

Autism treatment

MPP Alexa Gilmour: While the Premier's wealthy friends command this government's attention, Ontario's autistic children are begging—begging—to be seen.

Today, the Ontario Autism Coalition released a damning report. It is irrefutable proof of this government's failure that has pushed families to the breaking point: 64,000 children waiting five to six years for help when early intervention is key; services that don't match children's needs or don't exist in rural Ontario; families sinking into debt, losing their homes and their mental health trying to care for these kids. Every day another child is left behind, another family breaks under the strain.

To the Premier: When will this government start governing for Ontario's children instead of well-connected friends?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Ontario Autism Coalition, Alina Cameron and the entire team for being here and hosting us this morning, and for the advocacy work they do right across the community. We appreciate it.

Madam Speaker, let me make it very clear. We said this from day one: The status quo was not working. We listened to families. We listened to those with lived experience. We listened to clinicians. We put in a program that was built by the community. We doubled the funding of the Ontario Autism Program from \$300 million to \$600 million. In the recent budget, thanks to the Premier's support, we have increased that investment by an additional \$175 million, bringing the total to \$779 million. Now, what has that done? It has allowed us to serve tens of thousands of families in the program that was built by the community.

I'm not taking any credit for it. Neither is the government. I thank the community that put this program together. We'll continue to listen to them to expand the program and improve services and supports for the—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I look forward to this minister reading the report by the community about this program and changing his talking points accordingly, because nearly one in five families of autistic children has called or has considered calling Ontario's children's aid society for help. Parents in Ontario are wondering if giving up their child is the only way to get help from this government. In fact, some heartbroken parents have already been forced to make that decision. This is the state of Ontario Autism Program.

Through the Speaker to the Premier: What will it take for the Premier to notice these children?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the honourable member for the question again. I'll just remind the honourable member, just when we formed government, there were a total of 8,000 families across the province receiving supports and services—8,000, that's it. There were no other paths for them. Why? Because the previous government let down the families.

Remember, the NDP held the balance of power for three years. The NDP could have brought down their government on this issue. They chose not to do that.

What we said is we want to listen to families, work with families. Again, that's why I thank the advocacy group because they've done so much in this space to help us improve services and supports for families. In expanded core clinical services today alone, nearly 23,000 families are receiving supports as opposed to the 8,000 in total before—tens of thousands of families.

And we're not done. We're never going to stop working with families to support children and youth in this province so that they can continue to thrive in this province.

Indigenous economic development

MPP Monica Ciriello: My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation. For years, the Liberal government, supported by the NDP, ignored the north, even going so far as calling it “no man's land.” That neglect has left northern and First Nation communities without the tools or support needed to build a strong local economy.

It is our government that is changing that. We're working in true partnership with First Nations to unlock opportunity, strengthen the mining sector and support Indigenous-led economic growth. At a time of true global uncertainty, with new trade threats from Donald Trump, it has never been more important to protect Ontario.

Speaker, can the minister share how these partnerships are driving reconciliation and helping to build a stronger and more self-reliant Ontario?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I want to thank the member for Hamilton Mountain for her incredible work. She was at 233 events this summer, just in her role in her community, not to mention her responsibilities as a parliamentary assistant.

We're excited about the opportunity to fall in line with First Nations business leaders in writing the next important chapter of reconciliation, and that's First Nations economic reconciliation. It's why we've invested in three important programs, Madam Speaker, to that end:

—the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program builds community infrastructure projects focused on expanding businesses and new starts;

—the Indigenous Economic Development Fund supports communities in their efforts to develop and plan for economic prosperity, as new relationships and partnerships with businesses grow in their community; and, finally

—the Ontario First Nations Economic Developers Association is doing important work for economic development officers in every First Nations community in this province.

We're proud of our support for First Nations economic reconciliation, and we're going to keep going, Madam Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Hamilton Mountain.

MPP Monica Ciriello: Thank you to the minister for his continued leadership and partnership building with the north.

The Ring of Fire represents one of the most important economic opportunities in a generation, but it's not just about minerals, it's about people, jobs and a stronger future for northern and Indigenous communities.

While others talk, it is our government that is taking action to build roads, create jobs and deliver real results in the north. At a time of global uncertainty, these partnerships are protecting Ontario's economy and strengthening our position on the world stage. By standing with First Nations and investing in the north, we are protecting Ontario's future and building a stronger, more self-reliant province.

Can the minister share how these investments and partnerships are helping to advance the Ring of Fire and growing Ontario's economy?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for the question. We're so excited about the activity in the Ring of Fire but more importantly, or as importantly, the First Nations' leadership that's taking place in that region. We've seen first-hand them lead the environmental assessment processes, and, as they near their completion, they're mobilizing now to be involved in building legacy infrastructure and involved in responsible resource development. It's why we got a project off and running in Geraldton, Madam Speaker. The precursor was an economic plaza supporting First Nations communities for economic enterprise in the area. Now we're starting to build the road that leaves the Trans-Canada and heads to the Ring of Fire.

We've introduced an Indigenous opportunities fund to the tune of \$3 billion to make sure that First Nations communities are actively involved in the ability to access capital, participate in business, participate in industry and participate in a new look for prosperity in First Nations communities. It's exciting, Madam Speaker.

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Mr. Jonathan Tsao: My question is for the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. Minister, while this government continues to shovel out millions of taxpayer dollars through high-paid lobbyists like Kory Tenycke, over 61,000 remain trapped on the Ontario autism wait-list.

Minister, when will the 61,000 children on this wait-list finally get the help they need and they deserve?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the important question. I'll just remind the honourable member when he talks about the service registry on which families register for programs and services, 75% of families never had access to any support under the previous Liberal government—8,000, that was the total count of families that had access to support. Today, tens of thousands of families are accessing supports like foundational family services, the caregiver-mediated program, entry to school, the urgent response program. We have nearly 23,000 people in an expanded core program that includes ABA, mental health support, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy. These supports did not exist before. As I've said, they've come as a result of us not only doubling the funding of the program but increasing it by an additional \$175 million, and there's still more work to be done. We want to make sure every child—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, with all due respect to my honourable colleague, I just don't understand what alternate reality you're living in. Getting on a list is not getting help. Today, we have members of the Ontario Autism Coalition. If you speak to them today, you'll understand that families are exhausted; they're desperate for help. Minister, everything is not okay.

Today, the average wait time for core autism services is over five years. That's not a delay; that's negligence. We know that, with autism, early intervention is critical, but with every passing year when a child is stuck on a list, hope disappears, desperation sets in.

Minister, I'll put this question again, through you, Speaker: Are families going to be forced to have to hire high-priced Tory lobbyists like Kory Teneycke in order to see action, or will this government finally fix the system and support the children and families that need it?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The best way to do that is to listen to families and experts who actually wrote the program.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, and the honourable colleague would know, I call families every single day and have conversations with them, including the members on the Ontario Autism Coalition. They've got my number. They reach out to me directly. I ask my honourable colleague to come with me as we go around the province and meet with our partners and they talk about the impact of entry to school on that child and the family, a program that didn't exist before, the caregiver mediator program that didn't exist before, urgent response services that didn't exist before, foundational family services that didn't exist before, under the previous government. All of this was put in place because we listened to the families. We're going to continue to do that to improve outcomes for every child and every youth in this province.