



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Public Safety and Emergency Services

Tuesday, May 21, 2024
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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
First Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC), Deputy Chair

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Deputy Minister, Public Safety and Emergency Services

Ross Nairne, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategy, Support and Integrated Initiatives

Brad Smith, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services

Curtis Zablocki, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Security

Alberta Emergency Management Agency

Stephen Lacroix, Managing Director

8 a.m.**Tuesday, May 21, 2024**

[Mr. Sabir in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Irfan Sabir, MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and chair of this committee. As we begin this morning, I would like to invite members, guests, and LAO staff at the table to introduce themselves.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Ms de Jonge: Chantelle de Jonge, MLA for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mr. Dyck: Nolan Dyck, MLA for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Lundy: Good morning, everyone. Brandon Lundy, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. Jackie Lovely, Camrose constituency.

Mr. McDougall: Good morning. Myles McDougall, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Lacroix: Good morning, Chair, people. Steve Lacroix, managing director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency.

Mr. Smith: Good morning, Chair. Brad Smith, ADM of financial services.

Ms Lajeunesse: Good morning. Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Zablocki: Good morning. Curtis Zablocki, assistant deputy minister of public safety.

Mr. Nairne: Good morning. Ross Nairne, ADM of strategy, support and integrated initiatives.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning. Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

Ms Hayes: Good morning. Patty Hayes, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Haji: Sharif Haji, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Mr. Schmidt: Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Robert: Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Mr. Huffman: Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will note for the record the following substitution: Member Dyck for hon. Member Armstrong-Homeniuk.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting, and comments should flow through the chair at all times.

Approval of the agenda. Hon. members, are there any changes or additions to the agenda?

Seeing none, can a member move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the proposed agenda as distributed for its Tuesday, May 21, 2024, meeting? MLA Garth Rowswell. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried.

Approval of the minutes. We have minutes from the Tuesday, May 14, 2024, meeting of the committee. Do members have any errors or omissions to note?

Seeing none, can a member move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on Tuesday, May 14, 2024? MLA Lovely. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried.

I would now like to welcome our guests from the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services, who are here to address the ministry's annual report 2022-23 and the Auditor General's outstanding recommendations. I invite officials from the ministry to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes.

The deputy minister.

Ms Lajeunesse: Thank you very much, and good morning. I'm Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, as mentioned, the Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services. I will reiterate who's with me this morning as I have other members of our staff in the gallery. Joining me this morning are Mr. Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister and senior financial officer; Curtis Zablocki, ADM for public security; Ross Nairne, ADM for strategy support and integrated initiatives; Stephen Lacroix, senior assistant deputy minister and managing director for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. In the gallery I also have Fiona Lavoy, ADM of correctional services; Joe Zatylny, ADM and deputy managing director of AEMA; Trent Forsberg, director with the victims' services program; and Ellen Zhang, ED of finance.

The Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services, otherwise known as PSES, was formed partway through the '22-23 fiscal year, when the former Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General was divided into two new entities. The reporting period we are here to discuss today includes the accomplishments of the entire fiscal year, including those months when PSES was part of JSG.

The Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services was formed with a strong mandate to support the everyday safety, security, and protection of Albertans. Government has a fundamental role to play in protecting Albertans from crime, violence, disasters, and any other unlawful or life-threatening risk to health and safety. This province has a strong foundation of safety and security mechanisms in place that do just that.

During fiscal year '22-23 we worked hard to strengthen this foundation with new tools and supports designed to make Alberta's communities safer, provide law enforcement with the tools they need to combat crime and violence, support victims of crime, and protect our communities from the impact of disasters such as floods and wildfires. I firmly believe that the accomplishments we achieved in fiscal year '22-23 ensure that Albertans and the communities they choose to live in are safe places to live, work, and raise families.

The Department of Public Safety and Emergency Services is dedicated to keeping communities safe, resilient, and prepared for disasters. Working closely with partners in law enforcement, justice, health, and social services, the ministry ensures a fair and accessible criminal justice system that is tailored to the needs of Albertans. The ministry oversees provincial policing, primarily through the RCMP, and supports municipal policing with grants.

Specialized teams like ALERT tackle organized crime, drug trafficking, child exploitation, and gang violence. With eight adult correctional centres, two youth centres, and over 40 probation offices across the province the ministry manages the custody, supervision, and rehabilitation of individuals under provincial correctional authority while also collaborating with Indigenous communities for community supervision on reserves, aiming to guide individuals toward lawful choices while building stronger communities.

A new and significant part of our mandate is to help communities navigate emergency and disaster management through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, which co-ordinates prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Additionally, the ministry supports victims of crime, including those of domestic violence and human trafficking, through various programs and grants.

In '22-23 PSESA spent \$25.8 million more than the original budget to deliver its mandate. Expenses were \$1.079 million, or 8 per cent, lower than the previous year, primarily due to decreases within the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and the victims of crime and public safety fund.

In '22-23 Public Safety and Emergency Services delivered on commitments in the former Justice and Solicitor General '22-25 business plan, the former Municipal Affairs '22-25 business plan, and key priorities in the government of Alberta '22-25 strategic plan. These achievements have contributed to a safer and more secure Alberta.

In '22-23 amendments to the Police Act were passed by the Legislative Assembly following four years of extensive engagement with stakeholders, including Albertans, law enforcement, health and social services sectors, municipalities, Indigenous communities, and communities representing cultural and ethnic diversity. These amendments mark Alberta's most significant policing reforms in 34 years and aim to improve police accountability and boost public confidence through changes in governance, oversight, and community relations.

A central feature of these amendments is the establishment of an independent agency to handle and investigate police complaints, supported by stakeholders and policing agencies as a way to address biases in internal investigations. Key changes include adding a preamble and eight guiding principles for policing in Alberta; creating civilian governance bodies for communities under RCMP policing; mandating police to develop community safety and diversity plans; establishing policing priorities by the minister of public safety, with municipal commissions aligning their priorities; and strengthening provincial oversight to ensure adequate policing.

Public safety and social disorder continue to be challenges that many communities, both big and small, must contend with. In '22-23 we focused our efforts on reducing crime through increased officer presence in our large urban centres as well as increasing funding to suppress gang activity and combat illegal firearm activity. In February 2023 Alberta sheriffs teamed up with local police services in Edmonton and Calgary to boost law enforcement visibility, particularly in downtown areas and problem spots like LRT stations and other high-crime areas.

The results were immediate. By April 22, 2023, the joint efforts in Calgary resulted in over 1,600 calls responded to, with 109 charges laid and 1,524 arrest warrants executed. Meanwhile in Edmonton 923 incidents were addressed, leading to 274 charges and 2,986 arrests. The goal of these deployments was not only enforcement but also the provision of immediate assistance such as transporting individuals to shelters or social agencies for support. In March 2023 alone 74 individuals were assisted in Edmonton and 23 in Calgary. This initiative also led to the confiscation of weapons

such as bear spray, knives, and concealed firearms, which contributed to overall community safety. It is important to note that in redeploying existing resources, we did not incur additional expenditures, highlighting the efficient use of resources in achieving tangible results.

8:10

To further tackle gun violence, we established a firearms investigative unit within Alberta law enforcement response teams, otherwise known as ALERT, to combat illegal firearms activity. These teams, stationed in Calgary and Edmonton, bolster the capacity to investigate and disrupt the illegal importation and distribution of firearms. These specially trained officers focus on investigating organized criminal enterprises and preventing such crimes before they happen. Additionally, Alberta received \$10.25 million in '22-23 through the federal gun and gang violence action fund to enhance efforts to prevent, disrupt, and increase awareness of gun and gang violence.

We all know that crime is not just a big-city problem, though. Many rural communities are also experiencing increases in violence, and we are supporting the government's mandate to address crime in rural communities. We've implemented the rural Alberta provincial integrated defence response, otherwise known as RAPID, to strengthen the fight against rural crime. This initiative empowered fish and wildlife enforcement services and the sheriff highway patrol to assist the RCMP in rural areas. Alberta sheriffs played a crucial role in removing nearly 1,500 impaired drivers from the province's highways in 2022. This marked a significant effort in enhancing road safety and preventing accidents caused by impaired driving. Giving Alberta sheriffs the authority to investigate impaired driving has made our highways safer and freed up RCMP for other urgent calls.

In '22-23 the ministry assumed responsibility for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, also known as AEMA. The ministry is committed to helping municipalities and communities better manage emergencies and disasters. AEMA continues to provide local authorities with direction and guidance on emergency management roles and responsibilities. This assistance includes comprehensive emergency management training, support for emergency plan development, emergency social services planning, and key real-time response services during emergencies and disasters. AEMA also maintains the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre, which is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to respond immediately to requests from municipalities and government of Alberta departments. This centre is where all government of Alberta ministries and key stakeholders come together to co-ordinate the government's response to emergencies and disasters.

Finally, I'll talk briefly about the ministry's response to three outstanding recommendations made by the Auditor General in relation to its audits as of December 2023. In 2016 the Auditor General recommended the development and public reporting of "a business plan with measurable desired results for the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Fund." This recommendation was repeated in November 2021. The ministry launched an updated victim assistance program and governance model. The new victim assistance program launched in September 2022. A new regional governance model for victim service delivery commenced April 1, 2024, and transition is under way. The department and the OAG have been meeting regularly to provide status updates on this recommendation. The department is reviewing whether this recommendation is still relevant given the significant changes to the program and its governance and will provide updates to the OAG as needed.

In 2020 the Auditor General made two recommendations related to emergency management: "implement a system to develop and maintain

a provincial hazard assessment” for emergency management and to “improve the monitoring and reporting of recommendations from post-incident disaster reviews.” The ministry is developing the provincial hazard identification and risk assessment, otherwise known as HIRA, reports . . .

Thank you.

The Chair: You can finish the sentence if you want.

Ms Lajeunesse: Okay.

. . . with respective sections to address hazard assessments and postincident assessments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now turn it over to the Auditor General for his comments. Mr. Wylie, you have five minutes.

Mr. Wylie: Thank you, Chair. As the deputy didn’t get a chance to finish the remarks with respect to our outstanding recommendations, I might go a bit over the travelled ground then. As the deputy said, in 2016 we did make a recommendation relating to the victims of crime and public safety fund. In November 2021 we did a follow-up audit, and we found that at that time the victims’ services program took steps to develop a public business plan for the fund, but it was not approved, nor was it actioned; neither was the department reporting any type of specific measures relating to the desired results of the fund.

As a result, we determined that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations that we made in our original audit, back in 2021, were still relevant, and the recommendation was repeated. As the deputy said, I understand that the department itself will be doing its own assessment of whether they believe it’s relevant. I can assure you that our office will again make an assessment of whether it is relevant as well. Ultimately, we’ll be looking to see the work done by the department and assess the relevancy.

In 2020 the provincial hazard assessment for the emergency management performance audit resulted in two recommendations. The first was to implement a system to develop and maintain a provincial hazard assessment. Emergency management is a complex challenge for all provincial governments. It’s becoming even more complicated and expensive as disasters increase with frequency and intensity. The government of Alberta is also bearing more of the financial risk of uninsurable disaster costs.

Without a provincial hazard assessment the government may risk facing higher costs in responding to and recovering from disasters that may have been mitigated. For a government to reduce risk, plan for, and respond to calamities like flooding, wildfires, and pandemics, it must understand the extent of Alberta’s cumulative disaster risk now and into the future and not only for itself but all of the participants within the province, including local municipalities and the private sector. Province-wide hazard assessment is a key building block for an effective emergency management system that can help the government make informed province-wide decisions on funding, policies, and other planning and mitigation strategies.

A preliminary provincial hazard assessment was drafted in 2014 and ’15. However, it faced a variety of challenges and it was not completed, and the roles and responsibilities for developing and maintaining the provincial hazard assessment were not clearly defined. These were the results of our audit, Chair. We also noted that the assessment of methodology was lacking critical elements, including a mechanism to evaluate hazards and a step to identify hazard treatment options.

The second recommendation was to improve monitoring and reporting of recommendations from postincident disaster reviews. We know that disasters were once infrequent and are unfortunately

happening more and more often. This recommendation speaks to the need for improvements to the way for government to review and learn from previous disasters that may provide opportunities to improve the emergency management system.

Since 2011 AEMA has received several recommendations from postincident disaster reviews related to the hazard assessment system for local authorities and the government. Our review of the monitoring and reporting of the recommendations revealed that at the time of our audit it was not clear who must ensure that the recommendations were implemented. For recommendations classified as continual improvement, it was not clear what actions were required to implement them, and generally there was limited information on the estimated completed date or the status to determine whether the work was on track.

Again, Chair, we look forward to working with the department and to review the improvements made by the department, as the deputy said, and we’ll be making an assessment on these outstanding recommendations once that work is done.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to questions from the committee members, and we will begin with the Official Opposition. You have 15 minutes, and comments should flow through the chair at all times.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the deputy minister as well as the Auditor General for his remarks. As per the 2022-23 annual report page 21 indicates that, as you also alluded to in your opening remarks, Alberta received \$10 million through the federal government to enhance efforts to prevent, disrupt, and increase awareness of gun and gang violence. My first question is: does the department track gang and gun violence over the years?

Ms Lajeunesse: Thank you very much for the question. We certainly do have a number of measures and performance indicators and things that we track in terms of violence that happens in the province, including from the Canadian criminal justice statistics.

Maybe I’ll have ADM Curtis Zablocki expand on the information that we have in the department.

Mr. Zablocki: That information is also gathered through our police services, including our provincial police services and our municipal police services, and is moved up through to the Stats Canada folks, and our department certainly can access that information through Stats Canada.

Mr. Haji: Is that reported in the annual report in terms of year to year, the number of gun and gang violence, whether it is casualties or whatever?

Mr. Zablocki: It hasn’t been to date. The gun violence certainly has been something that’s come more so on our radar in the last few years as it’s increased in prevalence, but it’s something that . . .

8:20

Mr. Haji: Why is it not tracked then?

Mr. Zablocki: Well, we are looking at it currently in that context.

Mr. Haji: Is there something that you could share with the committee and table in terms of seeing year to year what the gang violence, the gun violence happening in the province is?

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. I’m not sure that we have those statistics with us today, but it’s something that we’ll endeavour to keep an eye on as things go forward.

Mr. Haji: Could you at least share the last, in the reporting year 2022-2023?

Ms Lajeunesse: We'll look and see if we have that available. We do track under performance measure 1(a) violent and property crime rates, but in terms of a specific breakdown to gun and gang violence we will see if we have that, that we can provide.

Mr. Haji: It's very, very important for me. In my riding during the reporting year alone, to what I know, that I visited, at least three lives were taken through gun violence. If it's not being tracked – we are tracking property damages, but we are not tracking lives taken through gun violence in the annual report. That's why I am really, really concerned in terms of it not being reported. So if you could table that, that would be very helpful.

Police-reported crimes have increased 71 per cent over the past three years, between 2020-2022, in Edmonton, which is most likely an underestimation of the true extent of the nature of hate crimes. We know only 1 in 10 hate crimes are reported to law enforcement. The government created to address the problem a hate crime unit. To tackle the issue, apart from the establishment of the hate crime unit, can you share what other efforts have been made in terms of addressing the hate crimes that Albertans are experiencing?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you very much. We certainly have a number of programs in place to help address issues with hate crimes that are affecting Albertans. In terms of the trends we've seen, we certainly have seen hate crimes increase by 62 per cent since 2018 across Canada. Within the ministry we have a number of initiatives that work to address hate crimes. We have hate crimes community liaison officers and a hate crimes unit that has been established to work with police services to amalgamate and compare information to be sure that everybody has the information needed to help tackle this problem in greater detail.

Maybe I'll have ADM Zablocki describe that initiative in more detail.

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. Thanks very much. The hate crime co-ordination unit was created in 2022 to enhance support for the prevention, investigation, prosecution of hate-motivated crime. In addition to that, the government created the Alberta security infrastructure program. Since its inception in 2021 this program has dispensed 253 grants totalling more than \$2.5 million. It has also moved to schools, where it provides and assists with security-related concerns in schools. Some of the work that was completed in 2022 and 2023 included a series of interviews with 78 community members, focus groups, interviews, conversations with 24 partner groups.

Mr. Haji: Is there a way of tracking in terms of reduction? It's pretty good, the Alberta security infrastructure that has been provided, and it's captured in the report pretty well. But I'm wondering in terms of any ways of reduction in terms of the number of hate crimes that happen in the province.

Mr. Zablocki: Well, the statistics are being tracked if that's what you mean, sir.

Mr. Haji: Okay. I'll move to my follow-up question. There are only three hate crime officers for the entire province, and the RCMP only has one member designated as a hate crime co-ordinator, who does not have any investigation capacity or operational support. Why are there no sufficient resources given the magnitude and the complexity of this problem?

Mr. Zablocki: I'll take that question. Yeah. Thank you for that question. You're correct. The RCMP has one designated resource working out of the RCMP headquarters in Alberta in more of a co-ordination role. Investigationally, the RCMP has numerous resources that contribute to investigations across the province.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. But in your report you indicate on page 32 that there are only three hate crime officers across the province.

Mr. Zablocki: Those are seconded resources that work with the government and with the Hate Crimes Committee and are liaisons to the police services.

Mr. Haji: How many total do we have, hate crime officers? Even if those are seconded ones, then how many do we have?

Mr. Zablocki: Each service will have a number of resources. Edmonton Police Service, Calgary Police Service will have designated hate crime investigators.

Mr. Haji: Do you know the numbers?

Mr. Zablocki: I don't know specifically the numbers for each of those agencies; no, I don't.

Mr. Haji: Will you be able to provide that?

Mr. Zablocki: We can ask and find that out, I'm sure.

Mr. Haji: Okay. The department appointed, as you mentioned, two hate crime community liaisons, and the liaisons are working directly with the hate crime co-ordination unit. Communities, community organizations are most targeted by hate crimes. But it says that the liaisons are working now to provide recommendations to the government at the end of their term, 2024. When does it end? Is it March?

Ms Lajeunesse: It's expected to conclude at the end of this month, and we're expecting a report from them, from the two liaisons, at that time.

Mr. Haji: Then after that is the department going to have liaisons, or it's not going to?

Ms Lajeunesse: We will be reviewing the report, and there will be recommendations, likely, that are relevant to our ministry as well as others. We will co-ordinate across government what it looks like for those ministries to respond to the recommendations that are in the report.

Mr. Haji: I'm struggling why we will have, again, other recommendations because, based on the report, there were sets of recommendations that came through the Anti-Racism Advisory Council. There were six recommendations that came through the department-commissioned research that was done through OPV. All of those recommendations are in place. I'm wondering: why do we need additional recommendations when we already see that hate crime is a problem and there have been recommendations that were provided to the department?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. The original report, as you mentioned, had a number of recommendations, and I can ask one of my ADMs to expand on the progress of implementing the variety of recommendations that came from that report. In terms of the hate crimes community liaisons it was felt that further engagement was needed across the province to just get some more granular information about the areas that would be most impactful in terms of moving a number of initiatives forward.

I will ask Ross to expand on the overall recommendations from the initial report and where they're at.

Mr. Nairne: I guess the recommendations from the initial report impacted a number of different departments. Where specifically each of the recommendations are, I'll have to come back, Rae-Ann; I don't know that question.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. There was a whole action list of recommendations that came from the antiracism council, and the OPV did a pretty good job in terms of the research that the department funded to provide recommendations and six key recommendations, all of them on the issues of hate. The question is: when you already have this number of recommendations and you have had liaisons, again, why would you wait on other recommendations and then determine whether you will keep that? That is the question. If you could provide some explanations on that, that would be great because I'm looking into the time and we may not have time to go through that.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you.

Mr. Haji: The trend of hate crimes and challenges requires solutions. According to the government-funded – again, on page 26 you indicate the research that you provided funding for, and it provided six recommendations, I see. Are there any steps taken so far on those recommendations?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. I will have Ross detail some of the steps that have been taken on the recommendations thus far.

Mr. Nairne: Sorry, Member. On page 26?

Mr. Haji: Yeah. Page 26 points out that you funded the research, but the six recommendations that came through that research: are there any steps that are taken? Like, have you developed action plans on what to do with those recommendations? Okay. I'll move ...

8:30

Mr. Nairne: Well, I can't answer that question specifically, but within the government there are a number of different activities going on.

To your previous comments, Chair, there was a large study that came out of our sister Department of Immigration and Multiculturalism around hate crimes and various things like that. I'm not sure if, you know, some of the work that we're doing, whether it's through the hate crime co-ordinators – we, of course, have the hate crime community liaisons. There's a lot of work being done in a lot of different areas. To your question about where all the recommendations are, I think I'm going to have to get back to you in terms of all of them, because it is, as you noted, a very complex issue within Alberta, and it requires almost a multidisciplinary approach to address it.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. Those are the recommendations from the antiracism advisory. Those are crossministry recommendations. I do understand that the one that I am referring to here is that these are specific six recommendations that were directed to the department and that these are the OPV research recommendations.

So appointed through the ministerial order, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Programs Committee evaluates grant applications and makes recommendations to the minister. In this committee do you have members with lived experience, particularly those who are victims of hate crimes?

Ms Lajeunesse: Thank you for the question. I will ask ADM Ross Nairne to describe the membership of that committee.

Mr. Nairne: Sorry. Is that the Hate Crimes Committee liaison, or which committee? The organization to prevent violence?

Mr. Haji: The Victims of Crime and Public Safety Programs Committee.

Mr. Nairne: Oh, the committee. That committee is staffed by people who volunteer to participate on the committee. They go through a normal recruitment process and are, you know, selected by the minister to serve on that committee. In terms of the competencies that they have for each position, I don't know if lived experience is specifically one of the competencies that we look for for the committee. However, we do look for a broad, diverse perspective to provide recommendations to the department and to the minister.

Mr. Haji: My follow-up question would be that according to the research that the government funded during the reporting period, nearly 50 per cent of racial and ethnic and gender-diverse minorities in the general population report experiencing hate. My question is: what is the representation of these groups within the committees?

Ms Lajeunesse: We can commit to bringing that information to the committee.

Mr. Haji: Okay. Well, I will give you the remaining three seconds.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to questions from government caucus committee members, and MLA Rowsell will start us.

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you very much. I would like to discuss the recommendations of the Auditor General for the department to "implement a system to develop and maintain a provincial hazard assessment," which you did mention a little bit in your report. I see that this is related to another recommendation, which is to improve the monitoring and reporting of recommendations through a postincident disaster review.

The department has indicated that both these recommendations will be implemented through the development of the provincial hazard identification and risk management report, which will incorporate a section summarizing the [government of Alberta's] approach to responding to identified hazards and the corresponding risks, including the actions to be taken to implement the [postincident assessment] recommendations.

I'd just like you to share kind of the steps that are being taken to ensure the tools and the training are fully validated and in place by 2025 in order to fully implement this recommendation.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that question. As you mentioned, this work was fully underway in 2023, during this reporting period, so a lot of work has been done since that time to try to ensure that we have the high-risk system up and running, fully validated, and in place in order to implement the outstanding recommendations from the Auditor General. Work completed thus far includes, from November 2023 to February 2024, the agency-held HIRA local authority pilot sessions with various communities in the Bow Valley corridor, Lethbridge, and Whitecourt. These sessions included the application of the high-res reference guide to a hypothetical scenario and an overview of the high-res e-learning and in-person courses. Fifty-eight participants attended the sessions with representatives from municipalities, First Nations, the government of Canada, including Parks Canada, and other GOA departments.

The HIRA e-tool alpha functional testing was completed late this year. This testing included government of Alberta partners and staff from the city of Lethbridge and Lac Ste. Anne county. HIRA staff have presented an overview of the work to the Alberta Municipalities

and Rural Municipalities of Alberta conferences last year. Further work is still anticipated for this year and into 2025 in order to meet those OAG recommendations. So there will be primary statistical validation of the method – that was already done – while secondary validation is scheduled to be completed this summer.

The HIRA application in-person course is on track to be approved later this fall, and the e-tool course is in development, with two rounds of testing scheduled for this summer and its first pilot session tentatively also scheduled for this fall prior to that final validation. Critical infrastructure GIS mapping is on track, with the final layer of confirmations expected in the summer. The HIRA GIS dashboard is under development, with the overall build and testing to be completed by March 2025, as we've committed, as mentioned previously, to address this recommendation. Commencement of training with stakeholders will also occur this fall.

I think I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you very much.

I see that the department is reviewing whether the OAG's recommendations for the department to "develop and approve a business plan with measurable desired results for the Victims of Crime and the Public Safety Fund" and to "publicly report on the results of this business plan" are still relevant given the significant changes to the program. Could the department please speak to the differences introduced through the new victim assistance program and the new regional governance model for victim services delivery?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that. As mentioned in my earlier comments and as the Auditor General mentioned as well, we've revamped these programs significantly. We are wanting to work closely with the OAG to determine if those original recommendations still relate to the programs as they exist now, which they weren't in that form at that time.

In terms of the overall change, it is bucketed into sort of two different main areas: the victims of crime assistance program and the regional governance model for RCMP-based victim services in smaller, rural, and remote communities. So just a bit of an understanding of the differences that have occurred from the prior programming: the new VAP program was announced in July 2022, and it provides significant enhancements to the previous victims' financial benefits program. The new program provides an array of options to mitigate the immediate after-effects of a crime and assist victims as they navigate through the criminal justice system.

These changes include immediate access of up to \$1,000 to assist with urgent, unanticipated care and/or support scenarios; quick access to emergency financial assistance for things such as safety and security expenses – this could be repairs to damaged doors or windows or enhanced door locks or security systems and that sort of thing – emergency short-term accommodations if needed; medical aid such as ambulance services, canes, walkers, prescription glasses, and that sort of thing; emergency travel, if needed, to escape domestic violence; access to immediate counselling services; and direct billing for extended medical health benefits through the Alberta Blue Cross plan, that means victims don't have to pay out of pocket to receive support. That is also a significant change that is very in support of victims and their immediate circumstances when they undergo a significant event that they need assistance with.

In terms of the regional governance model for the RCMP-based victim services in Alberta's small, rural, and remote communities we have gone to a new regional governance model for delivery of these services. This is intended to enhance supports for people in those smaller communities, provide more consistency and stability

of funding for those programs overall. Victim services will be delivered by four regional victim-serving societies working within an integrated model rather than the previous model in which 60 victim-serving societies operated independently of one another.

Although board governance is moving toward integration, all front-line services remain local. Communities throughout the province continue to have decentralized victim services personnel that are located in their RCMP local detachments. In fact, the new model shores up some detachments that previously did not have services. Alberta will provide stable funding to these new societies so that front-line personnel can focus on assisting victims rather than trying to fund raise to support their operations. Cost savings from the move to regionalized governance will be redirected to the front-line direct service delivery.

8:40

Under the previous model many victim services units had to rely on charitable donations, things like casino funds and that sort of thing, to provide those essential services. The addition of a full-time, centralized professional support staff within each of the four victim-serving societies will provide real-time strategic, logistical, and administrative support to those front-line employees and a stronger and more readily accessible governance structure, which will in turn stabilize supports to victims in rural areas.

I might say, too, that the creation of those four broader agencies allows for a much more streamlined approach to co-ordinate services across the province if that is required.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you very much.

I'll cede the rest of my time to Member Lundy.

Mr. Lundy: All right. Thank you, and thank you, of course, to the ministry officials who are joining us this morning. I'd like to start with a couple of questions on ALERT. On page 20 of the annual report it discusses the Alberta law enforcement response teams, or ALERT, which

since 2006 . . . has been building safer communities in Alberta by arresting more than 10,000 individuals, issuing 34,000 charges, and seizing close to \$1 billion in illegal drugs.

I also see that

ALERT is dedicated to investigating online child exploitation, organized crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, auto crimes, and rural property crime, as well as managing Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, which is connected to all provinces across Canada.

Through the chair, on page 21 it mentions that in '22-23 \$44.1 million plus an additional \$5 million advance payment from '21-22 was spent to support ALERT in their activities to support safer communities. What initiatives did this funding support in '22-23, and how did this funding support ALERT in keeping Albertans in our communities safe?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for the question, through the chair. As you mentioned, in 2022-23 ALERT was successful on a number of fronts supporting the safety and security of Albertans. This is done primarily through reducing the flow of illegal drugs and through the seizure of a variety of drugs, including fentanyl, opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine, and other illicit drugs; targeting organized crime groups to reduce victimization related to drugs, gang activity, and firearm offences; arresting perpetrators of human trafficking and providing referrals, resources, and/or trauma care through the safety network co-ordinators to those victims; and targeting online predators to protect children from exploitation, sexual abuse, self-harm, and/or child luring, and that is through the ICE, Internet child exploitation, unit.

They've also done work recovering stolen property and automobiles. Just to give you a bit of a flavour of the specific successes on those fronts, in the reporting year here, '22-23, ALERT was working in every area of the province, and specialized units arrested 309 offenders, laid 1,548 charges, seized 102 illegal firearms, and recovered more than \$8 million in stolen property, including 245 stolen vehicles, and seized and processed over \$1.4 million in civil forfeitures. They laid 815 charges, arrested 133 people for drug-related activities, seized 70 firearms, and recovered 232 stolen automobiles.

Mr. Lundy: All right. Through the chair, thank you for that information.

I'd like to drill down a little bit on one of the areas that you just spoke to, children and youth. We know with today's children and youth having so much access to the Internet, there are inherent risks of bad actors using the Internet to harm youth and children. Pages 28 and 29 of the annual report discuss the Alberta government's effort to prevent Internet and child exploitation. I see that in '22-23 expenditures for the Internet child exploitation unit were approximately \$8 million, with \$5.6 million provided by the province. Through the chair, could you please expand on how this funding supported efforts to protect children and youth in Alberta?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that question. As you mentioned, of course, we're in a day and age where children have vast access to the Internet and all of the negative things that go with it. Conversely, so do those bad actors who are out there who are able to utilize the Internet for those nefarious purposes. Education, awareness is absolutely one of the key strategic objectives of the ICE unit for the past few years. Since tracking began on community engagement and ICE, they have delivered approximately 70 community presentations. These community engagement events have been well received, with many positive notes being received by persons in attendance and the value of having ICE members speak to those local groups, being able to provide their invaluable expertise on this topic. The need for ICE to be involved in this realm is important as not only are we well positioned to speak on safety and hear about an ICE investigation because of their experience; it also allows access to the communities that are served to hear more specifically about the problems being experienced in those areas. So this is a pillar of community policing.

The purposes and mandate of the child exploitation teams will not be working in isolation in the ICE office but also to create and develop partnerships with other advocacy groups to amplify the ability for not only ICE but various stakeholders to interdict, educate, and put parents in a position to better protect their children. ICE representatives have a seat at the national working group on cybercrime through Public Safety Canada. They also sit on the subgroup on sextortion and online exploitation, and they received special permission to be on the committee after being invited based on Alberta's involvement and interaction in various aspects of child protection. They were asked to speak at several events like the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, Alberta provincial justices association, Alberta Teachers' Association, all with a view of educating the judiciary and other people involved such as executive police members on the work of ICE, the challenges and the strategies and the support they need to move those initiatives forward.

ICE, through ALERT communications, also has various resources and links to educational material that's on the ALERT website. Through community engagement events via teachers' associations they have had communication about involvement in curriculum information for material to be taught in schools for online safety.

In terms of a few of the key statistics in the reporting year there were almost 3,000 file intakes by the unit, 81 arrests, 351 charges laid, and 46 children rescued.

Mr. Lundy: Great. Thank you so much for that information.

I'd like to wrap up this block switching over to Alberta's safer communities and neighbourhoods. Of course, our UCP government is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of all Albertans. I see that

Alberta's Safer Communities and Neighborhoods ([or] SCAN) units are improving community safety by targeting and, if necessary, shutting down residential and commercial buildings regularly used for criminal activities. This includes activities such as producing, selling, or using illegal drugs; prostitution, solvent abuse or the unlawful sale and consumption of alcohol; ... gang activity, organized crime, and the exploitation of children.

I see on page 23 that "in '2022-23, the annual expenditures for the SCAN program were \$3.3 million." Through the chair, I see that there's a commitment to increase the number of investigator positions from 20 to 40 in '23-24. Can you please provide an update on the status of this commitment?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you very much. We're pleased to say that the SCAN units have continued to be expanded since this reporting period. It was first established by the sheriffs branch in 2008 and, as you mentioned, authorized to investigate complaints under the SCAN Act. Currently SCAN has 44 full-time employees and has an annual budget now of \$5.8 million. So we have definitely made strides in terms of expanding the ability and capacity of the SCAN unit to investigate those very serious issues.

The SCAN unit relies on authority under the act to target residential and commercial problem properties in Alberta where specified illegal activity is known to be occurring regularly. This includes drug activity, prostitution, and gang-related crime. SCAN holds owners accountable ...

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

We will now proceed to questions from committee members of the Official Opposition in another block of 10 minutes.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Page 39 of the annual report discusses emergency management in Alberta. Can the deputy minister tell the committee how many states of local emergency were declared in 2022-23?

Ms Lajeunesse: Thank you for the question. I'm not sure if I have that at hand. Stephen, do you have that?

Mr. Lacroix: Nor do I, but we can take this under advisement and get it back to you. I would say, though, through the chair, that fortunately, maybe, '22-23 was a relatively quiet year as it relates to natural disasters. But we can provide that exact number.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Can you confirm here at the table, though: does the ministry track the number of local emergencies that are ...

Mr. Lacroix: A hundred per cent.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. It'll take me – actually, I can do it when we take a break, and I'll get the number right back to you.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. Can you give us a breakdown of the types of local emergencies that were declared as well? Fire, flood,

tornado. When you report back to the committee, can you give us a breakdown of the types of local emergencies?

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. Through the chair, it'll take me just a bit longer, but we have those details at our fingertips.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

Performance measure 4(a) in the annual report discusses provincial review of local emergency management plans. I'm just wondering what kinds of reviews the department does for management of local emergencies after the fact. So a local emergency is declared. The emergency is over. Does the department do any review of how the local authorities managed those emergencies after the fact?

8:50

Ms Lajeunesse: We certainly do. Not only do we assist local authorities throughout the year to prepare and develop those plans and provide the requisite training to do that, but we certainly are in a position to work with them after the fact on a continuous improvement basis. I will have Steve Lacroix give . . .

Mr. Schmidt: No; that was an answer to my question.

Can the department tell us what was learned from the reviews that were completed in '22-23? I'm looking specifically for any deficiencies that were discovered about how local authorities managed emergencies.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that.
Steve?

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. Mr. Chair, there are – what? – 332 municipalities in the province, 48 First Nations, and eight Métis settlements, so the range of challenges that are posed across a wide array of capabilities in this province will vary greatly. If we focus, within the scope of this committee's work, on '22-23, actually, there were no significant lacks in terms of what was made available to them other than those very municipalities' ability to professionalize their own emergency management architecture, if you will.

Again, this varies greatly. Some of them have very mature and robust emergency management professionals working for their municipalities, mostly informed by recent or not-so-recent history of natural disasters facing their communities. Some of them have been blessed inasmuch as they haven't been hit as hard, and when it happens for the first time, for many of those communities, they do realize that they need to maybe bolster their defences, if you will.

Now, that being said, our very decentralized system has our field officers deployed across the province, validating those emergency preparedness plans in each of those municipalities to the tune, I think, of about 93 per cent every year being visited, and then based on those plans and their postincident assessments of those communities for the events that they faced, we will provide additional training. We will have them enter into mutual aid agreements with neighbouring communities, again, focusing on the resiliency of those communities.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much for that answer.

Now, in any of the reviews of how local authorities managed emergencies in 2022-23, was there anything that would suggest that provincial control of how the emergency was managed would have done better than how the local authorities had managed them?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that question. I think what's important to realize is that when a local authority – and, of course, as Stephen mentioned, depending on their size, capability, and their experiences, which vary quite greatly in terms of their capacity and ability, so there's that situation, whether there's an opportunity to help support more directly with some of those interventions but also

that emergencies and natural disasters don't have boundaries according to how the municipalities are laid out across the province. So there is always looking to be able to have a view beyond municipalities' borders to see if broader intervention might be needed.

Mr. Schmidt: Sorry. I'm having a problem, Chair, differentiating from the deputy minister's editorializing about how emergencies should be managed and anything that actually came out of the reviews. Were there any recommendations from local authority emergency management, postreviews, that suggested that there was something that the provincial government could do better if they assumed management of the emergency?

Ms Lajeunesse: In that reporting period, Stephen?

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The '22-23 year is probably not the best year to get you where you want to go, I would say. In '22-23, no, probably; 2016, absolutely, and in 2013 as well, right? There have been instances where . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. We don't have a whole lot of time.

I appreciate that the largest natural disaster in Canadian history probably could have benefited from provincial oversight, and we did actually provide that when we were in government.

But I want to go on to my next question, which is based on page 43 of the annual report, which discusses wildland urban interface field officers. Now, it's my understanding from reading the report that their job is to assess the capacity of local authorities to respond to wildfires. I'm wondering: does this section of the department do any analysis of the fiscal capacity of local authorities to fight wildfires?

Ms Lajeunesse: In terms of the WUI programs, those are teams managed by the AEMA and Forestry and Parks, and they work closely with the capacity of the local authorities, but I'll have Stephen expand on that.

Mr. Lacroix: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the purposes of this committee, again, in '22-23 the agency had just received those three wildland urban interface field officers. So it was rather – let's call it a work in progress at that particular time. To answer your question specifically, the field officers that manage that program do not delve into the financials of the local authorities, but other . . .

Mr. Schmidt: That's all I needed to know.

Ms Lajeunesse: Okay.

Mr. Schmidt: How many wildfires did local authority firefighters respond to in '22-23?

Ms Lajeunesse: I think we'd have to commit to bring that information back to you.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

I'm also interested in knowing what reviews of the responses to wildfires by local authorities were conducted in 2022-23 and any themes that popped out from the results of those reviews.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. A lot of that information would probably be provided by Forestry and Parks, but if the agency has any of that particular information, we will provide it.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. When you get back to me, I'm wondering if there were any incidents of mismanagement on the part of local authorities that popped up in '22-23.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Nothing that I'm aware of, but if we have . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Was there anything in the reviews that the department conducted that suggested that wildfire management would have been better had the province assumed control of the local authorities' firefighting forces?

Ms Lajeunesse: Again, we will look to the reviews that were undertaken as a result of this fiscal year and let you know.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Great. Thank you very much for those answers. I want to move on now to – I'll turn it over to Marie.

Ms Renaud: Sure. Thanks.

Real quick, page 29 talks about the Police Amendment Act, 2022. In particular, I had a quick question on page 30. In the three bullets that talk about the key changes in the act, the second bullet, new requirements for police to develop community safety plans and diversity and inclusion plans: could you talk to me about the framework that you're going to use to measure these plans beyond just did you get them or not?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you very much. We do have that work under way. We initiated some regulatory development around furthering the amendments that were made in 2022 to support a variety of those things. I think some of those things were undertaken in the fall, and we have some internal capacity as well to monitor the development and how robust those plans are.

Ms Renaud: Will those community safety plans be turned in to the ministry? How will the ministry know they're in place, they're sufficient?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. We do have . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

I will proceed to questions from the government caucus members. MLA McDougall.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you. As part of key objective 3.3 I see on page 38 that "in December 2022, government initiated Public Safety and Community Response Task Forces out of Edmonton and Calgary." They initiated those. "The task forces are focused on implementing initiatives that support the province's recovery-oriented system of addiction and mental health care." The report goes on to mention that "as a result of the task forces' work, Alberta Sheriffs partnered with police services in Edmonton and Calgary as part of two short term projects to help deter crime and respond to social disorder." Could the department please provide further detail on what these pilot projects entailed and what the results of these projects were?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you very much. These projects were implemented in the downtowns of both Edmonton and Calgary and involved us deploying a number of sheriffs in each city to partner with local members of those services not only to address the concerning crime and social disorder in the inner city and transit areas but also to help provide those persons that were being interacted with with more supports and resources that they might need. A total of 24 sheriffs were deployed, 12 in each city. The CPS pilot ended, I think, in June or July of that year, and the EPS pilot continued until December. A number of successes were born of those.

9:00

I can go back to revisiting a number of stats that I had in my opening comments, but I would just say that we tracked and had

tangible results for all of the arrests laid, the weapons that were confiscated, the number of people that were provided with some sort of intervention support services, and police also in detail tracked those specific tangible results. We can certainly provide more detail, but I think I covered a list of them in my opening comments. So in terms of brevity and giving the committee time for questions, I won't repeat those right now.

Mr. McDougall: As a result of those results that were measured, was there any consideration given in 2023 to renewing these projects for the future?

Ms Lajeunesse: We've continued to look at that in terms of working with the police services about – it really is about exploring with them what it is that they think they need in terms of support from the sheriffs and how we might assist. There were some preliminary reports provided to the department that we're looking at. Those conversations, of course, continue. Beyond these specific two pilots there are a number of initiatives that sheriffs are called upon to support police agencies across the province and act in support of on a variety of different tasks, whether there are time-limited situations that are happening at any given time or whether there's a request from the police to participate in a more targeted situation.

Of course, the ministry is providing funding to support 50 additional police officers in each of the cities as well, not specifically to do with the sheriffs deployment but other ways that we are supporting those cities.

Mr. McDougall: Okay. Changing direction a little bit, our government committed to working closely with Indigenous peoples in developing solutions and strategies to improve public safety in Indigenous communities and across Alberta. I'm glad to read on page 24 of the report about the public service Indigenous advisory committee, which was created to provide advice and recommendations regarding public safety matters from an Indigenous perspective to ensure government policies and program align with the needs of Indigenous communities across the province.

Can you please provide an update on the work of that committee and how its recommendations have helped inform the department's efforts to improve public safety in Indigenous communities across Alberta?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you. The Public Security Indigenous Advisory Committee, otherwise known as PSIAC, was created in November 2022 to do exactly what you mentioned in terms of providing advice and recommendations to improve public safety throughout Alberta, including Indigenous communities, and primarily to help provide recommendations to the ministry and the ministry's serving partners in this area in terms of how programs can be improved or better responsive to those unique challenges and needs by Indigenous people in the province. Since its inception the committee continues to meet regularly and sort of refine their focus and provide advice into various initiatives that the department has on the go. The work of the committee is really focused on identifying their priorities and those concerns in Indigenous communities, and where possible the government is able to provide supports in those areas.

There have been a lot of collaborative discussions with various public safety experts, including those in policing, conservation, enforcement, victim services, emergency management, and Crown prosecutors, to really help those folks who are on the front lines understand the framework of working with Indigenous communities, understand how to be most successful and effective in working with those communities in those various lines of business. As we know,

the needs of Indigenous communities and the tendency of overrepresentation in some of these areas is a very sensitive issue, and having all of those front-line partners being very engaged, providing regular education, and bringing current concerns by those various Indigenous partners to make sure that everybody is sort of aware of not only ongoing historical concerns but new and emerging concerns as proactive work with those Indigenous communities continues as a key role that the community assists with.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you.

As you know, the Indigenous community in Alberta has a proud history in this province, and its history and traditions are respected and accepted by the province. Page 29 of the annual report mentions that the Indigenous and municipal police transition study grant was officially launched in September of '22. I see that a total of \$270,000 in grant funding was provided in '22-23. Can you expand on how this grant funding helped these Indigenous communities and municipalities increase public safety?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. The Indigenous and municipal police transition study grant was really launched as a way to engage communities, Indigenous and otherwise, on helping them better explore and understand and articulate what they believe their needs for community policing are. It's been very important in the work in this space over the past couple of years to really be able to engage with those communities and understand that policing, to be effective, needs to be reflective of the community it serves.

So the work of those grants is to provide those communities with money to be able to do their own exploration into their policing needs and what that looks like for them. We've had a number of Indigenous communities as well as non-Indigenous communities apply for that funding. The work really is for them to be able to have the capacity and the funding to have an independent study done that will help them explore and articulate what their future policing needs may be.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you.

On page 39 of the report it discusses the ministry's commitment to outcome 4 of the annual report, which is to ensure that "Alberta is emergency-ready and resilient to the impacts of disasters." Can you expand on what initiatives PSES undertook in '22-23 to ensure the province was ready to respond to the emergent situations involving search and rescue?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that. As you know, the AEMA in partnership with many Alberta government departments and stakeholders employs a number of different methods to continually assess the province's emergency readiness at both individual and system-wide levels, and each of those would have their own metrics.

On an individual basis the agency's annual preparedness survey measures and assesses Albertans' reported levels of emergency preparedness across a variety of metrics, including risk awareness and preparedness actions taken. At the local response level AEMA's field officers conduct regular meetings with local authorities and First Nations across the province to evaluate local emergency plans and assist with planning and conducting local emergency exercises. As mentioned by ADM Lacroix earlier, in the reporting cycle over 93 per cent of those communities were visited by a field officer, and their emergency management plans were reviewed.

In terms of a system-wide level and the AEMA's ability to be a strong and effective co-ordinator of crossgovernment response to an emergency, each year there is a very comprehensive emergency management exercise conducted before each emergency management season is undertaken, and that really helps all the partners involved

come together in the PECC and explore through a tangible exercise what their response would be to any given emergency. There is a scenario-based exercise that typically occurs using an imagined emergency that may occur in the province, allowing all of the involved responders to practise their roles in terms of crossgovernment co-ordination and assisting a local authority.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to questions from the Official Opposition caucus members for another 10 minutes.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Page 38 discusses the task force's work between the Alberta sheriffs, CPS, and EPS to deter crime and respond to social disorder. I have a couple of questions about that. What was the total cost for both of these short-term projects?

Ms Lajeunesse: In terms of additional expenditures the ministry did not have additional expenditures as we redeployed existing sheriffs to support those cities.

Ms Renaud: So there were no new expenses, no new costs?

Ms Lajeunesse: No additional expenditures. It was existing sheriffs deployed to help for those periods of time.

Ms Renaud: Okay. So none of these initiatives were funded through the victims of crime fund?

Ms Lajeunesse: No. For the sheriffs deployment, no, they were not.

Ms Renaud: Okay. In the first few months of this pilot or short-term project the Alberta sheriffs and EPS "laid 274 charges against 66 people." That's on page 38. How many of those 66 people identified as being Indigenous or were Indigenous?

Ms Lajeunesse: I think we would have to commit to bringing that information back. I don't have that at hand.

9:10

Ms Renaud: If you would table that for the committee, that would be great.

Of the 274 people who were charged, how many were from racialized communities?

Ms Lajeunesse: Again, we will seek to bring that information back. We don't have it at hand.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Is that data that the ministry collects?

Ms Lajeunesse: We would have to check. Because these were largely police-led initiatives, we will have to check with the police services in terms of the additional data that was collected.

Ms Renaud: Does the ministry collect any race-based data?

Ms Lajeunesse: We do collect some race-based data in terms of various crimes. I would have to bring back to the committee the array of things that we track.

Ms Renaud: If you would do that, that would be great.

In March the pilot teams transported 74 people to shelters or social agencies, 23 in Calgary. How many of those folks that were transported were Indigenous or identified as Indigenous?

Ms Lajeunesse: Thank you. Through the chair, similarly, we will have to bring a breakdown back.

Ms Renaud: That would be great.

How many of those were from racialized communities for both Edmonton and Calgary?

Ms Lajeunesse: Thank you. Again, we will endeavour to provide that information.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. I look forward to getting that.

Could you give us a list of which specific social agencies people were taken to or sent to?

Ms Lajeunesse: Yes. Again, we will see what information we have.

Ms Renaud: Provide that list to the committee: that'd be great.

How many of those organizations were 12-step organizations?

Ms Lajeunesse: Thank you. We will follow that up.

Ms Renaud: Okay.

I'm going to change gears a little bit. Page 29 addresses the Indigenous and municipal police transition study grant noting, "a one-time grant up to \$30,000 to communities interested in examining the establishment of their own municipal police [force] or regional policing model." I see that 12 applications were received; nine were assessed. Could you please just generally tell the committee why the three were not assessed?

Ms Lajeunesse: At that time it was likely just a matter of the time frames for reporting. All applications either have since been through an assessment or an approval, so that was just a function of the cut-off of the timing for the report.

Ms Renaud: Just at the time of the report. Okay.

Prior to the announcement of the grant how many Indigenous communities and municipalities inquired about establishing their own police service?

Ms Lajeunesse: We would have to look into that. Certainly, we do have a number of Indigenous communities that indeed applied for the funding, so we will bring that back.

Ms Renaud: Okay. If you could also let the committee know how many municipalities inquired about establishing their own police service as well. Yes?

Ms Lajeunesse: Yes. Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Perfect.

Could the ministry or the DM tell us, when she reports this, I suppose: what were the concerns identified by the municipalities or the Indigenous communities as reasons for wanting to create their own regional police force or municipal police force?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. I would say just in general terms – and I'd welcome ADM Zablocki to supplement – that I think communities are highly interested in knowing that the community policing they have is truly responding to their unique pressures and concerns. I know that we've assisted Siksika in working towards a transition in recent years as well.

Ms Renaud: Prior to committing \$9.7 million to the city of Grande Prairie to establish a municipal police force, how many conversations about creating a municipal police force were initiated by the municipality and not the ministry?

Ms Lajeunesse: Is the question regarding Grande Prairie specifically?

Ms Renaud: Yes.

Ms Lajeunesse: I will have to go back and see if we have that.

Ms Renaud: Okay. So you'll table with the committee how many inquiries, meetings, questions were initiated by the municipality of Grande Prairie?

Ms Lajeunesse: We will see if we have that, yes. Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Okay.

Despite a lack of consultation with Grande Prairie residents and unknown cost implications, can the ministry explain the financial benefits to the taxpayers of Alberta and Grande Prairie, what the tax advantage would be to creating a municipal police force?

Ms Lajeunesse: Creating a municipal police force is within the jurisdiction of the municipality to make that decision. I'm not sure that we would have all that information, but we will see what we have.

Ms Renaud: The city of Grande Prairie policing transition final report stated that \$19 million will cover the transition costs, of which the GOA will cover \$9.7 million. Now, that report was not a feasibility study and does not investigate the additional costs like IT, equipment, resources, recruitment, and training, so what information was used by the ministry to verify the budget request amount? Was it sufficient? How does the ministry know it was sufficient? How much federal funding will be lost with the loss of RCMP service in Grande Prairie? So two questions there.

Ms Lajeunesse: In terms of your first question about the sufficiency of the budget, the ministry worked closely with Grande Prairie on this plan. Of course, we also conduct oversight in terms of any police agency that's operating in the province. Largely, a number of the financial decisions are of the local authority, and we would rely on that; however, we have worked closely to ensure that the support they need is there. Some of those transition costs will continue to be worked out in terms of the things you talked about, the infrastructure that may be already available or not, in terms of those that might transfer.

Ms Renaud: So if I am to understand, the budget will continue to be worked out, yet the ministry accepted the final stated budget of \$19 million as a transition budget?

Ms Lajeunesse: We rely on the local authority to assert what they believe their needs are to make that transition and, you know, stepped up to help them . . .

Ms Renaud: Through the chair, does the ministry assess if the budget, the transition budget, is realistic, and if so, how does the ministry assess that?

Ms Lajeunesse: I think the ministry is able to work with the local authority in terms of looking at that. Ultimately, it is their responsibility to understand what those costs are, but we also have sort of expertise in understanding the makeup and establishment of police services so would work closely with them.

Ms Renaud: Only 1 per cent of the population of Grande Prairie was able to provide feedback on a police transition. Now, does that seem sufficient, or does the ministry have concerns about that?

Ms Lajeunesse: I would have to actually go back in terms of validating that number and what those consultations looked like.

Ms Renaud: Okay. We do know that only 1 per cent of the population of Grande Prairie was able to provide feedback on a police transition, which is pretty significant, but a hundred per cent of the residents will be stuck with the bill of a transition. Again, is the ministry comfortable with that level of consultation?

Mr. Dyck: Chair, point of order. This is a point of order under 23(b). The member opposite is asking a line of questioning which is outside the scope of this committee, because this is a municipal question. We're talking about provincial politics; she's diving into municipal questions. This is outside the scope of this committee.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, first of all, let me start off by defending this point of order by welcoming the member to the committee. I know that he hasn't been here, and that's obvious from the way he's raised something that isn't a point of order. Had he read the report, he would have seen that this question is taken directly from the annual report that's under consideration here today. This is not a point of order. This is something that's well within the scope of the annual report and the department that's before us today. I would encourage the chair to find that this is not a point of order.

The Chair: Thank you.

I do agree that it's not a point of order.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll maybe just go back. Only 1 per cent of the population of Grande Prairie was able to provide feedback on a police transition, but 100 per cent of the residents will be stuck with the bill from the transition in the form of increased taxes. Is the ministry comfortable with this unacceptable level of consultation coming out of Grande Prairie? Now, I understand it is the municipality's decision, but ultimately the ministry has a degree of oversight, I'm assuming. This level of consultation before making such a huge decision for a municipality: is that sufficient for the ministry?

Ms Lajeunesse: I would say that we have a degree of oversight in terms of the delivery of policing in the province and what that looks like. We are not necessarily having direct oversight of municipalities in making their decisions.

I do have an answer to your question about the federal funding. In the current model the federal funding is a 90-10 split with the province, so there would be a 10 per cent . . .

Ms Renaud: A 10 per cent loss of federal funds?

Ms Lajeunesse: That's right.

Ms Renaud: What would the value of that 10 per cent loss be, like, just based on the numbers you had the year before, let's say?

Ms Lajeunesse: For Grande Prairie? We would have to bring that back.

Ms Renaud: Okay. If you could bring back the number of dollars that Grande Prairie will be losing in a transition that was really not supported by more than 1 per cent of the population – and the budget is a bit of a crashout at best – that would be terrific, to get also a number of how much in federal funds we're losing.

I have a minute left. I'm going to switch real quick to victims of crime. We'll have to come back to it. Obviously, we heard previously that the ministry does not have performance metrics nor reporting, and now we have budget cuts and unused funds for victims of crime. Based on a repeating recommendation and a lack of information, how does the ministry ensure the needs of victims are being met?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you. I think, actually, the new victim services model actually provides sustainable funding for those victim-serving societies that was not in place with any amount of consistency in the prior model. That is definitely one way we're ensuring that victims are receiving the supports they need.

I think the other key point of the new model is to ensure that there's more ability for sort of the administrative tasks in those societies, more capability and more ability to co-ordinate . . .

9:20

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed with questions from government caucus members. MLA Dyck.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you very much, Chair. Thank you very much for being here as well. Just on emergency readiness, key objective 1.3 is to "review the delivery of policing services in the province," and on page 29, continuing with Grande Prairie's support of \$9.7 million in "establishing a municipal police service that will accommodate the unique needs of [our] community," with funding being distributed over two years, beginning in '23-24, my first question is: how will this funding work to ensure Albertans feel safe and confident in their communities?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that question. The implementation of that municipal police service in Grande Prairie, as mentioned, was the decision of the city of Grande Prairie. The GOA is certainly supporting that transition through that grant funding over that two-year period, as mentioned. Having their own police service in Grande Prairie allows the Grande Prairie residents to better design their own public safety model and ensure that the model they develop is responsive to the needs they feel are most important to their community. We continue to meet with them – with the leaders, with the city of Grande Prairie, with the Grande Prairie Police Commission, Public Safety Canada, and the RCMP – to help work through that transition process to ensure that it is smooth, that the Grande Prairie police service continues to be able to recruit and hire the police officers they need.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you very much.

Can you please provide a status update on the establishment of the municipal police service in the city of Grande Prairie?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Maybe I'll turn to ADM Zablocki for that information.

Mr. Zablocki: Yeah. Thank you. Through the chair, I can advise that the recruitment plan is on track for the city of Grande Prairie and their new Grande Prairie police service. Actually, during the month of May here they are proceeding with their first recruitment class. They have a second recruitment class scheduled for September of this year as well. Again, things are on track in Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you very much, and thank you for the work you guys have done on that police service as well. A big fan of what's happening there.

Moving on to red tape reduction, on page 18 of the annual report it indicates that the Alberta government has made a commitment "to regulatory approaches and program delivery that reduces unnecessary government oversight and emphasizes outcomes, to improve access to government services, attract investment, support innovation and competitiveness, and grow Alberta businesses." I see, specifically, that "Public Safety and Emergency Services

supported this priority commitment by eliminating 2,582 regulatory requirements by the end of March 2023 [which is] a 17 per cent overall reduction.” Just really well done. That’s incredible: 17 per cent. Thank you very much for doing that. It really helps out the taxpayer here in Alberta as well as, I’m sure, the department. My question is: can you and the department please share some of the red tape reduction efforts that were undertaken to achieve this reduction?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that question, through the chair. As you’re likely aware, in terms of when we consider red tape, we consider not only things that are specifically embedded in regulation but also other administrative processes, forms, and those sorts of things that are considered to be burdensome on Albertans when they are using our system.

We’ve done a number of things. We have a very large ministry, as you know, that’s very front line and operational, so we really focused on where we could have impact on those direct things that our clients or the people we serve interact with quite frequently. We’ve made a number of updates to forms within the correctional services area. We repealed and consolidated, you know, where we had a number of forms in place before, really narrowing that down to what was really needed. We did reduce some requirements in applications for individual licences under the Security Services and Investigators Act, and we repealed a number of forms used under the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act.

At the end of this particular reporting period we were continuing to look at reviewing the variety of other permits and licences that we administer and issue as a ministry and which of those can be reduced or consolidated or otherwise reduce the burden for Albertans that need to interact with those forms to acquire our services.

In terms of security services’ and investigators’ licences, that included reducing the burden to both individuals and businesses. We dealt with some body armour control permits as well. To date we’re pleased, as you mentioned, to continue to meet our internal service standards for processing these permits.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you very much for doing the hard work of reducing red tape internally.

Now, going on to some urban crime, I’m hearing about increased mental health challenges and drug addiction in urban areas, and on page 15 of the annual report the ministry highlights its actions on addressing “crime in the downtown areas by launching temporary Alberta sheriff deployments in partnership with Edmonton and Calgary Police Services.” My first question on this is: can you explain what work was done in 2022 and ’23 to address mental health challenges and drug addiction in urban centres?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that, through the chair. As you’re probably aware, we don’t work in isolation, and a lot of this work is done in close collaboration with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction. Over this period MHA invested almost \$8 million over three years to increase the number of police and crisis, otherwise known as PACT, teams in both Calgary and Edmonton. These teams pair police constables with mental health therapists from Alberta Health Services to respond to 911 calls where there is a mental health concern. Police and mental health therapists work together to assess a client’s mental health challenge and determine what support might be required to keep both the individual and the community safe.

The government is adding 12 new PACT partnerships in each city. This will effectively double the number of PACT teams in Calgary, increasing from 12 to 24, and triple them in Edmonton, increasing from six to 18. These partnerships will certainly better

support Albertans struggling with those. Mental health challenges, as we know, are a concern, for sure, in the public safety realm, so to ensure Albertans across the province have access to addiction treatment, the government is building 11 recovery communities and adding more than 10,000 publicly funded spaces, including detox treatment and recovery spaces as well.

There are certainly some sister initiatives being undertaken within our correctional centres to offer services more in line with a recovery-oriented system of care to support those people in our correctional centres with those acute issues, to be able to give them better treatment through our therapeutic living units prior to their release.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very, very much for that.

Following up on this, many people living in urban communities are becoming fearful or reluctant to enter certain areas of these urban communities. What did the department do in 2022-2023 to reduce this fear and reluctance?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you. We’ve all heard of those concerns, particularly concentrated in the downtown cores and around the transit systems, which, of course, generates, you know, not unfounded and significant concerns by people who require those transit systems to get around in their daily life. We invested in both cities, in Calgary and Edmonton, with Alberta transit system cleanup grants to help them identify improvements they could make to those particular areas, which were of obvious concern, to clean those up, making it a safer, more welcoming environment. We continue to enhance access to a recovery-oriented continuum of mental health and addiction services and supports that, of course, incorporates prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery.

Many communities across Alberta are experiencing elevated rates of overdoses, violent crime, and social disorder. We are certainly well aware that in order to understand crime, we need to understand how addiction and mental health and homelessness are interrelated, complex issues that need to be dealt with in a co-ordinated way, so we continue to work with our policing partners in developing strategies to address those very complex challenges.

Another initiative we committed to during this time frame was to provide the funding for those additional 50 officers in each of Edmonton and Calgary. That work, I’m pleased to say, continues to be under way, and we expect to see those additional resources in the streets over the coming months. As we know, a visible presence of police officers certainly helps with a deterrent situation for those criminal activities that occur in those areas. We’re looking very much forward to seeing the results of those additional resources when that initiative is completed.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you very much.

On the 911 program, in my last 30 seconds. The 911 program was given \$43.36 million to public safety answering points, which represents just over a \$13 million increase over the last fiscal. How did this increased funding help strengthen and support the delivery of local 911 services?

End time. Back to you.

9:30

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will proceed with questions from the Official Opposition caucus member for another 10 minutes.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I go back to victims of crime, I just had a quick question. I’m assuming that the ministry has a unique view of the challenges faced from, you know, all law enforcement organizations right across the province. I’m just

wondering if the ministry could speak on the difficulty organizations are having with recruitment.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Of course, recruitment has been a challenge, as you know, in terms of policing. Maybe I'll have ADM Zablocki expand on that.

Mr. Zablocki: Through the chair, thank you for that question. Very, very good question. Recruitment and retention, I would suggest, are challenges for policing services not only in Alberta and law enforcement not only in Alberta but across the country and, quite frankly, across North America, so many law enforcement agencies have a very distinct, focused effort on recruitment and have expanded their approaches to recruitment. The issue continues to exist, and you know it's hoped that over time those challenges will be met and law enforcement more broadly could be considered a profession that more of our young people would like to be involved in.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Well, thank you for that. I'm certainly grateful to everyone who decides to enter that profession.

My question is: does the ministry – I'd just like their opinion, because it is sort of laced throughout the annual report. They don't say specifically that they think it's a good idea to create new law enforcement organizations, like, let's say, a municipal police force in Grande Prairie or wherever the case may be. Does the ministry believe that this will influence in a positive way recruitment and retention, or will it create more difficulties?

Ms Lajeunesse: I think in a general sense and what we've heard in the past and particularly as it has related to RCMP recruitment: that ability to work or return to your home community is one that's been, I would say, a consistent theme. Having those municipalities with their own police services that are able to recruit from their local community and really have a distinct understanding of those local challenges, be able to relate to those, and feel that satisfaction of being able to do that work in their communities we feel is a positive step.

Ms Renaud: Do you have a position, then, on RCMP members not being able to contribute those things that the DM just sort of outlined?

Ms Lajeunesse: The RCMP actually has been reviewing and updating their policies in terms of allowing people to return to their home province and home communities as well.

Ms Renaud: Are there any concerns at all – now, I know the RCMP does a great job, the GRC, of being bilingual or both languages, both Canadian languages. Any concerns about, say, a municipal police force in Grande Prairie not being able to offer the same services in French, let's say?

Ms Lajeunesse: I think there are a number of municipal police services operating in the province that might not necessarily have that as a distinct requirement and have been effective.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I'm going to move on to victims of crime questions. On page 33 objective 3.1 is "to ensure victims have the help they need, when they need it." Now, the Auditor General has repeatedly discussed the risks of not having performance metrics in reporting. How does the ministry ensure the needs of victims are being identified and met? I'm not talking about citing budget amounts or what was placed where, but what metrics is the ministry using to determine whether or not those investments are having the impact they want?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you very much for that question. Although those particular measures and metrics and the information we track are not necessarily some of those specific ones in the annual report, we certainly do have a large cache of information and statistics that we do measure in terms of calls for service and services provided by those victim-serving units. I might invite Ross Nairne to expand on that or Trent.

Mr. Nairne: I'll start off, Chair, if that's okay, and then I'll ask my director of victims services to come forward and provide some perspective. It was, you know, the MLA task force that looked at this issue in 2019 and 2020 and provided recommendations. They really focused on taking a more holistic view of how victims services provided across the province and ensuring consistency . . .

Ms Renaud: Sorry. I'm sorry to interrupt. I don't have much time. I do know that committee. I do know their work. I did read the report. But I'm asking: what came from that report? What was translated into metrics? It's very difficult for a committee member, let's say, to know that the needs of victims are being met if we don't have any metrics to look to. I think that's why the Auditor General was so very specific about how long they have repeated the same recommendation. Going to my question: specifically what are the metrics that the minister uses? I don't need a summary of the report, necessarily.

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Maybe we'll invite Trent to offer some comment as there are a number of metrics that are tracked in terms of actual service delivery by those units.

Mr. Forsberg: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Trent Forsberg, director of victims services. Through the chair, the program has been set up to be quite responsive to inputs, especially in its first year of operation. For example, there are many different options available to victims of crime. One that wouldn't have been available at the beginning, when we first implemented in September 2022, would have been something like scar removal or branding removal for human trafficking victims. As those requests come in or as those files are adjudicated, we have the ability within policy then to take a look and see what is within the spirit of the original decision of the original program and then make those changes to policy, hold that adjudication, and be able to provide those services. Those are the types of inputs we're looking at and that we're trying to measure. Eventually, I assume the products available will somewhat stabilize, but currently the design has been responsive.

Ms Renaud: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate the example of how the services are expanded. That's terrific.

My question is about metrics. How do we know what metrics are in place for us as simple committee members to know that the ministry is, you know, making the gains that they wanted to make? In November 2021 the Auditor General report highlighted the changes to the victims of crime fund under the UCP following the changes that we saw in legislation, noting a 50 per cent decrease in financial benefits, from \$10 million to \$5 million, and a 49 per cent increase in public safety initiatives, \$25.5 million to \$38 million. In 2022-23 we can see the program expands for financial benefits – the victims benefit was cut again and then underspent by almost half. Based on the fact that there are no metrics, how does the ministry let Albertans know that the needs of victims of crime, expanded needs in many cases, those victims of crime needs, are being met?

Mr. Forsberg: We do monitor, actually, each of those options, for usage rates . . .

The Chair: If you can introduce yourself before you answer.

Mr. Forsberg: Okay. Sorry. Again, Trent Forsberg, director of victims services, through the chair. My apologies.

Again, each of those particular line items or options for victims are measured as far as cost and usage rates and frequency, so they are monitored. The ...

Ms Renaud: It seems to me like the severe crime index has not indicated to us that things have gotten better in Alberta, significantly better, that there are more victims of crime, that the crime is severe still, yet we are underspending the funds that go to the specific victims of crimes, not the initiatives but the victims of crime. So I'm really struggling to understand how the ministry measures whether or not the needs of victims of crime are being met.

Mr. Forsberg: Well, the budget was increased from \$5 million to \$12 million in particular for the victims assistance program, so we definitely are monitoring what we can add and still stay within budget and watching it trend. The usage rates are trending up. We don't have enough data on the ground yet to know whether the parabolic curve is going to move up or whether it's going to start to flatten. Right now it's a straight line increase in usage, especially as people become more and more aware of the options available to them.

Ms Renaud: My question, then, maybe for the deputy minister: how do you report to Albertans that you are assured – again, we're looking backwards – that the victims of crime needs were met without any kind of metrics? Clearly, there's a reduction in spending or the usage of the funds that were delegated or assigned to the ministry, so how does the ministry report to Albertans that, yes, victims of crime needs are being met?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. I'll just start with that. There was a change in terms of some of the elements that were considered in that line item, so that would account for some of the reduction of expenditures.

There is certainly, as Trent mentioned, a monitoring and trending of the actual usage of the types of services that are needed, and the model is built to be responsive for that.

I think, Ross, you wanted to add to that.

Mr. Nairne: Thank you, Rae-Ann, Chair. I think the other part of this is that close to 80 per cent of funds flow through to the regional victim services societies that were created on the 1st of April, and through that grant agreement, you know, there would be specific report-back mechanisms in terms of ...

9:40

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will move back to the government caucus for another 10-minute block.

Ms Lovely: Rural crime rates remain high, leaving these communities feeling uneasy. According to key objective 1.1 on page 20 of the annual report: "To deter crime and increase the visible presence of law enforcement in rural areas, [your PSES] has implemented the Rural Alberta Provincial Integrated Defence (RAPID) Response." With that said, can you expand on how sheriffs supported the effort to reduce rural crime in 2022-23?

Ms Lajeunesse: For sure. Thank you for that question, through the chair. As mentioned earlier, I had a variety of statistics in my opening comments about some of those key accomplishments by

the RAPID initiative. I won't necessarily repeat all of those for the sake of your time, but I will also mention that, of course, there was an injection of funding into the sheriff's branch in terms of \$27.3 million added to their budget, and a number of new initiatives through the sheriffs were announced at that time, including the establishment of fugitive apprehension teams and an additional surveillance unit for the rural areas. We continue to move on those initiatives in terms of staffing them up and having them come into full fruition over the coming year. We're looking forward to some more achievements on that front.

Of course, under RAPID – I did mention earlier – the sheriffs were given those additional authorities that enable them to respond to impaired driving and other criminal traffic offences, and we have additional funding marked for the sheriff's highway patrol to continue to train and equip its members to assist the local police with jurisdiction with emergencies and other high-priority calls.

We did invest \$4.3 million to create a two plainclothes sheriff's team that will be working on surveillance in the rural areas on criminal targets, and that will enhance their existing surveillance capacity and provide that extended support to RCMP detachments for those local investigations.

As mentioned and discussed earlier, the SCAN teams have been increased as well, several new positions being added to those various regional hubs, and that will give them added capacity to be able to deal with those problematic business individual properties that are conducting those criminal activities that they seek to target, and the fugitive apprehension sheriff support team will be working closely with police to identify those individuals who are high risk, who might be in breach of various release conditions, to locate them, and bring them back into custody.

Ms Lovely: I'd like to ask a question regarding the electronic monitoring pilot program. Key objective 3.2, as seen on page 36 of the annual report, is to "continue to implement digital transformation to improve Albertans' access to services, promote system sustainability and reduce red tape." I see on page 36 that

in alignment with the government's commitment to expand the use of electronic monitoring technology, and supported by IOMS, the department moved forward [in June 2022] with establishing an electronic monitoring pilot program ... for clients released from custody on temporary absence permits.

Could the ministry please provide details on this program. How does the electronic monitoring help reduce crime and keep Albertans safe, and what metrics did the department use to track the outcomes of this pilot program?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you very much. That existing electronic monitoring project, as you mentioned, relates to those individuals in custody who seek to have a temporary absence approved for their temporary release from a correctional facility, maybe during their period of custody or near the end. That's facilitated using RePath. It's a mobile phone based application that has GPS-enabled surveillance to monitor those clients. We do an assessment as to whether they're appropriate to be released on a temporary absence. If necessary, we use this technology to track them. The metrics in terms of really measuring the success of those outcomes is the number of clients that were placed on that RePath program and how many successfully completed those periods of supervision. I'm certainly able to provide more details through the ADM of correctional services on some of those results if needed.

Ms Lovely: Thank you.

Performance measure 1(c) on page 32 of the annual report reflects the number of police officer and law enforcement civilian positions that are funded by the government of Alberta. I see that

over the past five years the government of Alberta has steadily increased the number of provincially funded police officer positions from 1,900 in 2018-19 to 2,255 in '22-23, an increase of 14.9 per cent. I also see that as part of its commitment to address rural crime, the ministry is hiring additional RCMP members to strengthen the province's ability to respond to rural crime. How did the hiring of additional police officers in '22-23 promote public safety and deter crime in our communities? I see the funding for additional police officer positions is provided through a new funding police model. Could you please elaborate on this new funding model and how it's helping meet the public safety needs of rural Albertans such as those in my constituency?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you for that, through the chair. The police funding model allows a reinvestment from those communities who have those police contracts in place with us. It allows the ministry to redistribute and allow for more resources in areas as they are needed across the province. In '22-23 40 police officer and 52 civilian positions were called up to support policing public safety and deter crime in these communities through the funding acquired through the police funding model.

The efforts of these particular increases in positions were on the rural police and crisis teams that we talked about earlier, which involves teams of registered psychiatric nurses and RCMP members that provide crisis response to intervene, assess, and support people having a mental health crisis in the community, and district relief teams for southern, western, and eastern Alberta districts. Police officers are assigned to cover urgent demand for service, who may be deployed across a district, and resources are not attached to a singular detachment. That allows for more flexibility to assist in those particular areas of need at a particular time.

These efforts were focused on the following civilian member positions, which included youth program officers, community program officers, and district support personnel. It's always important to realize that boots on the street are certainly one resource that's needed, but in the entire spectrum of providing those policing services effectively in a community, you need a number of other positions as well in those frameworks to make the entire service delivery effective.

So '22-23 was the third year of operation for the police funding model, with over \$46 million in generated revenue for reinvestment into policing and really placing a priority on increasing that front-line and core policing but also augmenting necessarily specialized services, as I mentioned, to support the delivery of adequate and effective policing across all areas policed by the RCMP. This includes support for rural detachment enhancements.

These are the priorities in the first few years of reinvestment: expansion of aerial observation capabilities; undertaking methamphetamine and opioid initiatives; addressing auto theft; augmenting specialized services for crime reduction; continuing to advance the call management initiative; enhancing general investigative, or GIS, services; and further supporting vulnerable persons, missing persons, and homicide investigations in small and rural Alberta communities.

The police funding regulation provides, for the 2020-21 fiscal year, \$23,250,000, representing 10 per cent of front-line policing costs, growing to almost \$35 million in the second year, representing 15 per cent of the front-line policing costs, and, for the reporting period that we're discussing today, over \$46 million, representing 20 per cent of those costs.

Ms Lovely: Human trafficking is a heinous and unthinkable crime that violates a person's most basic human rights, and this government is

taking action to combat human trafficking in the province. Turning to page 28 of the annual report, it mentions that in October 2022 Alberta announced \$22.8 million in new funding to fight against human trafficking, including establishing an Alberta Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons, with funding being distributed over three years. How did this funding contribute to the government's efforts to combat human trafficking?

Ms Lajeunesse: Sure. Thank you. As with many questions we've had before and on this topic in particular, there's always a need for a multidisciplinary or a multifaceted approach to these complex problems. Of course, we have ALERT, who maintains human trafficking units in both Edmonton and Calgary. These investigating units have and continue to investigate incidents of human trafficking. They have rescued many victims and laid a number of charges at the conclusion of these investigations, and of course human trafficking works to connect victims with supports.

Internal to the ministry we've done a lot of work to establish the Alberta Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons, otherwise known as AOCTP, and so during the time frame that we're talking about – of course, the office is quite a bit more established now, but during the time in question a variety of in-person workshops were held to help, including representatives from human trafficking focused community-based organizations, law enforcement . . .

9:50

The Chair: Thank you.

For the final round members will read questions into the record for a written response, starting with the Official Opposition caucus.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm certain we've all heard anecdotal reports about law enforcement misunderstanding movements or behaviours of people with disabilities, whether they're autistic or perhaps having a seizure, and inadvertently, you know, maybe are reacting in a way that they shouldn't. These things happen, and I think it just sort of underlines the importance of training. On page 29 and 30 in the discussion on the key changes to the Police Amendment Act, 2022, the second bullet describes a new requirement for police to develop community safety plans for diversity and inclusion plans. Going back to my comment about the importance of training, I'm wondering if the ministry could offer some comments in the reply about how this will be addressed. I'm using a very specific example from the community I represent, which is St. Albert, and that was an issue that they had last year.

I would also like a list, if possible – if the ministry could share a list with all of the initiatives that were funded in this fiscal that we're reviewing through the victim of crime fund changes.

How does the ministry ensure – so what accommodations are offered to victims of crime who identify with disabilities or who have disabilities? How are they supported and monitored? What metrics are used, if any? Just, you know, keeping in mind that this is a pretty significant portion of the population. I think the UCP's own ministry has said that about 21 per cent of the Alberta population is disabled, so I think these plans are quite important.

That is it for me.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. The department introduced amendments to the Police Act to improve police accountability and enhance public confidence by reforming police governance and oversight and strengthening ties to the communities. Can the department elaborate improvements that the government has made in strengthening community relations, relationships, and public confidence, particularly Indigenous communities, Black communities, and gender-diverse communities?

According to a study that was commissioned by the department during the reporting period, a number of interviews from Black and

Indigenous communities indicated a lack of trust in the police or believed that reporting hate crime incidents will not result in meaningful investigation or justice. What steps is the department taking to bring confidence and trust with the system among these respective communities?

That's it for me.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will move to the government caucus members for three minutes.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Chair. We're hearing about incidents of gun and gang-related violence more often in the news. Page 21 of the annual report discusses the gun and gang violence action fund, so what actions did PSES take in 2022-23 to reduce violent crimes associated with guns and gangs?

As well, key objective 4.2 on page 40 of the annual report is to "lead the implementation of a provincial hazard identification and risk assessment framework to help inform disaster risk reduction decision-making." Page 40 discusses the implementation of the HIRA in alignment with the findings of the 2020 office of the Auditor General report. What progress was made in 2022-23 towards developing and implementing the HIRA, and what benefits will this bring to Albertans?

As well, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency coordinates large-scale emergency and disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery programs and initiatives. Page 43 of the annual report details field operations for the AEMA, and I see that there are 11 regional field officers spread across the province into seven regions. Can the department please share the benefits that Albertans experienced in 2022-23 from this regional approach?

As well, performance measure 4(a) discussed on page 45 of the annual report measures the performance of local authorities visited by an Alberta Emergency Management Agency field officer and had their community emergency management plan reviewed annually.

This performance measure was introduced in the 2016-17 fiscal year. It reflects the Alberta Emergency Management Agency's efforts to plan and conduct emergency management plan reviews.

Community visits are typically within operational control unless an emergency or disaster event occurs.

I see that in 2022-23 field officer visits and community emergency management plan reviews were completed in 90 per cent of local authorities. That's 301 out of 335, meeting the target set for this year. So the questions are: how did these visits and reviews contribute to the ministry's efforts to support communities with emergency management activities, and how is this performance target set?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to thank officials from the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services and the office of the Auditor General for their participation in responding to committee members' questions. We ask that any outstanding questions be responded to in writing within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk.

Other business. Hon. members, we are nearing the end of the list of ministries that the committee has agreed to meet with. The subcommittee on committee business will meet today to recommend a schedule of the ministries for the committee during the fall session. If the subcommittee makes recommendations, a report will be made available for review at our next Tuesday committee meeting. At the meeting the committee may consider approving a schedule for the fall.

Are there any other items for discussion under other business?

The next business meeting of the committee is on Tuesday, May 28, 2024, with the Ministry of Affordability and Utilities. That meeting may be extended by half an hour to accommodate review of the subcommittee report and consideration of a new ministry schedule.

I will now call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member move that the Tuesday, May 21, 2024, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be adjourned? MLA Rowsell. All in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

This meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:57 a.m.]

