

Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025

Mr. Calandra moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to child, youth and family services, education, and colleges and universities.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the minister.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let me say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Markham–Unionville; the member for Kitchener South–Hespeler; the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services; and the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

It is, of course, a pleasure to rise today to talk about the bill that we have introduced, Bill 33.

Let me first quickly just highlight some of—where we've come.

As you know, Madam Speaker, since 2018, the government has been refocused on a mission to restore education in the province of Ontario—a back-to-basics system that puts students, parents and teachers first. As you know, in 2018, our children were certainly suffering under an education system that really wasn't reflecting the needs of the jobs of tomorrow. The results, when it came to reading and math, were certainly suffering. That is why the previous ministers moved very quickly to, as I said, restore a back-to-basics approach. Obviously, that was challenged somewhat when we faced a global health and economic emergency, but through that all, we did continue on with that progress of improving the education system for our children, and the results have been very, very, very encouraging.

This bill will highlight some additional changes that we're making in co-operation with other ministers—which is, again, a focus on improving outcomes for children across the province of Ontario.

Let me highlight, there are a number of things education-related in this bill—and I know the parliamentary assistants will also talk about some of the aspects of the bill that are unique, but I'll do a high-level approach to this.

Ultimately, what this bill does is what I said: It begins the process of restoring power back to parents, back to teachers, and focusing on outcomes for students.

One of the highlights of this bill and one of the first things I want to talk about—one of the parliamentary assistants will delve deeper into this—is the return of the school resource officer into all of our schools. Some of our school boards have continued with the school resource officer program. What this program was is a program that allowed police back into our schools. This was a very, I think, exciting program, and where it is undertaken still, currently, in the province of Ontario—I think some 30 of the 72 boards still have a program, in co-operation with local police forces.

What this bill will do is mandate that every school board will have to work with police forces, where a program is available, and we will assist in ensuring that there are programs available by working with police forces across the province of Ontario to assist them in developing programs. It allows officers back into our schools—into our high schools, into our elementary schools. Not only is it a safety function—yes, having police back in the schools—but it also gives our students the opportunity to connect in a very real way with police officers. It helps them

understand the role of a police officer, helps to demystify it, and helps them understand that law enforcement is there to help them. And it restores a sense of security into our schools. The reaction from parents on this has been very, very exciting. The reaction, obviously, from our police forces has also been one of excitement—to be provided the opportunity to get back into our schools.

Just today, I was reading, from the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board—one of those boards that has clearly been a challenge. They're excited to have officers back in their schools.

I'm going to leave it at that, because I think the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler and the parliamentary assistant will talk a bit more about that.

It's one of the things that I'm quite proud of in this bill. I, of course, acknowledge the work of the previous minister, Minister Dunlop, who was instrumental in helping to develop the program.

Another element of this bill is giving the Minister of Education the ability to approve names of schools and the changing of names of schools. I know, for some, that might appear to be a bit of an overreach. Some might argue that having the minister approve the names of every single school across the province of Ontario—every new school—or where a name change is happening is not only overreach, but it might take out local consideration or local priorities when it comes to the naming of a school. I acknowledge that it is more work for us. I acknowledge that it's more work for the ministry. But at the same time, what we have seen across the province of Ontario—and again, let me highlight the Toronto situation.

The city of Toronto, as you know, Madam Speaker, are undertaking a review of three schools at this time. They want to change the names of three schools—most notable, of course, is the name of Sir John A. Macdonald Collegiate Institute in Scarborough. This is a high school that has obviously been around for a very, very long time. We've had so much outreach from graduates of that school who are very proud to have attended Sir John A. Macdonald. But more importantly, what this is, in my estimation, is an overreach from the local board.

We can debate, and I would be very happy to debate with anybody at any time, the importance of history and the importance of preserving our history, the importance of teaching our history—the good parts of it, the bad parts of it—and not simply erasing it to answer to a small cadre of people who have demands.

Whether it's Sir John A. Macdonald or Ryerson or Henry Dundas—those are the three schools that Toronto is looking at renaming. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to decide whether they should rename their schools, and those are dollars that go directly out of the classroom for a project of renaming three schools—a project that is about erasing our history. That is something that I, as the minister; that is something that we, as the government—and I would hope, certainly, that all members would not condone.

That is why in this bill, if it is passed, the minister will have to approve changes of names. The minister will approve the name of every school in the province of Ontario. I acknowledge the fact that we are building a lot of schools across the province of Ontario. We have a massive building program. There are a lot of schools that are being built, and there are a lot of schools that are being renovated—more than at any other time in the history of the province of Ontario—but I'm excited to have that opportunity to be able to approve those names. We'll work with communities to do that. But no longer are we going to be basing the names of schools on how

we can rewrite our history and how we can erase history. And I said very clearly that this bill also highlights the fact that, once passed, if passed and approved by this Legislature, that will be retroactive to January 1, 2025.

So, very clearly, to all of those who might still be considering erasing parts of our history, who might be considering changing the names of schools—let me just be very clear to them that they should stop. If they do something that the ministry or the minister and the people do not approve of, we will force them to change the name back and maintain the existing name. I don't want to go too long on it, but this is very important.

In the rush to eliminate our history, in the rush to appease small parts of different communities, school boards—in particular, in the city of Toronto—have been nothing but gleeful in their attempts to do that.

I think the better approach is for us to acknowledge, to educate and to teach people the great things about our province, the great things about our country, and the great things that people have done to build what we have all said is the best country and the best province in the world, and we have to acknowledge those who helped make it that. At the same time, we can do that in a way that respects people. So that is why that part is in the bill.

Again, as I said very clearly, to any school board that is out there considering changing a name right now: This bill is retroactive, and on the assumption that it gets passed, we will ensure that our history remains a prominent part of how we name schools.

Another part of this bill is communicating to our child care system—it's a small part. Right now, the Minister of Education is responsible for child care in the province of Ontario but does not have the ability to communicate directly with parents on issues that are very important to them—and in particular, on funding issues.

As you know, Madam Speaker, we are currently in the process of renegotiating a new child care agreement with the federal government—an agreement that, if we cannot come to terms with, will mean some serious and fundamental changes on how the program is delivered across the province of Ontario.

As you know, in April, I did send out a letter to service managers who organized the system for us, where I outlined the fact that in the absence of a new federal funding commitment for child care, fees would have to go up. I was surprised, at that time, to learn that I could not communicate directly with parents; that I could only communicate with service managers.

This small change allows me to keep parents up to date as we continue these negotiations with the federal government—so important for families across the province of Ontario. I completely acknowledge how important this is for families. That is why I think, as we negotiate over the next number of months, we have to keep families updated as best as we possibly can with every single aspect of those negotiations. The decision-making for families when it comes to child care is a very complex one, it is a very difficult one, and the earlier we can provide the information, I think the better it is for families.

The reason I'm so worried about this, as I highlighted to operators in April, is that the federal government, of course, has acknowledged that they are underfunding the system by about \$10 billion. I'm hopeful that we will come to an agreement when it comes to child care, but if we are unable to come to an agreement that sees the federal government fund its portion, then I think

at the same time, we have to tell parents as soon as we possibly can that that commitment is not there, and that will mean a change in the fee structure for parents.

That is why I've put that small piece in the bill—a small but very, very important part of the bill.

The other part of this, of course, is the update to how we assume responsibility for boards in the province of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, as you will know, currently, in the province of Ontario, we have assumed responsibility for one board: the Thames Valley District School Board—which is London and area—one of our largest school boards in the province, with an over \$1-billion budget. A recent report on that led to us assuming responsibility for that board—in essence, firing the trustees and putting a supervisor in place to bring the board back into a healthy position. They went from multi-year surpluses in that board to a \$17-million deficit. As you know, school boards are not allowed to continue with multi-year deficits—and certainly not annual deficits—without the approval of the minister. But without a path to balance, boards are often—not often. Honestly, it is very rare; I'll give them that. It's not used very often. But in this instance, we felt it was important that the ministry assume responsibility for that board.

We also have investigations currently under way in the Toronto Catholic District School Board, the Toronto District School Board, and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. These are boards, again, that are facing multi-year deficits without an approved path back to balance.

Just to back up a bit—in order for us to make these decisions on how a board gets to be supervised, the Minister of Education is faced with an antiquated process that requires me to bring in a third-party auditor and then rely on a recommendation from a third party as to whether the ministry should assume its role, its responsibilities, and take over or assume responsibility for a school board. So, even in instances where we absolutely know that a board has gone off the rails, that they have no desire to come back into a balanced position, the minister must rely on a third party to report back and give me a recommendation.

This bill will change that. It allows the minister to not only assume responsibility without relying on a third party; it broadens the scope by which the minister might assume responsibility for a school board—not only for financial reasons, but for other reasons. It allows us to put ministry investigators directly in the position of reviewing, as opposed to looking at an outside investigative team to look at the finances. But it ultimately allows us to move much quicker, so that we can address the challenges that are being faced in school boards with respect to, more often than not, trustees who are refusing to put money into the classroom and are putting money in different areas.

You've heard, very recently, of course, that one school board in the province of Ontario sent a group of four trustees to Italy to buy art for a school and spent thousands of dollars on this excursion—literally over \$100,000, if I'm not mistaken, on buying art; expenses that were totalled over \$12,000 each, for each of these trustees to be on this trip, for business class flights, expensive meals, limousines, the whole works. No expense was spared in helping these trustees go to Italy and buy art. That investigation found that each of these trustees owed \$12,000. It wasn't just the cost of the trip—then the money that was spent to help them deal with this challenge, bringing in a crisis communicator. They spent almost as much, if not more, frankly, on a crisis communicator, on legal fees to try to defend a trip that is, frankly, indefensible, not only in my estimation, but in teachers' and parents' estimation as well.

As I said at the news conference, can you imagine trying to convince a teacher who goes to Dollarama to buy supplies for their school that somehow a group of trustees needed to spend 12,000 bucks each to go on a trip to Italy to buy over \$100,000 worth of artwork?

Three of the trustees have paid it back. One of the trustees has basically said, “I’m not paying. I’ve had enough.” They gave 2,000 bucks back, and the rest of it—“not my problem.” What makes this trustee even more aggravating is, this trustee was actually an educator before—he’s a retired educator, and I don’t have the tools, as Minister of Education, to deal with that. But I will have tools, separately—and my tool will be to bring a bill to this House to specifically remove this trustee, fire this trustee from holding the position that he currently holds.

But the bill, if passed, allows us to deal with these types of situations more quickly.

In other situations—I know we’ll get the question at some point: “What’s another situation?” Not only financial—hopefully, everybody can agree on financial. The bill also says the minister can step in in other situations. I know everybody is wondering, “Well, what does that mean? If the minister has had a bad day, he’s going to take over a school board?”

Let’s look quickly at the Peel situation, where Black students were not feeling comfortable in their own school, and the previous minister had to send an investigator into that school board and found things that none of us, I think, would agree with.

The minister’s ability, the ministry’s ability, to move quickly on clear financial mismanagement, on clear issues where students are not being put first, on issues where students are being divided, on issues where schools and trustees think that they’re in charge of geopolitical events—the ministry does not and the minister does not have the tools to move quickly to address that. This bill is all about restoring that ability.

Let’s be clear: The powers that we have given to school boards are powers that Parliament has devolved down to a school board. And what this bill does is—if passed—it restores some of those powers that we as Parliaments have given to boards, back to where they belong: into the Ministry of Education. I hope you will all agree that this is a very important tool in helping us ensure that students, parents and teachers come first in the education system.

I hope members will ultimately support the bill before them.

With that, I will cede the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The minister is sharing his time.

I recognize the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler.

Ms. Jess Dixon: It’s very gratifying to be able to rise today and speak in support of this bill, but particularly about the aspects bringing police back to schools—the school resource officer program. I brought a motion forward last year to do exactly that, because I heard over and over again from parents across the province, from teachers and from police officers, especially in communities where the SRO program was removed, that something really important had been taken away from them, and taken away without real consultation. School resource officer programs connect students with trusted and trained adults—adults who are visible and consistent and able to intervene early. I heard from many officers who served in those roles.

I particularly want to call out Officer Chris Golder of the London Police Service. His daughter was a page here last year. I met Chris before the school boards in London removed their SRO program, Chris was one of the most dedicated and caring SROs I have ever heard of. He was not just a uniform in a hallway. He was a constant for children. He was somebody who listened. He was a trusted adult for children, across the years, who were facing real, personal challenges and had nowhere else to turn. Chris is an example of the type of person who was removed from those children's lives.

So to see this legislation that says that when a police service is willing to deliver a school resource officer program, a school must avail itself of it, is incredibly satisfying to me.

One of the reasons that I was so supportive of the SRO program is because I view it as an equity issue, predominantly. For many students, especially those in communities that deal more with violence or with instability or with fewer supports, that extra layer of that relationship-building with police can make a really, really key difference. The way that I view this is, police are a key part of our protective infrastructure, like EMS, like paramedics, and children and families should be able to access that protective infrastructure without fear and without alienation. It was very clear that there were accounts from children—predominantly Black and Indigenous children—who, because of history and experiences from their parents, had a negative connotation with police officers. The way that I look at it is, that is then a clear equity issue. We cannot have vulnerable students being taught, either implicitly or explicitly, that police are dangerous and, essentially, that police are not for people like them. I don't view that as a remotely tenable situation in our schools or in our community.

When you are denying access to that relationship-building opportunity that SROs offer, that denial is not neutral. Honestly, it disproportionately affects especially vulnerable children—children who are newcomers; children of immigrants; racialized children; children who are coming from violent home lives, where they don't have access to any kind of trusted adult. To deny them the ability to form that relationship, as I said, is an absolute failure of equity. It's not justice. I view it as abandonment.

Ultimately, removing those officers in what was, in my opinion, an ill-thought-out, sort of politically motivated knee-jerk reaction, did a huge disservice to those children and to those families.

Ultimately, the SRO program—we now have the opportunity to entrench it and improve it, to make sure that it is done well, with guardrails in place. An SRO ultimately is not a surveillance officer; they are a bridge. They are a bridge to building a relationship of trust, a relationship of respect, in a neutral, friendly environment that many children and many families would not have access to. Ultimately, very small things—a handshake or a high-five in the hall, a sticker, a basketball game, a child going home to their parent and talking about a uniformed officer being kind to them. That is the type of thing that breaks down that inequitable access, that barrier, and ultimately creates a society where all children and their families have access to the same infrastructure.

With that, I will pass it over to my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Markham—Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: I rise today to speak in support of Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025.

Since the minister's appointment, he has taken a hard look at the state of school boards in the province and the legislation that governs them. What we've seen is alarming: boards rewriting spending rules, wasting funds on perks and inflated salaries instead of directing resources to classrooms. When boards misdirect resources, it's parents, teachers and students who pay the price. Despite unprecedented investments, certain boards have prioritized bureaucracy and administration over student success.

That's why Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025, is essential. It gives the minister the tools to act decisively, modernize outdated systems, and ensure accountability.

Let me share a few examples.

In July 2024, the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board sent trustees on a nearly \$190,000 trip to Italy to purchase religious art. Taxpayers footed the bill for luxury hotels and fine dining. A governance review exposed mismanagement, procurement failures, and trustees interfering in daily operations, damaging morale and governance. The minister has directed the board to repay travel and art expenses, as mentioned earlier, ensure meeting compliance, and submit a learning plan for trustees. These actions were delayed because of outdated rules. Bill 33 would change that.

At the Thames Valley District School Board, 18 senior staff stayed at the former SkyDome hotel for a retreat, despite a large budget deficit. They also increased executive salaries, violating compensation rules. During the pandemic, some senior officials even gave themselves bonuses of up to \$24,000. These moves occurred while families were still recovering and student needs were mounting. The board promoted a role without trustee approval, increasing its pay by \$40,000. In response, we appointed a supervisor to oversee the board's financial and operational decisions. Bill 33 will help us interfere faster in cases like this.

Unfortunately, financial missteps such as these are not isolated events happening at one or two school boards. They are happening even at the largest school board, the Toronto District School Board, which has also demonstrated poor financial management.

In December 2024, the Auditor General of Ontario found, in a report on the TDSB, a lack of documentation, ineffective use of funds, and inefficient planning. Despite declining enrolment, the board added two new associate director positions, relied on one-time pandemic funding, and deferred school repairs, leading to increased costs. Now facing a deficit of tens of millions of dollars and depleted reserves, the board risks filing a non-compliant budget. Meanwhile, the board has wasted time and money on renaming schools.

Bill 33 proposes giving the ministry the authority to approve school names, ensuring taxpayer funds go towards student success.

This pattern of fiscal mismanagement is not isolated. The Toronto Catholic District School Board and Ottawa-Carleton District School Board have both been running deficits for years. Deloitte found the Toronto Catholic board could have done more to avoid these financial issues. Similarly, since the 2021-22 school year, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has been reporting in-year deficits and is reporting another shortfall this year. At the end of the 2023-24 school year, the board had completely depleted its reserves.

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Perpetually running deficits is not sustainable. This is why, for these two boards, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board, the minister has appointed financial investigators.

In summary, Bill 33 provides the tools needed to act swiftly when boards mismanage funds. I commend the minister for holding boards accountable, and I urge all members to support this important legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's a pleasure for me to join my colleagues the Minister of Education and the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security for today's second reading debate. We're here today to speak in favour of Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025.

As the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, I am, of course, here to talk about a number of new proposals in Bill 33 that will improve the child and youth services sector.

Before I do that, I want to voice my strong support for one section of the bill that was championed by none other than the amazing Minister of Education, the Honourable Paul Calandra. Through this legislation, our government will instruct school boards to mark June 1, Ontario Day, as a dedicated time for student learning. Four years ago, I introduced Bill 173, An Act to proclaim Ontario Day, in this House. I did this because Ontario is truly an amazing place to live, work and raise a family, and I think we ought to be very proud of our province. So I commend my colleague the Minister of Education for taking action to ensure that students learn more about Ontario's history and, rightfully, take pride in it.

Ontario is a land of opportunity. We want to see all young people achieve lifelong success. That's why we've been working to improve the child welfare system, to focus on services that prioritize safety and protection and that are high-quality, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the needs of children, youth and families.

Throughout this process, we have consulted with our community partners about how we can better protect children and youth. I sincerely thank everyone who took the time to share their thoughts and their experiences with us throughout this process. The measures that we're proposing build on the feedback as well as the recommendations from the Ontario Ombudsman.

If passed, our government's proposals would update the legislative framework of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act to strengthen the accountability of children's aid societies and prioritize the well-being of children, youth and families, and would support child and youth well-being, so that all children and young people receiving support and services from a children's aid society have access to, and are aware of, as well as understand the role of the Ombudsman. Additionally, we want to make sure that children and young people receiving services from children's aid societies know how to contact the Ombudsman when they have a complaint about the care that they're receiving.

As I mentioned earlier, our work to improve the child welfare system is a continuous effort, and I believe it's important to acknowledge and build on the improvements that have been made already to date.

As you're aware, Speaker, our government announced a third-party review of 37 non-Indigenous children's aid societies last October. This review is just another step that we're taking to help ensure that the needs of children and youth are being met by service providers, including children's aid societies.

Every child, every youth in this province deserves to be supported and protected. That's why we established new regulatory requirements to improve quality of care as part of the quality standards framework. This important framework sets out enhanced requirements around pre-admission and placement assessments, safety plans, as well as plans of care. I'm confident that we can build on these changes and better protect children and youth by developing personalized supports and services that meet their unique needs.

As part of Bill 33, we're proposing to strengthen the accountability of children's aid societies. This involves prioritizing the well-being of children, youth and families by updating the legislative framework of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017. It also involves increasing the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' oversight of certain financial decisions made by children's aid societies. Improving transparency and financial sustainability is critical to ensuring that societies use their funding to prioritize the well-being of children, youth and families. We want to help societies avoid budget deficits, and we want to make sure that taxpayer dollars allocated to child welfare are being used effectively.

I'm very proud to add that there's strong support within the sector for the reforms that we are proposing.

In fact, Solomon Owoo, the CEO of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, recently had this to say: "While we are still in the process of reviewing the proposed legislation, we support the government's desire to improve the lives of children, youth and families receiving services from child welfare agencies."

That's a very positive statement, and I welcome Mr. Owoo's feedback and support.

I will add that these proposals build on existing ministry oversight and accountability tools aimed at improving the efficiency and overall effectiveness of the child welfare sector.

Our government is taking action to protect children and youth in care.

In fact, last April, the Legislature unanimously passed the Supporting Children's Futures Act. That bill included provisions to modernize and standardize important safeguards for children receiving licensed out-of-home care. We strengthened the ministry's oversight of foster care and group homes, including stronger licensing enforcement tools to hold licensees accountable. We also enhanced privacy protections for people who are currently or were formerly in the child welfare system by restricting access to personal childhood histories and protection records. And we increased the frequency that children's aid societies are required to visit children in their care, such as children in foster homes and group homes, to better support their safety and their well-being. These changes represented a significant step forward. But we're not stopping there.

We're proposing to require children's aid societies to review and to update their bylaws and make them available to the public to increase consistency and transparency. The details of these proposed changes will be outlined in future regulations.

We would also consult with our sector partners on developing regulatory requirements for children's aid societies. And we would require them to publicly post board of directors' meeting dates and minutes to increase transparency about their governance.

We want to ensure that all children and youth receiving services from the child welfare sector are aware of and understand their rights, and that they know how to speak up when they have a complaint about the care they're receiving.

Thanks to my colleague the Attorney General, our proposals would, if passed, expand the Ombudsman's investigative powers to include complaints about children's aid society services provided to youth between the ages of 18 and 22 who are eligible for or who are participating in the Ready, Set, Go Program. This would improve the consistency of the Ombudsman oversight with respect to mandated services provided by children's aid societies. The proposals that we're introducing today would also amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act to clarify when children's aid societies need to inform children and youth about the Ombudsman. That includes youth who are eligible for or who are participating in the Ready, Set, Go Program.

Speaker, just to provide some context, the Ready, Set, Go Program was launched in April 2023 with a \$170-million investment over three years to improve outcomes for youth leaving care in the child welfare system. This program provides youth transitioning from the child welfare system with the additional services and supports that they need to prepare for adulthood and to succeed after leaving care. As part of the program, children's aid societies help children plan for the future at an earlier age. Starting at age 13, they begin learning practical life skills and planning educational goals. At age 15, the emphasis expands to financial literacy and preparing for the workforce—including managing personal finances, setting up a bank account, grocery shopping, résumé building, and how to access social services and other supports. The program allows youth to continue receiving supports and services from a society until the age of 23—that's up from the age of 21.

The Ready, Set, Go Program includes monthly financial assistance to provide youth with better quality of life and help them maintain housing so that they can focus on their studies or perhaps employment opportunities. Youth in the program receive \$1,000 per month at age 21, and at age 22 they receive \$500 per month. They're also able to work up to 40 hours a week at Ontario's minimum wage without seeing an impact on their financial supports. Youth pursuing a post-secondary program or training in skilled trades and apprenticeships receive an additional \$500 per month, starting at age 20.

The Ready, Set, Go Program has supported thousands of youth leaving care since its introduction in April 2023. In the first year, the program served 4,444 youth between ages 18 and 22. In the second year, the program continued to have an important impact, by reaching an additional 3,425 youth between the ages of 18 and 22, between April 1 and December 31.

In 2023, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services also conducted a review of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, which came into force on April 30, 2018. The act governs a range of important services, such as adoption, child welfare and protection services, Indigenous-led family services, licensed out-of-home care services and youth justice services. By law, we must review the act every five years, and every review shall address the rights of children and young persons described in the act. The review involved extensive engagement with children, youth, families, service providers, sector experts and community organizations, as

well as First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous representatives from across the province.

The 2023 review and engagement built on six key areas: (1) child and youth rights, which assessed how rights are respected when receiving services; (2) First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, which considered developments on Indigenous-led models of child and family services and assessed how well services are meeting obligations, such as providing culturally appropriate services and consultations with communities; (3) equity and anti-racism, which assessed how we're addressing overrepresentation in services and opportunities to further embed equity and anti-racism within the act; (4) prevention and community-based care, which looked at how to increase access to holistic prevention, early identification and early intervention services, including a focus on family well-being, community-based care and protection from sexual exploitation; (5) quality services, which looked at the ways to improve the quality of services, with a particular focus on licensed out-of-home care, youth leaving care, and anti-human trafficking; and (6) accountability, which assessed enabling greater accountability through oversight, governance, financial performance, data, and outcomes measurement.

As I mentioned earlier, we want to be sure that children and youth in care understand their rights and how to make a complaint. For that reason, the ministry will consult with children's aid societies and out-of-home care licensees on proposed regulatory requirements to post age-appropriate information about children and youth rights and internal complaints processes in the areas of a facility that are accessible to children and youth. This would align with existing requirements for societies and out-of-home care licensees to post information about the Ombudsman and similarly align with requirements in other care settings. Children and youth would feel more supported and heard by having an increased awareness of the Ombudsman's office, their rights, and the complaints processes related to the service providers that are supporting them.

Speaker, I believe we're making progress as we strengthen and improve the child welfare system. Over the past 10 years, the average number of children and youth in care has decreased by more than 28%, and the average number of ongoing open protection cases has decreased by about 48%. More families are being supported earlier, so more children and youth can stay with their parents whenever it's possible.

That said, we recognize there's more work to be done. We will continue to consult with experts, with advocates and community partners to improve supports and services for all children and youth in our province. Similarly, we will continue to engage regularly with First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous representatives and service providers on how we can best meet the unique needs of Indigenous children and families and communities requiring services. This includes improving coordination between the provincial child welfare system and Indigenous-led models of child and family services operating pursuant to Indigenous laws. Their input is vital to ensuring the success of our government's vision of leaving no child behind.

Together, we'll continue to take steps forward to improve Ontario's child welfare system, because every child and every youth in our province deserves a safe, loving and stable home and to have the resources they need to succeed and thrive. Passing Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act, will help us achieve that goal.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Today I have the pleasure to speak about our Supporting Children and Students Act. If passed, this bill would strengthen oversight, accountability and transparency in our world-class post-secondary education system.

Every day across Ontario, our colleges and universities are building the workforce of tomorrow—a workforce that is dynamic, highly skilled and ready to face whatever may come our way. And as we always have, our government continues to ensure our colleges and universities are laser-focused on preparing students for success.

Since becoming the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, I've had the privilege of visiting many of our post-secondary institutions, and I can tell you from first-hand experience that Ontario is home to some of the brightest graduates and researchers in the world.

The people of Ontario are the greatest asset we have, and as our government has said since our historic re-election, we'll do whatever it takes to protect Ontario, and that includes protecting our students. By creating the right conditions for students to succeed, both during their academic journey and in their future careers, Ontario will continue to build a strong, resilient economy.

All students in Ontario deserve transparency, accountability and fairness when embarking on their post-secondary journey.

That's why, today, I'm proud to join Minister Calandra and Minister Parsa to highlight the incredible work being done for the post-secondary sector through the Supporting Children and Students Act. To put it simply, the proposed measures in this bill would put students first, ensuring their success as they learn the skills they need to lead our critical industries for decades to come. These measures would provide greater clarity to students and their families, increase consistency, and foster trust in our world-class post-secondary education system.

The first area I'd like to address is our decisive action in this bill to increase transparency around tuition and other fees.

Our government has always had the backs of hard-working students and their families. We know every dollar counts for Ontario households, and we're ensuring maximum clarity for each dollar students spend on post-secondary education.

We've heard from students and their families that it is difficult to find detailed information about tuition costs and the full scope of fees they are being charged for their education—including the purpose of each fee, which services the fees are funding, and which fees they can opt out of—which is why, if passed, Bill 33 would enable our government to require publicly assisted colleges and universities to publish detailed information about tuition and ancillary fees and how they are used. Last year, we took action to make sure that the costs of textbooks and other learning materials were accessible and transparent for students and their families. And now we're taking it one step further by making sure tuition and ancillary fees are clear and consistent across institutions. These detailed breakdowns would be posted online for current and future students to easily access. If passed, we would also explore what fees can and should be optional. For some of these fees, students are already able to opt out. This bill would ensure that it is abundantly clear which fees are optional and how students can opt out if they so choose.

As we always have, we're going to be consulting with the sector to understand which fees are necessary, what fees may not be, and when that opt-out process could begin, making sure there are no disruptions to student services or in the delivery of our world-class education.

Hard-working students and their families deserve to know where their money is going and that every dollar is well spent in pursuit of their education. And through Bill 33, our government would make that happen.

In addition, we know that admissions processes vary widely by institution and can be unclear to students and their families.

That is why, through this bill, we would also increase transparency in the admissions process by requiring post-secondary institutions to clearly outline their merit-based admissions policies. When prospective students are trying to better themselves through higher education, they deserve to know the standards they are being evaluated against, and those standards should be directly related to their academic achievements and potential for success in Ontario's economy. We know our colleges and universities are already home to the best and brightest this country has to offer, but for many prospective students, the application requirements can be confusing. So through this legislation, if passed, we would take the mystery out of applying for post-secondary education, ensuring our students know exactly what they need to begin achieving their full potential at a college and university.

Let me be abundantly clear: Our government will always ensure students of all backgrounds and abilities have pathways to access post-secondary education in Ontario.

For example, we recently announced that we are investing \$10 million to create new scholarship opportunities for First Nations students interested in pursuing careers in resource development. These scholarships are breaking down barriers for First Nations students to get the skills needed to succeed as leaders and innovators in this highly demanded sector.

This is on top of our numerous other accessibility measures for under-represented students accessing higher education, including:

- \$90 million annually to support students with disabilities and to provide enhanced mental health services;

- over \$40 million for programs enhancing post-secondary accessibility and employment outcomes;

- \$9.5 million annually for Pathways to Education, a not-for-profit that provides academic, financial, social and one-on-one supports to youth in low-income communities in Ontario to help them graduate from high school and transition into post-secondary education; and

- \$11.4 million annually in access and inclusion programs at colleges and universities that provide outreach, transition and retention support to students who are facing barriers to accessing and succeeding at post-secondary education.

If passed, I look forward to the extensive consultations we will have with our sector to understand their current admissions processes and bring better clarity to our prospective students so we can keep producing the incredible leaders and innovators our province is known for.

Speaking of innovation, we know that groundbreaking discoveries are happening in our colleges and universities—discoveries that drive our economy and improve the lives of people in Ontario and across all of Canada. Research as valuable as ours needs to be protected. Now, more than ever, it is crucial for our government to bolster research security to safeguard our province's significant investments in Ontario-based research and mitigate any potential threats of foreign interference or economic uncertainty.

Through Bill 33, if passed, we would strengthen a unified approach across our institutions by requiring all publicly assisted colleges and universities to develop and implement formal research security plans. This will protect our discoveries so that Ontario can continue to produce, commercialize, and drive research in our key sectors. Ontario is already leading our country in research security, serving as a model for other jurisdictions. With Bill 33, we are building on Ontario's existing framework, ensuring the province will continue to lead in responding to emerging and evolving risks in order to protect our workers, our economy and our future. We know we are strongest when we work together, which is why we will consult with the sector on best practices for implementing these research plans and eliminating duplication with federal or other security measures of equal calibre.

I want to be clear: As I have said many times this morning, should this bill pass, we will be undertaking extensive consultation with the sector, including students, to shape and implement these proposed changes in the months ahead. We understand the challenges institutions are facing since the federal government's unilateral decision to reduce the number of international students. And we will take the time to get this right so that our world-class colleges and universities can continue delivering excellent education for our students.

If the bill passes, we will not be bringing forward any regulations until consultation is completed. Colleges and universities and other sector stakeholders will hear more in the coming months on consultation to inform implementation, timing, and development of any forthcoming regulations.

To close, when students choose Ontario's world-class colleges and universities to pursue their post-secondary education, they deserve to know where their fees are going, what criteria they need for admission, and how their research will be protected.

Through the Supporting Children and Students Act, our government would be ensuring that colleges and universities are taking responsible measures to protect our students as they prepare for successful careers that will strengthen Ontario's economy for decades to come.

While I've covered a lot of actions our government is taking today, we need to remind ourselves that at the heart of it, post-secondary education is about preparing students to make successful contributions to our workforce.

That is why, as our government always has, we are putting student success at the forefront of proposing the Supporting Children and Students Act. Together, these proposed measures would ensure our post-secondary sector continues to be transparent and accountable.

As we always have done, our government will do whatever it takes to uphold Ontario's world-class post-secondary education system and ensure students are ready for the jobs of tomorrow, because when we protect students, we protect Ontario. The Supporting Children and Students Act does exactly that. I'm confident that the initiatives outlined in this bill will protect our students, our workforce and our economy. I ask for your support as we move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: My question is for the Minister of Education.

Let's review this government's record a moment: \$6.35 billion out of the education system under their tenure. They've driven 46,000 qualified teachers out of the education system. They've cut special education programming to the point where parents are sending their kids off to school in the morning not even knowing if they will be safe, let alone if they will learn anything. They can't assure parents that the school bus will show up on time, that their children's school will not flood and does not have lead in the drinking water, and that the ceiling will not crumble over their heads.

Why is the minister grabbing more power to himself when it's very clear that it's the minister who should be put under supervision?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the question in itself highlights the fact that the NDP and the opposition are probably going to vote against the bill, because what they don't want us to do is assume responsibility for the over—it's a \$40-billion ministry. We spend—one of the most on education than anybody in the Western world, for the love of God.

We want to ensure that the money we're spending on education goes to students, parents and teachers, so that our kids can graduate with the best results possible. It is a responsibility of the Ministry of Education, of the Minister of Education, to ensure that those dollars are spent correctly. This puts the responsibility back with the ministry and the minister.

The member, in voting for this bill, can hold us directly responsible to ensure that the commitments that we make and the dollars that we're spending live up to the expectations that we're setting for our students. That's why I'm hoping that the member will support the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I have to say that I was very hopeful when I saw, last week, the minister stand up to table a bill on education. I was certainly hoping that the bill would address the important and concerning shortcomings in our education system, such as the shortage of teachers, mental health support, crumbling infrastructure, and support for special needs. Those are just examples in areas that need attention—yet this bill doesn't do anything for that.

So I will ask the minister: When and what will you do to fix the problem, at least—and I will focus on just one issue: the important shortage of teachers, especially in our francophone schools.

Hon. Paul Calandra: There's so much to unpack in that question.

We have school boards across the province of Ontario that have money in their capital accounts that they're not spending to repair schools.

But leaving that aside, we have record levels of funding to build new schools; record levels of funding to repair schools. The reason that we're having to do that is because we inherited a massive infrastructure deficit across the system. You don't rebuild a school in an afternoon. You don't build a new school in an afternoon. It's something that we've been doing since 2018.

When it comes to the teacher supply shortage—it manifested itself when the Liberals made a change on how we educate students across the province of Ontario. We've heard from

teachers, we've heard from educators themselves that it was the policies of the Liberal government that have led to this.

The Minister of Colleges and Universities, in this budget, has—I think it's more than \$55 million to graduate more students.

We are focusing on getting more educators in the classroom to fix the mistakes that we inherited from—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Questions?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I might as well continue with the Minister of Education.

We've all seen deeply concerning examples of school boards spending education dollars on luxury trips abroad, high-end conferences, and multi-day retreats in downtown hotels.

Can the minister please speak to how Bill 33 strengthens the government's ability to investigate, supervise and, if necessary, intervene when school boards mismanage taxpayer funds and lose focus on their core responsibility, which is student learning?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's a good question. At the heart of it, that's what this bill really is about. It is about ensuring that the funding that the people of the province of Ontario provide to school boards is used for the purpose that it's intended: educating students, giving the teachers the tools and the resources that they need to give us the best students possible.

The system that we operate now is an antiquated one, where the Minister of Education, who's responsible for education, needs to hire somebody else to tell him—in this instance, me—whether a board that has gone completely off the rails should be supervised.

This bill allows me to move quickly, so that things like what we're seeing in Peel, in Toronto, in Ottawa—we don't have to let sit and manifest over years. We can step in quickly and put the funding back where it belongs: into the classrooms.

I am ready to be held accountable for those decisions that we are making, and this legislation allows me to be held accountable.

I hope the opposition will agree that it is time we reassert our influence over the education system for the betterment of students.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Parents expect to have a say in their children's schools, and they deserve to have a say in their children's schools. Right now, they have that say through their democratically elected trustees. The school board has to consult. Most trustees hold many consultations in their community, and parents know that if they have a concern or a question about what's happening in their child's school, they can go and meet with the trustee. If they don't think the trustee is actually serving their interests, they can elect a different trustee in the next election.

But what this government wants to do is to appoint a Conservative government insider from Toronto who is not required to consult with anybody, to listen to anybody. We've seen that with

supervisors in boards. We're seeing that right now with Thames Valley. The supervisor is not speaking to a single parent in the community. They can make any decision they want. Parents can't even go to court to overturn that supervision.

So why doesn't the minister respect the rights of parents to have a say in their children's schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I do respect the rights of parents to ensure that their students are educated in a way that makes them ready for the jobs of tomorrow. That's what I expect.

To be clear, school boards exist because Parliament allows them to exist. That is all.

In this instance, Parliament, with this bill, is reasserting, reassuming, some of those powers that we devolved to school boards. We're taking those powers back.

When the member talks about London—there are numerous NDP members of provincial Parliament from London. Are they not answering their phones? I know my colleagues will deal with education issues.

I can tell you this, Madam Speaker: In Markham–Stouffville, we elected, as a school board trustee—they elected a white supremacist racist, and we couldn't get rid of the person. Do you know why? Because nobody knows who the trustees are. They don't come out and do things that they're supposed to do. Their job—by Parliament—is to deal with a budget. That's what their job is. They're not doing it—and when they don't, we're going to assume responsibility, we'll fire them, and I have no problem with doing it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I'm not against financial accountability. We expect that much of the government, and definitely, school boards that spend public money should be accountable as well.

However, I'm very concerned about the control measures contained in that bill for those school boards that have exemplary governance practices, that have a stellar record in terms of performance, of student success.

I'm just wondering, what are you going to do to ensure that you're not punishing those school boards to get at the few bad actors?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I agree with the member. This isn't about the good actors in the education system. This is about going after those who are not doing their job.

To be clear, it's not just about financial challenges. That, for the most part, is what this bill deals with. But you do have instances, as I talked about in my speech, in Peel, where Black students weren't feeling comfortable to go to school, where there continue to be problems with anti-Black racism in the Peel District School Board that are not being addressed by the school board.

As minister, I need to be able to move in and make the changes that are needed so that students can feel safe and parents can feel safe sending their kids to school. I will not apologize for doing that. This bill gives me the power to go back and do that. And we will do that. I shouldn't have to wait months or years for somebody to tell me to do the right thing.

This bill allows us to reassume the power that we once had that was devolved and that now needs to come back to the ministry to ensure students, parents and teachers have the best ability to get our kids graduated for the jobs of tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I am rising today, as the MPP for Ottawa West–Nepean and as the official opposition shadow minister for education, to speak about this government's Trumpian education bill with another ironic title: Supporting Children and Students Act.

I want to start by saying that this is really personal for me, as a parent of three children in our education system in Ontario—and two of them are actually here watching us today. Say hi, Luc and Clara.

They experience, every single day, the impact of this government's cuts to education. And Minister, you could actually look up at them, if you wanted, and see two of the people who are experiencing the effects of this government's cuts day in and day out—a school bus that doesn't arrive on time, not enough teachers in the school, nobody to fill in when a teacher is sick for the day, not enough educational assistants.

For a psychological assessment, we got told to go to a private provider. The school board just outright told us there was no way that we were ever going to get one, if we had to wait, through the publicly funded system.

This is their education. This is their future. This is what you're doing here in this House with your decisions. These are the kind of kids you're impacting—their whole future that you're shaping through these decisions here.

So I want you to think about that—that this isn't just about debate; it isn't just about the kinds of behaviours that we've seen this week from this government. It is about our children, and it is about their best interests, which we should be prioritizing.

I want to take a step back for a minute and talk about what has happened this week and talk about what has happened this month and talk about what has happened this year.

This government has quite a track record just this year. The year started with an unnecessary election that disenfranchised many people in Ontario.

I spoke to so many people, in the days before the election was called, who said they were about to leave the country, as they normally do for the month of February. They were leaving before the election started, they weren't coming back until after the election ended, and they felt completely disenfranchised by this government. They felt like this government didn't respect their right to have a say.

I spoke to many seniors and people living with disabilities who were worried about their capacity to make it out to the polls on election day because of the snow and the ice. We did our best to make sure that everybody was connected with Elections Ontario in a way that would allow them to vote. But they could only do that if we were able to connect with them. The government's snap election meant that many people didn't even have the information they needed to know about how they could vote and about where their polling station was.

Then, after that unnecessary election, the government refused to call the Legislature back for six weeks. So for the first three and a half months of this year, in which the government said they had such an urgent agenda to stand up to Trump, they couldn't even be bothered to recall this House so that we could sit, so that they could bring forward proposals and we could debate them on behalf of the people of Ontario.

They've used that delay in recalling the Legislature to ram legislation through, now that we are here. In fact, on seven different bills, they have moved time allocations, saying that we're not allowed to have any committee study of the bill. So the public aren't allowed to come for six of those bills, including the budget, and tell their legislators what they think of the proposals the government is putting forward and what they would like to see in it. They have shut down debate here, so even as MPPs elected to represent people, we're not allowed to bring forward the voices of our constituents on the legislation that they're proposing.

They did force through a bill yesterday that tramples on First Nations treaty rights, that breaks an election promise to the people of Chatham-Kent-Middlesex, and that creates special law-free zones where the government can do literally anything they want. No laws at all will apply in those zones, whether we're talking about labour laws, child labour laws, health and safety measures that are meant to protect the people of Ontario, environmental protections. We could put children to work, we could wipe out species, we could poison the water, and all of it is perfectly legal because of this government's legislation. They didn't even want to hear from the people of Ontario about this. They wouldn't take the bill on the road to the communities that are going to be affected by it. They shut down committee hearings. They wouldn't even take the time to consider it at third reading, with all the galleries full of people who will be deeply affected by this bill. They were not interested in that.

They think that they deserve all the power in the province of Ontario, with no say from the people of Ontario and a complete lack of accountability or guardrails.

Now they have this Trumpian education bill which is seeking to do the same thing in our education system. The minister is trying to give himself all the power without any kind of accountability or oversight. Parents will have no say anymore about what happens in their children's schools. Their democratically elected trustees will not have the power to take their concerns and their questions, and take them into account in shaping a budget. It will be the minister, with no oversight, no guardrails—not even the ability to challenge his decisions in court—who will be making the decisions for all of our children.

This is a government, as I said, that already has a track record of cutting the funding that our children need to have safe and healthy schools; cutting the funding that our children need to actually have a qualified teacher or education worker in our schools; cutting the funding that our children need to be on a school bus in the morning that shows up on time, that takes the correct route, and that doesn't spend more than an hour getting to school. This is a government whose funding cuts mean that our children are in special education programs that can't even keep them safe, let alone provide them with any kind of learning support.

When the minister says we should just trust him because he's more trustworthy than democratically elected trustees—well, we've seen what happens when this government is directly in charge of schools—and that's the provincial schools, which are, if anything, in even worse shape. There are so many allegations of abuse, harassment, discrimination, crumbling schools, and lack of education that this government has already paid out \$23 million in lawsuits,

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and yet there are at least three current or pending lawsuits that I'm aware of. That's this government's track record when they directly control education. I don't think a single parent in Ontario wants to actually see that in our children's schools—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize. It is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Education funding

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I rise today to echo the many people sounding the alarm about the state of special education in Ontario. I listen to too many neighbours who are devastated that their children are not getting access to education because their needs aren't being met. Education workers regularly come to me in tears because the public system we all love is on fire.

I am a school social worker. I can tell you, honestly, things have changed, but the special education funding formula has not.

I echo the ETFO report that shows that the lack of support staff and overcrowding in classrooms causes kids distress. These classes are so crowded, you often can't fit all the desks in.

I want to thank all those who are vocal regularly, who don't give up the fight: Michaela, Carolyn, Kimiko, Jeff from ETFO, Dave from OSSTF, Patrick from OECTA, and the countless other parents and advocates who work tirelessly to fill in these gaps.

Let's do better, Ontario, because the kids of Ontario are not okay.