Lib.):** Good afternoon, Madam Chair. I feel as if I'm a bit far away. My apologies.

Minister, welcome. Thank you for joining us.

Ms. McRae and Mr. Massie, it's a pleasure to see you again.

Minister, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that this committee is doing a good job. You're quite right. As our new chair likes to put it, our group is a bit hyperactive, and we're quite proud of that.

On a more serious note, yesterday, we were devastated to hear about Quebec's alleged 10th femicide. However, the violent death of a young woman, the 30-year-old Shannon Jean Hickey, is not alleged. The young lady's identity was released today.

The committee recently heard from the Minister of Justice, your colleague the Honourable Sean Fraser, who told us about the government's strategy to fight against femicide, which is the most violent and fatal form of gender-based violence. He spoke to three pillars.

What would you tell us if we were to focus on the component under your department? Please be specific. I know that in your opening remarks, you spoke about programs, obviously. Can you give us a breakdown of the budget allocated to the fight against femicide?

• (1545)

[*English*]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, as I addressed in my opening earlier, it's really important to address the fact that, today, we heard heartbreaking news. This is completely unacceptable. Gender-based violence has no place in our country. I'm thinking about the women, the families and the loved ones who are deeply impacted, and my heart goes out to all of them.

Our response, in terms of the federal government, is one that is both urgent and practical. If we're referring to Quebec specifically, our agreement with Quebec has provided \$97.3 million to support organizations on the ground. They're helping survivors. They're strengthening frontline services and working to make sure we're doing everything we can to prevent violence before it happens. Through our national action plan to end gender-based violence, we're making sure that provinces and territories are allocating a minimum of 25% of all funding toward prevention.

As this committee knows—you've had the minister here already to speak about Bill C-16—and as we've heard from frontline organizations, it is critically important to make sure we're making femicide a first-degree offence.

This piece around criminalizing control is vitally important, because one of the precursors to violence in this country is coercive control, and coercive control can come in many forms. By putting forward Bill C-16, what women's organizations have asked for is to make sure our law enforcement has the tools and mechanisms to act on and to make sure we are providing interventions for coercive control when we can intervene in any respect. We are working through it with financial institutions on the financial side as well. When we act, we are able to stop these acts of violence and prevent gender-based violence in our country. I think this piece around Bill C-16 is incredibly important. Again, above and beyond that, it's really making sure that we're strengthening our criminal system.

The member—

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Gabrielle Ménard:** Thank you, Minister.

You have spoken about coercive control. On November 25 last year, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women tabled its report, along with recommendations, on criminalizing coercive control.

Are you telling us that our committee influenced the Department for Women and Gender Equality's development of Bill C-16 and contributed to the report to some extent?

[*English*]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Yes, absolutely. As I said in my opening, I really believe that the work of this committee, with all of the different reports you've provided, has fed into that. Because the Minister of Justice has had an opportunity to appear at this committee on multiple occasions, he's been able to take back that feedback and also to ensure that Bill C-16 is, again, strengthened and solidified. I really want to again thank the committee for that work.

Finally, I already mentioned the importance of making sure we're focused on prevention and on coercive control. We're also seeing a rise in artificial intelligence and deepfakes across the country. Bill C-16 also works to address that.

Then, the fourth piece with Bill C-16 is that we've heard from women about the challenges they have when they come into contact with the justice system. We know that they often get retraumatized from their experience, and Bill C-16 helps to protect victims and survivors but also addresses some of the court delays, which are some of the issues we've already heard about from advocates, time and time again.

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Gabrielle Ménard:** Since I'm appearing remotely, Madam Chair, I can't see you. Do I have a few seconds left?

**The Chair:** Great minds think alike. I was just going to let you know that you have a minute left.

**Marie-Gabrielle Ménard:** That's kind of you.

Thank you, Minister.

If you don't have time to respond now, please feel free to incorporate your answer into one of my colleague's questions. We're in the final stages of the report on the rise in anti-feminist ideology. During our discussions, some colleagues seemed to somehow think that we want to provoke men and women.

What is your perspective on prevention and on the inclusion of young men and boys in the fight against gender-based violence? As I understand it, the idea is not to blame anyone but rather to raise awareness about prevention among this cohort.

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds.

[*English*]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

As a mother of a son, I can say it's really important that we ensure that all of our solutions are grounded in the fact that we need to take care of our men and boys—

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

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

You might get another chance to continue.

It's your turn now, Ms. Larouche.

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

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today. Once again, I want to say that we're reeling from the shocking news of yet another femicide. One of the first victims of femicides this year was Véronique Champagne, and I want to recognize her loved ones. Her death occurred in the riding of Shefford, in Rougemont to be precise. I attended her vigil, which was organized by the Rougemont community.

We now have a 10th femicide. I would also like to extend my sincere condolences to Shannon Jean Hickey's family.

It's hard to understand the reason behind all of this violence. On November 25 last year, after tabling the report on the study that I recommended to this committee on the status of women, during which we spoke about coercive control—the idea came from a Quebec government report on rebuilding trust entitled “Rebâtir la confiance”—and heard that coercive control should be enshrined in the Criminal Code and that the federal government had to take action. The thing that shook me at the beginning of this year when I heard about Véronique Champagne's femicide was the reminder from one of her loved ones that femicides are highly preventable crimes. Unfortunately, we have failed to prevent them.

Minister, we can't undertake a multi-year campaign to end femicide with a 12-month grant. Several organizations have told us that.

Temporary project-related funding that women's rights organizations receive from Women and Gender Equality Canada is sorely inadequate in this day and age. In the course of our study, we've seen that retrogressive and extremist movements on the rise of masculinism are actively trying to reverse human rights, even as the wave of violence against women continues to claim an increasing number of victims, with rates of femicide on the rise in Quebec and throughout Canada. This comes on top of rising economic uncertainty and precarious employment driven by geopolitical instability, the trade war between the United States and Canada, and lack of operational funding for domestic organizations that advocate for women's rights, and this is imperiling women's rights and safety.

Are you committed to addressing this inequality and to providing funding to support the long-term mandates of these organizations?

[English]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Madam Chair, I thank my honourable colleague for that question.

We've had many conversations with regard to ending gender-based violence in this country. What I can share with this committee, and I alluded to it the last time I was here, is that our government is committed to making sure that, through Women and Gender Equality Canada, we're investing and doing everything we can to end gender-based violence. In the last budget, in November, you would have seen a commitment of \$660.5 million. This is absolutely essential. You need funding. Organizations have asked for this. When we talk about gender-based violence, \$223.4 million over five years is a significant investment. The piece that's really critical—it's the first time in history—is the \$44.7 million ongoing. This is tremendously important.

I do want to share, since the member is from Quebec, that I really appreciate that she attended that occasion to be able to commemorate the person we have lost. Regroupement des maisons pour

femmes victimes de violence conjugale, with the funding we've provided, have helped strengthen the socio-judicial system's ability to recognize, document and respond to coercive control for intimate partner violence. The tools they have delivered have helped 6,200 professionals, which is absolutely essential to making sure that frontline organizations have that support and do everything they can to end gender-based violence in this country.

[Translation]

**Andréanne Larouche:** The reality, Minister, is that many of the responsibilities connected to ending gender-based violence fall under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. In fact, there will be some compelling debate in the Quebec National Assembly on the “Gabie Renaud” bill. I hope Quebec will pass it. The government of Quebec, with its “Rebâtir la confiance” report and the “Gabie Renaud” bill, is therefore a trailblazer.

The issue now is that the justice system, shelters, police services, prosecutors, and rehabilitation and support programs for survivors are all under Quebec. The provinces, including Quebec, have said they don't have enough resources to address the scale of this crisis.

Obviously, Bill C-16 will provide additional measures under the Criminal Code, but thereafter, the administration of justice will fall under Quebec. That's a good example of fiscal imbalance, Minister.

Have you discussed that with your colleagues?

Does your government have any plans to increase transfers related to the justice system?

If not, I'm quite concerned the new measures that will be enshrined in the Criminal Code will leave Quebec and the provinces in a difficult position when it comes to implementation.

● (1555)

**The Chair:** Please give a brief answer in 40 seconds, Minister.

[English]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to go back to the idea the member opposite brought up with regard to the campaign on femicides. I think that's a great idea, and if the committee agrees it's what we want to do in this country, you can certainly put that forward.

With regard to the Quebec Assembly, I'm happy to work alongside Minister Biron. I congratulate her for taking on the portfolio again. I recently met with her, right before the election, and one of the federal supports we're ensuring we are providing funding for is the crisis lines. These are vital supports that Quebeckers need—

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

It's very frustrating, but I have to keep time.

Ms. Cody, you have the floor.

[English]

**Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for coming today.

Would you agree that homelessness among older adults, or seniors, has increased?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** What I can say is that our government is making sure that we recognize vulnerable Canadians—

**Connie Cody:** It was a simple question: Yes or no?

Federal homelessness reporting shows that unsheltered homelessness has increased 107%. Is 107% acceptable to you, Minister?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Madam Chair, what the member opposite would have seen in our spring economic update is that our commitment to making sure we're providing—

**Connie Cody:** Minister, that's not an answer. I asked you if a 107% increase in unsheltered homelessness is acceptable to you.

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** We recognize there is an increase in challenges that—

**Connie Cody:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Minister.

Here are some stats from your own home area. Shelter use has increased 44% from 2023 to 2024; shelters in your area are operating at 383% over capacity. The wait-list in Peel has more than doubled. Mississauga has publicly acknowledged rising homelessness as part of a growing housing affordability crisis.

According to your government data, one out of five people using shelters is over 50. Older adults have the highest rate of chronic homelessness in Canada. It's the fastest-growing homeless group.

Currently, 59% of Canadians now say they'll never retire.

Do these stats shock you, Minister?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** As I was saying earlier, the government is committed to building more homes more quickly. Specifically within the budget, the member would have seen \$1 billion—

**Connie Cody:** Minister, while you're reading pre-approved responses, Canadian women and seniors want and need answers to where they can live safely. Do you have an answer for them?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** If the member opposite would provide me with an opportunity, I'd be happy to give that answer.

What I was saying is that with our investments in housing, we have a commitment to doubling the rate of housing, specifically helping to make sure that those who are most vulnerable get access.

As for shelters, which are at the core of her questions, we have allocated \$1 billion to make sure that transitional and shelter homes qualify for that funding across the country.

**Connie Cody:** Minister, that's not answering my question. People are being forced out of home ownership. There aren't enough homes for them. Building houses in two years, three years, five years or 10 years won't help people with home ownership now. Many are becoming homeless.

I have an 84-year-old woman in my city who can no longer afford the high cost of living and had to go to a shelter. What would you say to this woman?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I would like to share with that senior that our government is committed to making sure that we're supporting seniors and that we are providing millions of seniors—

**Connie Cody:** What are her options now, Minister?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I'm happy to share those options.

With old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, the Canada pension plan and one of my favourite programs, the New Horizons for Seniors program, the government is there and committed to supporting seniors—

**Connie Cody:** Minister, is a shelter—

**Juanita Nathan (Pickering—Brooklin, Lib.):** Madam Chair, on a point of order, I would really like to hear the minister finish answering one of the questions. I would really like to hear her answers.

Thank you.

**Connie Cody:** She's not answering.

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I was saying that the government has raised old age security by 10% for seniors 75 years or older. If it were up to the Conservative Party of Canada, seniors would have to wait until the age of 67 to retire.

These supports we're providing, in addition to dental care across the country—

**Connie Cody:** Minister, I'm talking about shelters. Is a shelter a safe place for an 84-year-old woman today to live, if she can even get into one?

• (1600)

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, I've already answered that question. We have provided \$1 billion focused on housing across the country, transitional homes and affordable homes. Shelters and transitional homes qualify for that funding, and we are working directly with provinces and territories to make sure that vital housing needs across the country will be fulfilled.

**Connie Cody:** Minister, it's not enough, because things are not getting any better.

I have the reports right here, asking us about seniors, the poor and disabled, and why Canada is euthanizing the poor. Seniors are wanting MAID rather than losing their home and their dignity.

The CEO of the Mississauga Food Bank, Meghan Nicholls, has publicly said she has clients who are asking her how to apply for MAID because they can no longer live in poverty today.

What do you have to say to these people who fear homelessness more than death?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Seniors do deserve to live in dignity and to be able to afford the cost of living, which is why the government is ensuring, again, through the old age security—

**Connie Cody:** Minister, no Canadian should feel pushed toward MAID because of poverty or housing insecurity. What are you actually doing now, today, to prevent that from happening?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds, Minister.

[English]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, going back to what I've said, we're providing financial supports. We're ensuring that we're building more homes faster, particularly to address the issues around homelessness and the issues that the member opposite—

**Connie Cody:** Minister, Canadians need answers today on where they can live safely. Do you have an answer for them right now?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I'm happy to provide a list of resources for seniors.

[Translation]

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

Now, I understand that the time will be split between Ms. Gladu, Ms. Nguyen and Ms. Nathan.

Is that right?

[English]

**Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair. I will be splitting my time with Ms. Nguyen.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. You are right that this committee has done amazing work. I was just on the justice committee, watching us finish the clause-by-clause on Bill C-16. That was very rewarding.

I see that we have plans to do major building, and to build houses across the country. We'll need people in the trades to do that. We're really not tapping into enough women in the trades. Perhaps you could talk a bit about what you are doing to promote women in the trades.

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you for that question.

Again, I appreciate the member's statement with regard to supporting women and making sure we have more women in trades. As our government builds more homes, as our government does nation-building projects, we want to make sure that women have equal opportunity. Through the spring economic update, we've made significant new investments to strengthen our skilled trades.

We are launching team Canada strong. This is a \$6-billion national initiative. We plan to make sure that young Canadians have the chance to apply. We're investing \$2 billion to train young Canadians to make sure they can get access to that. Our goal is to ensure

that we hire 80,000 to 100,000 new Red Seal skilled trades workers, which of course will be inclusive of women.

I was out in Windsor not too long ago, making an announcement. I met this incredible organization that empowers young women to make sure they participate in the trades. We recognize that women face a lot of those barriers. We have organizations that are ready to do the good work to make sure we're empowering young Canadians. Again, through our spring economic update, \$2 billion will support paid and ready job placements that lead directly into registered apprenticeships. That will help reduce one of the biggest barriers into apprenticeships. For women, this absolutely matters so much.

I was recently with my daughter—I want to thank CAGIS, the organization out in the GTA that does great work in empowering young women and girls—and one of the exercises we got to do was virtually weld using artificial intelligence, which was really cool. It really creates opportunities for young girls to see themselves in trades, to see themselves being able to use tools and be hands-on, and to see that they can absolutely participate and help grow our economy.

**Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you.

I'll pass it to Ms. Nguyen.

**Chi Nguyen (Spadina—Harbourfront, Lib.):** Thanks, Madam Gladu, and thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks very much, Minister, for being here today. I'll try to keep this tight, because I know we're short on time.

I know how critical child care is to our economy. I think of it as an economy-enabling infrastructure. This is a priority for our government, and of course for your department, when we think about women's economic security.

Could you tell us how your department is working on supporting women through entrepreneurship, etc., and helping women enter and remain in the workforce? We have great child care in my riding in particular. We have great multiservice agencies delivering this work, from St. Stephen's Community House to WoodGreen Community Services. We have great examples of how we can support women on that side, but I'd love to hear more.

• (1605)

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Thanks to our government's commitment through the national early learning and child care program, we have child care as low as \$10 a day. We've heard time and time again from women's organizations that this support is vitally needed. Women who want to start a business or want to pursue their career can now get access to that because of affordable child care. In terms of savings, we're looking at \$6,200 per year that an average family can save because of the national early learning and child care program. This absolutely matters. It creates an environment in which Canadians can participate fully.

With regard to the entrepreneurs that the member was asking about, through our women entrepreneurship strategy we've already supported 500,000 women across the country to start, scale and grow their businesses. I've met many who continue to inspire me every day.

Again, we'll continue to do everything we can to make sure that women in this country, through Women and Gender Equality, through our women's program and through leadership opportunities, can contribute and grow. I have a daughter. She's 11 years old. It's just amazing to see all the opportunities she now has thanks to our government's commitments to gender equality.

**Chi Nguyen:** In my last 30 seconds, can you share a data point on women's economic security that you think is proof that we are doing well in this space?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** The member was with me when I made an important announcement not too long ago. We recently funded the Canadian Women's Foundation with \$15.5 million. Through their hard work, they are ensuring that this money goes out to the organizations on the ground that are doing all the good work to end gender inequality.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you for your answers, but I have to turn the floor over to Ms. Larouche.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Chair, I have two and a half minutes, right?

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

**Andréanne Larouche:** Minister, I want to follow up on a question on senior women from one of my colleagues. I believe it was raised by Ms. Cody. The committee is currently considering a study dedicated to the status of senior women.

We're not happy about what we're hearing, Minister. You spoke about a 10% raise for women aged 75 or older, but the problem, which is also what we're hearing from witnesses, is that poverty doesn't wait until the age of 75. Many witnesses have reminded us that financial insecurity traps many senior women in violent and coercively controlling situations. However, women aged 65 to 74 are still locked out of the rise in old age security pension granted to seniors aged 75 and above.

Has your government, and you, Minister, had any talks with your colleague responsible for seniors?

Do you acknowledge that this imbalance primarily puts senior women in a precarious position?

Are you committed to increasing the old age security pension for women aged 65 and above to give them meaningful financial security and more autonomy?

[*English*]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I was speaking in regard to senior women earlier and what our government is doing. Again, we've raised old age security by 10% for seniors 75 and older.

We also recognize that seniors are very vulnerable to financial fraud and abuse. The government believes this is completely unacceptable. The Minister of Finance recently launched an anti-fraud strategy to protect seniors, prevent scams before they happen and go after those who seek to take advantage of them. We're also moving forward, with financial institutions, on establishing an economic abuse code of conduct, so that institutions can better intervene when instances of scams and economic abuse occur. That certainly helps women who are over the age of 75.

One of the organizations I am proud of, in terms of their work, is the Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. They've addressed gaps in gender-based violence responses for women aged 55 and older. Through those investments into this organization, they have developed trauma- and violence-informed tools and guidance tailored to older survivors, which the member was asking about. This includes a self-assessment tool for service providers. It directly helps those who are fleeing difficult situations.

What I do appreciate—

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. That wraps up your answer for this round of questions from Ms. Larouche.

Mrs. Goodridge, you have the floor.

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

[*English*]

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I know you're a mom, so you understand very well how expensive it is to raise a child in today's space. Does the ever-rising cost of baby formula concern you at all?

• (1610)

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** To answer the member's question, we recognize the challenges that women and mothers are facing with regard to the cost of living in this country. That's why we're doing everything we can to make sure we're tackling the issue of affordability.

**Laila Goodridge:** Do you know how much the price of baby formula has gone up in just the last two years?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** The government is doing everything it can. It's not—

**Laila Goodridge:** It's gone up 30% in just the last two years.

Do you know how much it's gone up in the last eight years?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** The government is making sure that it's helping make life more affordable for Canadians, specifically for—

**Laila Goodridge:** The answer is 84%.

These are real numbers. This is real space. Families are struggling to make ends meet, and your government being focused on something at some point doesn't help the parents who are currently struggling. In Mississauga, the town that you represent, just last year a group was stealing baby formula to trade for drugs. If that's not a sign that this is an out-of-control problem, I don't know what else is.

What specific things has your government done to bring down the cost of baby formula?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** A month from now, Canadians will have access to the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. We recognize the rising cost that is happening. This is going to provide an average family of four—

**Laila Goodridge:** That does nothing for the cost of baby formula. It's a band-aid. It will help families after the fact.

The reality is that I have been bringing up this issue about the rising cost of baby formula for years in Parliament. It's not like this is some surprise. You've answered questions that I've asked in question period on this. Has there been anything, one iota of an ounce of anything, that your government has done to bring down the specific cost of baby formula, yes or no?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, which is going out to Canada, is going to help curb the cost. This is in addition to the fact that we're lowering costs at the pumps. We're also providing—

**Laila Goodridge:** Okay. I'm curious. How will it curb the cost of baby formula if you're providing families with a cheque after the fact? How does that actually lower the cost of baby formula on the shelf?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** With regard to supply chains, again, we're working with the Minister of Agriculture to make sure from a supply chain perspective that we're doing everything we can to promote competition in this country—

**Laila Goodridge:** There is no competition. The reality is—

**Chi Nguyen:** I have a point of order. I just want to make sure the interpreters are able to do the interpretation.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Indeed. Please refrain from talking over each other. It makes it difficult for our interpreters to do their work.

[English]

**Laila Goodridge:** All right. Clearly, the government has done nothing on baby formula. I'm going to skip to the next piece.

Violence against women is extremely concerning. What specific actions has your government taken in the last six months to address

the growing concern of women being killed by their intimate partners?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, through our significant historic investments, through Women and Gender Equality we have addressed gender-based violence in working directly with provinces and territories through our government's commitment of \$225 million. What this has done for the provinces and territories is that it has allowed them to put forward \$1.3 billion.

In terms of direct impact, 46% of our actions were related to prevention. A million people across Canada were able to access services: counselling, housing, legal information, crisis supports and community-based programs—

**Laila Goodridge:** Minister, there's been a 76% increase in sexual assaults under Liberal governments in the last decade. I don't think spending tons of money on this has necessarily worked, because all we see is more women dying, like we saw just yesterday in Gatineau. This is a serious concern. What is the government doing today to make this better?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, as I said earlier, not only is it important for us to make investments, which the sector has asked for, but we're making sure that we're addressing prevention, which I've already answered on as well.

**Laila Goodridge:** All right. Then—

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** We're also addressing this through legislation, which is important, like making femicide a first-degree offence.

**Laila Goodridge:** There are 231 calls for justice from the missing and murdered indigenous women's group. Really quickly, how many have been completed?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I'm working very closely with the minister on this effort with regard to the missing and murdered—

**Laila Goodridge:** Do you know how many have been completed, yes or no?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** We're doing everything we can. We recognize, given that it was Red Dress Day—

**Laila Goodridge:** Two have been completed.

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** —earlier this week—

**Laila Goodridge:** Two have been completed and 82 haven't even been started. This is a fail.

• (1615)

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** It was Red Dress Day earlier this week—

[Translation]

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

I'm quite flexible in allowing discussions, but we need to make sure that members of the committee and our guests don't talk over each other because that's dreadful for the interpreters. I think that everyone, on all sides, can make some concessions to ensure interventions are communicated clearly.

Mr. Chen, you have the floor.

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

[*English*]

This committee recently undertook a study regarding anti-feminist ideology, which highlighted how online influencers in the manosphere are pushing anti-feminist and misogynistic rhetoric on to young men and boys in particular. From there, dehumanizing women and girls becomes normalized, which in turn allows for acts of gender-based violence to take place.

What work are you undertaking, Minister, to engage young men and boys in particular, who are crucial in the solution?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Through Women and Gender Equality, we absolutely need to make sure that we're engaging with men and boys, and the reality is that every single one of us has an important role to play to make sure we're doing everything we can to end gender-based violence in this country. Some of the work we do includes funding projects that help to engage with men and boys in a healthy way to make sure we can address gender-based violence.

I recently returned from Vancouver, where I met Black Buildup. We provided \$669 million to this organization. I'm really proud to say that they teach young athletes through sport to make sure that they respect, that they provide consent, that they have bystander intervention to prevent gender-based violence. It's truly investments like these that help to build a healthier culture, where respect is the norm, which is what we want, where harmful behaviours are challenged and prevented, and where everyone understands their role in preventing gender-based violence.

I do want to take a moment to thank Minister Michel for her work in recently launching a men and boys strategy on mental health. We recognize that this has been an ask. Men and boys need help, but they also need supports. For anyone who is listening to this committee, I urge you to go to the website of the Minister of Health to put forward your recommendations to make sure that men and boys get the mental health support they truly deserve.

**Shaun Chen:** Thank you, Minister.

Speaking of investment, I know that constituents in my riding and, indeed, Canadians across the country want to understand how federal investments are being delivered, particularly when it comes to advancing gender equality and supporting those who face violence.

Can you break down where the funding in last year's budget is going, including how investments are allocated across key areas such as gender-based violence prevention, housing supports, economic empowerment programs and community-based services?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** What I was sharing earlier with the committee is that our investments to end gender-based violence are through our national action plan to end gender-based violence. We

put forth \$539 million that we committed in budget 2022. We're three years into that plan. Through our investments already of \$225 million... I was sharing earlier that \$1.3 billion is what the provinces and territories have been able to put forward. It's incredible what this has done. We're talking about 27,400 prevention resources that have been accessed, whether that's counselling, housing—which the member was asking about—legal information or crisis supports, which are vitally important.

The member is from Scarborough North, and I just want to share a positive story of just how many families in the member's riding really rely on these types of supports. Through a women's program, we invested \$280,000 into the Homeward Family Shelter in Scarborough North to help strengthen its work and make sure that women and families can continue getting the support they need close to home. The impact of that support is very real for women on the ground in Scarborough. It helps women facing crisis and instability to access housing, connect with community-based supports or get help navigating through the barriers that often stand in the way of the type of stability that women need, whether that's income security, employment or child care—the list goes on—so I give a shout-out to the Homeward Family Shelter in Scarborough North for their good work.

**Shaun Chen:** Thank you, Minister.

Indeed, Homeward Family Shelter, also known as Juliette's Place, is an incredible organization. I thank you for sharing news of that important investment.

Minister, you mentioned Red Dress Day, which was this past Tuesday. It's a day of awareness and action honouring missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. As you know, indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people continue to face disproportionately high rates of violence. This is part of the colonial realities that Canada continues to confront.

Can you speak to the actions your government is taking to help end this violence?

● (1620)

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, our hearts go out to indigenous families, especially as they are grieving. We want to make sure that we're doing everything we can to help indigenous women and—

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, that wraps up your answer, Minister. Every now and then, I have the unenviable task of having to cut you off.

Mrs. Roberts, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Anna Roberts:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to go back to the minister about a question that was asked earlier.

The affordability crisis in this country has unfortunately caused a lot of individuals, especially seniors, to have to go to shelters. You talked about building homes quickly. Why is it then that the wait time for affordable housing is eight to 10 years for anyone waiting? How quickly are you going to speak to that project to ensure that seniors are not waiting that long and living on the streets?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** As I said earlier, how we're planning to address this is through our significant investments in housing. Again, we've committed \$1 billion, and we're ensuring that, through that \$1 billion—

**Anna Roberts:** I don't mean to cut you off, and I apologize for that, but I have limited time.

I apologize, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to know what the anticipated wait time is. Is it going to go from eight to 10 years to maybe 15 years, or are you going to be able to ensure that women, especially seniors, have the opportunity to find housing this year?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, our significant investments in housing are going to significantly help with the challenges we face with regard to homelessness. That includes senior women across the country. We're doing everything we can. We're working with provinces and territories to make sure we get those agreements settled, so that we can get the funding out the door to make sure we're building more shelters—

**Anna Roberts:** Thank you very much for that response. I don't think that's what the seniors are looking for.

I'm going to go back to the femicide in Quebec. A 56-year-old man received a nine-year sentence after stabbing his wife. He will probably serve only six years. One of the things that women are asking us.... I've seen, especially when we did our tour across this country in 2024, from the east coast to the west coast and back, is that people are afraid to come out and speak to the police. People are afraid to come out and testify, because they know that their perpetrators will get out on bail and that their life could be on the line.

Why is it that they are not serving the rightful sentence of 25 years for committing murder?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** The member had a couple of questions, and I want to be able to address each of them.

In terms of the first part with regard to the gender-based violence and crime, through Bill C-16, again, we are going to make sure we're able to address that by making femicide a first-degree offence, making sure we're criminalizing coercive control, and through our bail reform, making sure that violent repeat offenders do not go back out on the streets.

On the other part of her question, with regard to reporting, we recognize that there have been challenges with reporting gender-based violence, but thanks to the resources that we are providing, more women are coming forward to make sure they can have their voice heard. That has also helped, as you're seeing an increase in reporting. Again, this is a way for us to make sure that we're track-

ing our progress and making good progress with regard to ending gender-based violence in this country.

**Anna Roberts:** Excuse me. I have limited time.

Why, then, did this man who committed murder not get 25 years to life?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** To make sure that we're addressing gender-based violence, we've put forward significant legislation. I do hope the member—

**Anna Roberts:** Obviously, those significant violations aren't helping people, because women are being killed. Today and yesterday, 76% IPV is happening. It's been almost 11 years that the Liberal government has been in place, yet we are seeing these numbers increase over and over again.

Why is it that this gentleman...? Just give a simple yes or no answer. Do you agree that he should have had a 25-year sentence?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Again, we're doing everything we can to address gender-based violence legislation.

**Anna Roberts:** That's not the question I asked.

I asked, do you agree that he should have had a 25-year sentence? Yes or no?

• (1625)

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I don't think anyone in this committee will ever agree.... We all want to make sure that gender-based violence ends in this country. I have already talked about legislation. I already talked about the important work that the government is doing to make sure there are organizations on the ground to support them. I referred to our investments in crisis lines so that victims and survivors have places to go.

**Anna Roberts:** Excuse me, Minister. Those lines aren't working. I just got off the phone with someone who's very upset, who has just been violated by her husband. He's out on bail two hours after being arrested. You know what? People listening at home are scared. They're worried.

This man should have received a 25-year sentence. People should not be let out on bail after beating someone or killing someone. The 25-year sentence should be there for that gentleman.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Roberts. That concludes your time.

Ms. Nathan, you have the floor.

[English]

**Juanita Nathan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, through the main estimates, the women's program continues to provide important funding to community organizations across Canada, including in regions like Pickering—Brooklin, where local groups are working to remove barriers and strengthen opportunities for women and families.

Can you share how these investments are empowering organizations in Pickering—Brooklin and helping deliver measurable outcomes for women and gender-diverse people?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Yes, 100%.

Again, through our significant investments.... I've addressed gender-based violence quite a lot in this committee. To the member's question, we're really empowering women. We're giving them opportunities through the women's program and helping the organizations on the ground make sure that they are, in every respect, getting opportunities to see themselves in leadership positions.

In fact, our government put forward pay equity legislation to make sure that women can also get paid equally for the work they are doing. With regard to our women entrepreneurship strategy, I cannot tell you and stress enough in this committee how much of an impact this has made, as a former entrepreneur myself. We have already supported over 500,000 women across the country, and the good news is that our SME growth since we kicked off the strategy has increased from 17.8% back in 2023, to 20.9% just last year alone. This is significant. Again, it's amazing the impact we're seeing.

Investments are needed. We're going to make sure that the investments are going to the right places. We certainly need to continue to empower women in every which way we can.

**Juanita Nathan:** Thank you.

In February, in the riding of Pickering—Brooklin, we hosted the inaugural Black entrepreneurs forum, bringing together black business owners and community members for a very important conversation about opportunities, barriers and the road ahead.

Minister Valdez, thank you again for joining us as a panellist. Your presence meant a great deal to the community.

At the forum, three themes came through clearly: the challenges of finding the right information on available funding and programs, the power of mentorship and community collaboration in building a strong entrepreneurship ecosystem, and the importance of investing in Black youth as the next generation of business leaders.

With programs that can support SMEs—like the business benefits finder, which offers eligible businesses up to \$50,000 to expand into international markets—already in place, can you speak to how the national Black entrepreneurship strategy is translating these themes into concrete outcomes? What more can be done to ensure that Black entrepreneurs in the community, like ours, have equitable access to the full suite of supports available to them?

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** I really want to thank the member for hosting an incredible Black History Month event in her riding. I got an opportunity to meet the incredible entrepreneurs from that region.

I can share that, through our Black entrepreneurship program, we have supported well over 24,000 Black entrepreneurs across the country. Through our Black entrepreneurship loan fund, we've approved more than \$70 million in financing to over 800 loans to date. This has made a significant impact. We recognize that Black entrepreneurs have challenges and barriers to accessing that type of support.

I know the member does not know this, but I have good news. Since that event, the Stagecoach performing arts school for kids in Ajax and Pickering is planning to expand into the Durham region in

2027. I wanted to share a good news story that's a result of the event she hosted in her region.

Our government will do everything we can to continue to create an inclusive economy and an inclusive environment where every Canadian can become an entrepreneur. Our women entrepreneurship strategy, which I talked about, our Black entrepreneurship strategy and the 2SLGBTQI+ entrepreneurship strategy will certainly help.

As we build the strongest economy in the G7, we want to make sure that we have the full and equal participation of all Canadians.

• (1630)

**Juanita Nathan:** Thank you, Minister Valdez, for your answer.

We'll move on. In 30 seconds, I could ask the minister to talk a bit about some of the community-based programs that are reducing isolation for senior women. We're talking a lot about seniors and what measures are in place to protect the financial vulnerability of seniors.

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Yes, absolutely.

I'll cite a perfect example. Out in Edmonton, we have the Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Centre—

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** We'll take that up another time. I'm sorry, but your time is up.

[*English*]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Madam Chair, I was having so much fun.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** What can I say? That's committee life.

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

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

Minister, I'd like to get back to some of the measures announced in the economic update, including announcements related to the media. During the study on anti-feminist ideology, witnesses recommended increasing support for Canada's media, and diverse local media outlets in particular, to counter misinformation and hate speech. We spoke about community media, among others. We actually have some good models of such media in Quebec.

You announced some investments in the update, but I'd like you to tell us about the tangible investments your government can make to support the media, which plays a critical role in the prevention of violence and radicalization that could result in femicide.

[English]

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Although this is within the Minister of Heritage's portfolio, I can share that the government remains committed to making sure it can support media in every which way. That includes journalists and making sure that we can tell the real stories, even out in Quebec.

With regard to hate speech, we've put forward legislation here in Parliament. Bill C-9 addresses hate.

We're going to do everything we can to promote local media and give opportunities for the storytellers to share their good work. We are investing significantly into arts, culture and heritage to make sure we can preserve Canadian culture. That includes francophone and Quebec culture.

[Translation]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I'll give you this message and ask you to bring it up with your colleagues—I hope you have conversations among ministers—because it's critical to combatting the rise of these anti-feminist movements, radicalization and misinformation.

Now, this week's economic update also talks about a business support fund to be administered by Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, or CED. However, the support is still in the form of a loan, not direct assistance. Micro enterprises will probably not be in a position to take on more debt or to access this program. Most micro enterprises are headed by women.

What will you do to provide them with tangible assistance?

Bloc Québécois members are calling for wage subsidies to support businesses, particularly women-led businesses.

You have five to 10 seconds to provide an answer.

**The Chair:** You won't even have that luxury, Ms. Larouche. I'm sorry, but time is up.

Minister, thank you very much. You survived intense questioning from members of the committee. Have a great evening.

We're going to suspend for a moment.

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** Is the meeting over?

**The Chair:** Yes, that's what I was telling you.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Rechie Valdez:** My apologies. What a surprise.

**The Chair:** If you want to stay on, we'll have you, but I won't presume you'd like to stay on. You survived intense questioning. Thank you very much.

I'll keep your colleagues here for the second hour.

We're going to suspend for a moment.

• (1630) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1635)

**The Chair:** I call this meeting back to order for the second hour.

Having heard the minister's testimony, we are pleased to have Ms. Mitchell, Ms. McRae and Mr. Massie speak to the members.

We will begin right away, with Mrs. Goodridge.

Mrs. Goodridge, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

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

Thank you for being here with us today.

It will probably come as no surprise that I'm going to ask you guys about baby formula. This is something that is critically important.

Do you guys have any answers, through the chair, as to why the price of baby formula has risen twice as fast in Canada as it has in the States?

**Frances McRae (Deputy Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality):** Thank you very much for that question.

You'll likely understand, Madam Chair, that our remit at Women and Gender Equality Canada does not specifically deal with the price of baby formula.

My colleague Étienne-René may have some information about the general economy he could share.

**Étienne-René Massie (Assistant Deputy Minister, Small Business and Tourism Marketplace Services, Department of Industry):** Thank you for the question.

What I can say is that we have seen increases in grocery prices on a range of goods. That is due to supply chains, global economic disruptions and general inflation in the economy.

I do not have immediate data on baby formula, although I am aware of the cost increases.

• (1640)

**Laila Goodridge:** My understanding, Mr. Massie, is that you're with Industry Canada. Is that correct?

**Etienne-René Massie:** That is correct. I'm with Innovation, Science and Economic Development.

**Laila Goodridge:** All right.

How many baby formula facilities exist in Canada?

**Etienne-René Massie:** Thank you for the question.

I don't necessarily have information on production facilities across the country.

**Laila Goodridge:** There's one. It's located in Kingston. We haven't been able to discover, through Order Paper questions or a variety of different means, whether they even have availability in Canada. In fact, you can order it online, but it's not available on any grocery store shelf. It seems to be a problem that we are solely reliant on imports for a product that is critical to families relying on it to feed their children.

I'll switch gears a bit and go back to intimate partner violence.

What specific items has the government done to address the epidemic that exists of women being killed by their intimate partners?

**Frances McRae:** Thank you for the question.

Intimate partner violence is certainly a critical problem in this country. The member would be right that this is of significant concern to the government, as the minister would have stated.

In terms of what is being done about it, I can speak broadly to the Government of Canada's overall work on gender-based violence. We have a federal strategy on gender-based violence, which actually brings in Public Safety, the RCMP and the Public Health Agency of Canada, among others. We have some very good information on our website that is very specific about what the various organizations do in that area.

As far as Women and Gender Equality is concerned, as the minister indicated, the premise of our programming is that those who are living with the situation on a daily basis are the best ones to develop the solutions. We do project work with a number of organizations who play in this space.

**Laila Goodridge:** All right. Does it concern you that women are being killed at a much higher rate than men?

**Frances McRae:** Absolutely. The numbers are very clear on intimate partner violence. The minister referred to the Minister of Justice bills. This is the most critical piece the government is advancing at this time.

**Laila Goodridge:** The cost of living crisis that we're currently facing is making it harder for women to leave abusive situations. We know that one of the big struggles women cite as to why they stay in abusive relationships and in abusive homes is that they can't afford to leave. When the cost of living gets as high as it is, where people are trying to figure out which bill they're going to pay this month and which bill they're going to skip paying this month, that makes leaving that much more difficult, especially when they have nowhere to go. We see so many shelters that are so full beyond capacity that people can't even get in.

What specific pieces are being done by the government to address the fact that the shelters right across the country are full, and women are being forced to stay in abusive relationships because of the cost of living crisis the government has caused?

**Frances McRae:** Madam Chair—

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** I am very sorry. That's all the time we have for this discussion with Mrs. Goodridge.

Mr. Ntumba, we will continue with you. We will check your connection, and if it's fine, so much the better. If not, I will give the floor to one of your colleagues.

You have the floor for five minutes.

**Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.):** Good afternoon.

Can you hear me?

**The Chair:** Yes, we can hear you. Ask your questions, and then we'll see if everything is working well.

**Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Massie, women in rural areas often have less access to business contacts, training and markets. How can your department adapt its programs to help Black women—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Ntumba, but we will have to put you on standby for now.

I'll now turn the floor over to Ms. Nguyen, who will continue.

• (1645)

[*English*]

**Chi Nguyen:** Pass the baton over here.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Chi Nguyen:** Thank you very much to the officials for joining us today.

As a former recipient of funding supports from WAGE, I'll ask a nerd question about how the department takes a view on program design and how you set up metrics to measure and evaluate the impact of WAGE programming.

**Frances McRae:** Thank you very much for the question.

We have significant engagement with our project partners, which is one of the key ways we design in a way that will meet the needs on the ground. That feedback is coming in all the time. We have a significant portfolio of projects. The women's program alone has been around a very long time, since 1973, and just since 2018 we've had over 800 projects. We have a significant volume of projects from which we get feedback. When we design the work ahead, we certainly work with our stakeholders to make sure we're going to address the needs.

In terms of building in impacts and results, as you may have noticed in our departmental plan, we'll be spending quite a lot more time on thinking about how we speak about those impacts. It's not just for the sake of the public funds that are being spent. It's also because it's important that Canadians understand that the work that is happening at critical levels is with civil society organizations on the ground, who really are the drivers of progress.

**Chi Nguyen:** Thank you.

I know that, a number of years ago, the federal government started to introduce gender-based analysis as a tool and a framework for all government departments. I was wondering whether you could speak to the role that you play, in terms of capacity building and supporting other government departments, in making sure that we are doing that work very rigorously.

**Frances McRae:** Thank you very much for the question.

You're quite right: GBA+ has been around for more than 30 years, and it is a significant discipline. Canada is a world leader in this space.

I would note that, in the spring economic statement, there are even snapshots of various pieces of analyses of various investments. We know that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts issued a February 2026 report. We are preparing a response to that shortly.

I would say that what we're seeing in government, in terms of our ability to apply GBA+, is promising. We just got the results in from our seventh capacity survey, in 2025. We've streamlined the questions to make it easier, and in fact we have a response rate that is 10% up from last year. It's now 83% instead of 73%. We are seeing more evidence that GBA+ is being addressed at the problem or definition stage in addition to the stage of options and decisions. We are very encouraged by the fact that we're seeing it much earlier in the process.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that this is GBA awareness week. We spend a lot of time during this week working with our colleagues to raise awareness. This week is an important week for that purpose.

**Chi Nguyen:** May I ask whether there are any gold stars that you would give to any departments that are doing this, or would you like to shout them all out?

**Frances McRae:** We try to make sure that the work we do with departments is comparing them to their own state, so essentially helping them come up the maturity curve. Not all organizations have the same level of maturity; some have been doing it in different ways for a very long time.

We are seeing some evidence that... I would actually shout out my central agency colleagues. The Department of Finance has developed significant rigour in this area, and so has Treasury Board Secretariat, and that was enabled by the Gender Budgeting Act, which was passed in 2018.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mrs. Roberts, you have the floor.

[English]

**Anna Roberts:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I want to go to a question that Mr. Massie referred to earlier, about the inflationary crisis.

• (1650)

In my area of King—Vaughan, the wait times for affordable housing, due to this inflationary situation that we're currently faced with, are eight to 10 years. My question to you is this: Do you see any advances in speeding up that process so that, for our senior women and women who are looking for homes and apartments, it will be available sooner than that period of time?

**Frances McRae:** If I could just make an attempt at answering that question, I hope you will understand that neither Innovation, Science and Economic Development nor Women and Gender Equality has significant insight into the specifics of wait times for affordable housing. I'm afraid those questions would be best direct-

ed to our colleagues at Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada.

**Anna Roberts:** I'll move on, then.

On May 1, 2023, we had a witness by the name of Ms. Timea Nagy. She shared her concern with us.

My question for her was, "Why are judges not applying the maximum sentences to these perpetrators?" That was referring to the human trafficking perpetrators. She is a survivor of human trafficking.

This was the response:

The judges who have decided not to go for the harsh sentences have said that these would be too harsh. Then I don't understand why we have laws. Why do we have laws if the judges are not implementing our laws?

In 2024, I was fortunate to do a tour, from coast to coast, with the status of women committee, to listen to survivors, to listen to individuals. We met with them in shelters, and we found out that this government has not provided them the tools that they need to survive. Do you feel that the legal penalties that are facing our human traffickers—these perpetrators who, sometimes, don't even get a day in jail—should be increased?

**Frances McRae:** As the minister was noting earlier when she was here, Bill C-16 is being led by Justice Canada, and the notion of addressing how the justice system deals with perpetrators of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and human trafficking and these kinds of things is actually contemplated in the bill.

I do know and can say that federal-provincial-territorial relationships are quite strong in this area. I actually made a presentation to the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of justice not long ago, just on the gender-based violence national action plan, because there is a correlation between these things, and the pieces have to function together.

Maybe just as a last point, there is a pillar on the gender-based violence national action plan that is about a supportive justice system. We are seeing additional action in that area, partly due to the Justice Canada bill.

**Anna Roberts:** I will tell you that I have met with many parents and many survivors. The sad news and the reality, Ms. McRae, is that they're going after our children, and they're grooming them at a very young age. That is disheartening to me.

I will you that after speaking to Carol Wildgoose, I spoke to Jasmine De Fina. I've spoken to Casandra Diamond. These are women who have helped and have tried to help provide shelter for these survivors, and through no fault of their own, the funds are not there. The women are being left on the street to be revictimized again and again.

I ask again, how is it that after 11 years of this Liberal government, we don't understand? I'll give you the stats: Nova Scotia is the number one province for human trafficking. The second-worst province is Ontario, and then we have P.E.I., New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. The worst city in the country is Thunder Bay.

We are not supporting our survivors of human trafficking. What do you say to that?

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, colleague. That's all the time we have. The question has been asked. I don't know if anyone else would like to answer it.

The little bit of confusion earlier was due to the fact that we did not start a new round. We suspended the meeting and then resumed. Now, with Mrs. Roberts, we have begun a new round of questions.

Mr. Chen, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Shaun Chen:** During these types of reforms, survivors often tell us that what matters most in the immediate aftermath of violence is whether they can access timely, practical support close to home.

Can you speak to what WAGE is doing to strengthen survivor services and improve access to supports for women and children who are fleeing violence?

**Frances McRae:** Clearly, those fleeing violence need safe places to be, and they need access to supports. I think we all have seen that demonstrated time and time again. We play a part in that ecosystem at Women and Gender Equality.

We do not directly fund shelters or housing, but we do work with organizations that do quite a lot of work in this area. I will point to the gender-based violence national action plan, because there are certainly supports that are provided by provinces and territories through that national action plan—which is partly funded by the federal government—to very specific housing supports and shelters.

For us, it's really about working with those on the ground who, again, know exactly what needs to happen, and being able to ensure, for example, that workers in shelters are trained—have trauma-informed training. As well, some of those shelters work very closely with police forces to make sure there is less traumatization involved in questioning. There are even places where pets are allowed to be. There's a significant amount of work that goes into best practices around the best supports for victims and survivors.

**Shaun Chen:** Thank you very much.

Indigenous, racialized and immigrant women face compounded and intersectional challenges when leaving an abusive relationship. These may relate to systemic and cultural barriers or could even be related to immigration status, creating a vulnerability that can be further exploited by abusers.

How is your department working to recognize this particular challenge and ensuring that supports are available across the country to women who are facing these compounded and intersectional obstacles?

**Frances McRae:** At the Department for Women and Gender Equality, being the lead on gender-based analysis in addition to our work supporting communities, particularly women and gender-diverse people, we build intersectionality into all of the work that we do. We pay particular attention in the calls for proposals that we do

and in the proposals that we review, to ensure that we cover off specific communities.

I will perhaps give an example around women with disabilities. In 2024-25, we launched an investment call for equality for senior women and women and girls with disabilities, because we know that those communities are particularly affected. About \$2.2 million was invested in projects that would serve women and girls with disabilities primarily as a beginning.

We look through our data and evidence, and we can see through intersectional data that we have key gaps in certain areas. That is, then, how we determine the way ahead.

**Shaun Chen:** In terms of women who are newcomers, who have experienced language barriers, cultural dissonance and unfamiliarity with the system, and who may also be fearful due to immigration status, do you have examples of funding or investments that have been made to support that demographic?

• (1700)

**Frances McRae:** We know that a significant amount of gender-based violence is rooted in culture, and with Canada being a very diverse country—

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McRae. That's all the time we have for this discussion.

Ms. Larouche, you have two and a half minutes.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the government officials for being here.

I'm going to try to get a better understanding of what will happen in your department, with all of the challenges we have just talked about. I am thinking, in particular, about violence against women and femicides, as well as rising anti-feminism, masculinism and the challenges faced by senior women. Despite everything you have to do in the Department of Women and Gender Equality, the 2026-27 departmental plan says that, as part of the Government of Canada's comprehensive expenditure review, as set out in the 2025 budget—we've heard about cuts departments are required to make—you anticipate an \$8-million cut in spending each year for 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29. It also says that you are finalizing your approach to achieve these savings in collaboration with the partners involved.

Could you tell the committee what measures are planned in order to achieve the annual savings of \$8 million referred to in the departmental plan, as part of this comprehensive expenditure review?

**Frances McRae:** Thank you for your question.

First, you're quite right about the number of issues and problems to be tackled. That said, Women and Gender Equality Canada is an organization of some 400 people, and you will understand that our department is not the only one dealing with issues and problems related to the rights of women, who represent 51% of the population. We have a lot of partnerships. Our role primarily includes supporting projects so we can help staff on the ground.

As for the \$8 million in cuts that you speak of, I have no answer for you, unfortunately, that will tell you exactly how these savings will be achieved.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. McRae.

Mrs. Goodridge, you have the floor.

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

[English]

I have a question. How much money does your department spend when it comes to the calls to action for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls?

**Frances McRae:** Missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people is a subject that we have worked on quite a lot with the lead department, which is, as you would know, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. In 2021, Women and Gender Equality Canada received \$55 million over five years, and that money is doing its work. We have over 100 first nations, Inuit and Métis organizations—in all provinces and territories—that we're working with. Since 2018, we've funded 134 organizations. That's \$89 million, and that includes the \$55 million.

It is very important to us, as well, to make sure that we have indigenous-led approaches, and I would point to pillar four in the national action plan, which is very specifically about indigenous women leading those approaches and—

**Laila Goodridge:** How much is spent every year by the department? I don't mean a global amount over  $x$  number of years. There has to be “this is how much is being spent for this calendar year”.

• (1705)

**Frances McRae:** In 2024-25, investments in those approaches allowed about 186,000 people to access culturally appropriate resources.

**Laila Goodridge:** Do you know how much money was spent or was allocated in your department in the last budget year?

**Frances McRae:** Are you saying in 2025-26?

**Laila Goodridge:** Sure.

**Frances McRae:** We do not have a specific envelope anymore for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We actually—

**Laila Goodridge:** There was a massive inquiry that came up with 231 calls for justice. Two of those calls for justice have been completed; 82 have been started but aren't completed. You are saying that the Department for Women and Gender Equality does not have a budget pocket for completing these calls for justice anymore. It used to, but it doesn't anymore. Is that correct?

**Frances McRae:** We have significant investments that are already in place. Those investments have been made, and they're continuing to do their work. As a department, we always have a significant amount of funding that goes to indigenous women overall, for a range of reasons.

**Laila Goodridge:** I appreciate that, but we're here to talk about estimates, and “a significant amount” is not a dollar figure. I could possibly forgive a minister for not having a specific dollar figure. However, you're the deputy minister, and you don't have a dollar figure. That is concerning.

**Frances McRae:** There's a specific action plan with specific funds for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. As a department, we invest significantly more than that in the support of indigenous women and girls. We can get you—

**Laila Goodridge:** Could you table—

**Frances McRae:** I can certainly come back and give you a list of projects that we have funded that would support missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in a global sense, absolutely.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

How many of the outstanding calls for justice is the department currently working on?

**Frances McRae:** Women and Gender Equality Canada is responsible for part of the work on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We have very specific work that we've done, as I mentioned, on supporting commemorations. Significant money went into that—\$13 million—commemorating—

**Laila Goodridge:** I didn't ask how much money this time. I asked how many of the calls for justice are currently being worked on. If you don't have that answer, perhaps you could table that with our committee. This is something that a lot of indigenous communities.... This week, we celebrated Red Dress Day. There were red dress walks. This is something that is real.

**Frances McRae:** Yes.

**Laila Goodridge:** There are missing and murdered indigenous women from my riding. There are families. There are the survivors. They want to know that there is action being taken. Saying that there is “significant” money—you can't say how much—is meaningless.

**Frances McRae:** The work that we do is not specific to only one or two calls for justice. The work we do supports calls for justice 1.3, 1.5, 1.6, 16.44 and 17.2, so—

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. McRae.

Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor.

**Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. McRae, Mr. Massie and Ms. Mitchell, how are you?

Let's catch our breath for a minute, because it can be very intense here, with the limited time we are given to speak.

I would like to ask the three of you a question. You can answer one at a time.

Women in rural areas often have less access to business contacts, training and markets. How is your department adapting its programs to help Black women, in particular, gain access to rural entrepreneurship, instead of running the same programs throughout the country, in a fairly balanced manner?

**Etienne-René Massie:** I thank the member for his question.

I would be pleased to talk about the Black entrepreneurship program, which the government renewed in 2024. In general terms, we have three components that we use to help Black entrepreneurs.

The first one is the Black entrepreneurship loan fund, which is available to all Black entrepreneurs through the Federation of African Canadian Economics.

Secondly—and this may answer your question more specifically—we use the ecosystem fund to finance organizations that provide support services to women entrepreneurs. This can be mentoring, sponsorship or help in writing a business plan. We work with regional development agencies across the country to provide funding for organizations that operate in urban settings and others that work more specifically in rural settings, as well as some that work in both.

Black women can also access programs for women in entrepreneurship. Some organizations, such as PARO, which operates in northern Ontario, and Alberta Women Entrepreneurs, which works throughout that province, provide services to Black women and women entrepreneurs in rural areas.

• (1710)

**Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba:** In 2020, during the pandemic, I worked with friends in my area to launch a food basket home delivery service for single mothers. We did this for at least 10 or 15 weeks, but I don't remember the data, since it was a very long time ago. I have heard people asking you for numbers, which you still didn't have, but I do understand that it's hard to get accurate numbers for the results of programs intended for certain groups. This can happen—it's not unusual. You can send us the numbers later, if you have them.

Do you have any data on participation and the success of businesses owned by Black women in rural communities? If so, how do you use these data to inform your decisions?

**Etienne-René Massie:** I thank the member for his question.

I have data today for the entire ecosystem. For example, we have granted more than 1,460 loans to women entrepreneurs and have helped more than 200,800 women entrepreneurs. For the Black community, we have granted more than 875 loans to entrepreneurs and have helped more than 24,000 entrepreneurs, as the minister indicated a little earlier today.

I don't have any data on businesses owned by Black women or women of other demographic categories, but I can check. I have to say that we want to avoid stigmatizing people who use these en-

trepreneurship programs. We ask them to provide demographic data on a voluntary basis, but they are not required to indicate if they come from a rural or urban area, for example, or to give us any other information.

That said, I can check this and, if we do have any data, I would be pleased to share them with the committee.

**Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba:** Thank you.

Ms. McRae, I have 30 seconds left. Can you comment on what type of tangible support will be provided to women in the economic update?

**Frances McRae:** I thank the member for his question.

For us at Women and Gender Equality, there are three aspects to women's participation in Canadian society: Economic participation, social participation and leadership participation. There's also a link between violence against women and the economy—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McRae. That's all the time we have for this discussion.

I will now turn the floor over to Mrs. Roberts for five minutes.

[*English*]

**Anna Roberts:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, again, to the witnesses for being here.

I have a question that maybe I'll leave it to any of you to answer. How's the department conducting any recent analysis on how inflation and housing costs are disproportionately impacting women fleeing violence?

**Frances McRae:** Thank you very much for the question.

I would say that at Women and Gender Equality, we have significant research efforts with Statistics Canada to be able to understand how we can fill data gaps around those most affected by things like poverty, joblessness, homelessness and a number of areas. A significant amount of our resources goes to Statistics Canada for these purposes. You will know that Statistics Canada has a very significant investment in disaggregated data. Understanding how various groups of women and Canadians are affected by a whole range of social issues is part of that work.

We—

• (1715)

**Anna Roberts:** I'm sorry to interrupt, Mrs. McRae.

Can you establish a specific number for us? Are we improving? Are we declining? I'm not hearing about a lot of opportunities for women trying to escape this violence—that there's a place for them to live. I speak to individuals who are running shelters. The stay in shelters is becoming longer and longer, because there is no affordable housing. Maybe we could table that. It's something I've heard that I'm concerned about.

My next question is on this: Many women in Canada continue to face disproportionate economic pressures related to housing, caregiving responsibilities and inflation. They're forgotten. I know we had an individual, James Janeiro, as a witness a few weeks ago. He mentioned that, a lot of times, caregivers are not rewarded for the time they must leave their jobs to take care of the elderly.

Is there anything your department knows regarding how many opportunities...or the number of caregivers having to leave their jobs to take care of the elderly?

**Frances McRae:** The information I could give you is through Statistics Canada. They have done quite a lot of research on informal care and how it affects various groups of Canadians. Certainly, we know it affects women much more than men. We still have women doing disproportionate amounts of child care and elder care, despite having full-time jobs.

There is a significant cultural change we need to be looking at, around gender norms.

**Anna Roberts:** Thank you.

Recently, we had Elizabeth Brown as a witness. One of the things she's advocating for is tax fairness for single women. One piece of data she shared with us is this: A couple earning \$50,000 will pay \$1,172 in taxes. However, a single senior will pay close to \$5,800 in taxes. Really, when you look at the overall expenses of individuals, the rent is the same, the utilities are the same, the gas is the same and the insurance on their car is the same.

How is that fair for an individual versus a couple? Has your department done anything to look at tax fairness for single women?

**Frances McRae:** As you can appreciate, tax matters are the domain of the Department of Finance, exclusively. I would be directing that question to colleagues at the Department of Finance, in particular.

**Anna Roberts:** I've been going to different food banks. The increasing number of seniors they're seeing is pretty scary.

What are we doing to help individuals? A lot of single seniors are women. Because of the inflationary situation we are faced with, how are we assisting these women who are living below the poverty line and not able to make ends meet?

**Frances McRae:** I very much agree with the comments you're making about senior women in poverty.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

**Frances McRae:** We look forward to the committee's study.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Gladu, you have the floor.

**Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you to the department officials for being with us today.

I have a couple of quick questions. Then I'm going to share my time with Mr. Chen.

We see that tariffs are impacting small businesses incredibly.... I wonder if you have any information about whether it's worse for women-led businesses.

**Frances McRae:** There are some characteristics of women-led businesses that we know about. I know Mr. Massie can give you those. These tell us that women tend to have smaller companies. They tend to be more in the service areas. They're about self-employment, in many cases. We don't have as many women in export situations.

I'm going to turn to my colleague Étienne-René Massie to give you a little more detail.

• (1720)

**Etienne-René Massie:** To complement the deputy minister's answer, it is true that women-entrepreneur businesses are often about self-employment. About 37% of self-employed Canadians are women entrepreneurs. Because of size and, often, their other responsibilities, they sometimes—when there are periods of economic shock—suffer greater consequences.

The government is conscious of that. It has, through the women entrepreneurship strategy and, of course, the Business Development Bank, a range of measures for women entrepreneurs.

**Marilyn Gladu:** My next question is this. There's \$52 million announced for victims services support. Can you tell us a little about the types of organizations that this will support?

**Frances McRae:** My understanding is that those funds were announced by the Minister of Justice, and I'm not as familiar with the details of that programming as I would be with Women and Gender Equality programming.

One thing I will say is that we do see a need for continued supports and additional supports for victims services, so we're very pleased to see that investment happen.

**Marilyn Gladu:** Go ahead, Mr. Chen.

**Shaun Chen:** Thank you.

At a time when there are setbacks in human rights protections in some places and many gender-diverse women are reporting feeling less safe, Pride season starts next month, and members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community are raising concerns regarding their safety at Pride festivals.

Statistics Canada reported in 2023 that hate crimes targeting sexual orientation increased 69% from the previous year. This is alarming. What action is WAGE taking to better protect 2SLGBTQI+ communities across the country?

**Frances McRae:** I want to reiterate what the member has been saying about increased hate. We have significant work under way with the Department of Canadian Heritage on the Canadian anti-hate strategy, which provides over \$12 million over five years to our department. In addition to that, there's \$3 million over two years for Pride security. That has now been made permanent with budget 2025. We will have \$1.5 million annually for Pride security.

I want to just mention that we have worked with Fierté Canada Pride on these projects. They have put significant investment not only in large Pride parades but, in fact, small ones. Eighty-four per cent of the funds that they use to support Pride events are from smaller, rural and remote communities. Those have made the difference between those events happening or not happening, because members do need to feel safe in attending.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Larouche, you have two and a half minutes.

**Andréanne Larouche:** I would like to revisit the topic of budget constraints. All these questions from my colleagues show that a lot remains to be done. The 2026-27 departmental plan, however, indicates a drop in funding starting in 2027-28; total funding will go from \$414 million to \$206 million.

Could you explain to us how the funding set out in the 2026-27 main estimates could interact with the anticipated drop in funding?

Which programs and funds will be eliminated?

**Frances McRae:** Thank you very much for your question.

First, I should reiterate that Women and Gender Equality Canada's funding and mandate were protected in the 2025 budget. We have been asked to reduce our expenditures by 2%, which is low compared to the bigger cuts happening elsewhere. We find this highly significant.

Also, as the minister said, the funding we have been granted is permanent. Once again, this is a first, and it's extraordinary. As you have said, stable funding is one of the biggest challenges we face in this area. That is important.

With regard to the numbers tabled in Parliament, some decisions have yet to be made, as always, and these are not necessarily reflected in the numbers. The figures you see in Parliament represent

decisions made so far. The largest amount, which is still awaiting a decision, has to be approved by the end of March 2027. This is the funding for the national action plan to end gender-based violence, which accounts for the bulk of the funding.

• (1725)

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

I thank our guests for their availability today. We greatly appreciate this. I understand the frustration that they could sometimes feel. I am the timekeeper. I hope they will understand that. The committee would like to excuse them now and to thank them once more.

As for committee members, we still have a few minor matters to resolve together, since we have to vote on the expenditures in the 2026-27 main estimates.

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Vote 1—Operating expenditures..... \$61,578,946

Vote 5—Grants and contributions..... \$345,571,095

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

**The Chair:** Finally, is it the committee's wish that the chair report on the main estimates to the House of Commons?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I would like to give you a few little friendly reminders.

First, our report on the main estimates, which we just voted on, will be tabled in the House at the same time as the report on the Criminal Code on May 28.

Next, the analysts have drafted a news release. Do the members wish to review it or leave this to the analysts and the chair?

I am told that you would like to receive it. It will therefore be sent to the members.

Now, I would like to remind you that the deadline for submitting witness lists for the study on menopause is Thursday, May 21. We plan to commence the study on June 9.

Moreover, on May 26, when we return from the two weeks in our ridings, one hour will be set aside to commence our study on women's shelters. During the second hour, we will study version 2 of the report on anti-feminist ideology and discuss drafting instructions for the report on senior women.

Finally, on May 28, two hours have been set aside for testimony as part of our study on women's shelters. This will keep us fairly busy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a great evening. We'll see each other in two weeks.

The meeting is adjourned.







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