

Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 28, 2025, on the motion for 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): Further debate?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I was halfway through my debate of Bill 33 yesterday, so I'm pleased to be able to be pick up from there.

Bill 33 centralizes all power for our education system with the Minister of Education. I thought the Progressive Conservative party was supposed to be a party of small government and local decision-making. How can Toronto make decisions for rural communities, for northern communities, for any community? I've never seen a government of any stripe like this in Ontario that has removed local decision-making for the people and transferred power into the hands of a few, with little accountability or transparency.

Right now, Ontarians are worried, they're anxious and, for thousands of them, they are out of work. We're living through a time of great upheaval and uncertainty—economically, socially and geopolitically—and I think all of us in this Legislature hear that from people we have been elected to represent.

It's within this context—I did a double take, actually, when I read the legislation. It includes a provision where school boards must seek the minister's approval before naming schools, and I can't reconcile the very serious challenges that our province and country are facing with a government that spent time and resources deciding this was the aspect of law that we need right now. Why? What problem is the government trying to solve with that part of the proposed law?

I've only been an MPP since February, and I get a lot of emails; I can only imagine how many the minister does, after years and years of experience. I have to say, I don't think I've seen a groundswell or even one email demanding that the minister approve school names. The only word I can think of to describe this provision is "absurd." It's absurd that this is what we're spending our time on, especially in these times. It is completely disconnected from the day-to-day lives of people in this province.

So what is this bill really about, then? It isn't about governance of school boards; it is just a distraction—something the government is very good at: blame someone else for what is really the job of the Ontario government.

A couple of weeks ago, I raised concerns about an unusual deep probing the government has conducted of hospital governance. I worry that there too they are setting up local hospitals to take the fall for what is really a lack of funding from the province. And it isn't about financial management either. Under this government's watch, we're now a province with half a trillion in debt. I'm reminded that my colleague from Don Valley West aptly describes the government's financial record when she says, "Never has a government spent so much to achieve so little."

It isn't about education because if it was, they would get serious about supporting public education, recognizing that the most important investment we can make as a province in our

future prosperity is education. It always has been. But no, we have a bill that transfers unprecedented power to the Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education has confirmed that closing schools and selling them off is an option on the table, something that, for all intents and purposes, has been denied to school boards for years. Without enough public funding, this is what trustees have been asking permission to do, to balance their budgets, make better use of their schools and lands, but have been unable to persuade the government to allow them to proceed. Perhaps this is where the answer lies. This is not about students or parents or education. It's actually about real estate. This tracks with the secret greenbelt deals, the Ontario Place deal and who knows what deals the province is working on under the extraordinary powers the government has granted in Bill 5.

I'm not against school consolidations or closures if we need to adjust to meet the needs of the population, to meet the needs of our kids and our families. But how will sites be selected? How will the government proceed in consultations? And if they proceed, will we see a process like Ontario Place, like the Skills Development Fund, where winners are hand-picked by the minister's office and sold off without regard to fairness, transparency or accountability? Speaker, those were the words that the Auditor General used to describe it: the process was not fair, transparent or accountable.

Time and again, especially where Ontario's public assets are concerned, we see the interests of the public on the sidelines, increasingly fending for themselves.

As for the proposed changes implicating our post-secondary institutions, again, I confess, I cannot imagine what business the minister has in determining student fees as typically determined by elected student unions who are elected by the student body—elected. I can tell you that I have not received any emails or calls from my constituents requesting this change. There is no one in this chamber who can make the case that they know better than the students what their needs are.

But I did receive this email from a constituent, and I thought it was interesting to hear from a student in post-secondary education, given their busy lives while they are studying. It says:

"I am a student in your riding. I am writing to share my deep concerns about Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025, and what it could mean for students like me.

"As a student, I already face the daily pressures of balancing classes, part-time work, and the cost of living. Access to supports on campus such as mental health counselling, food banks, peer programs, and wellness services has been absolutely essential for me and many of my peers. Without these services, I do not know how I would get through my studies.

"Bill 33 worries me because it could take away the ability of students and student associations to decide what supports are most important for us. These services are not luxuries, they are lifelines.

"We need access to these supports, and as a student I am willing to continue paying fees that help me and others succeed. I urge you to stand with students by encouraging the government to amend Bill 33, schedule 3, section 21.1, which allows" them "to regulate student fees."

That was from a student, and I'm sure many of you have students in university right now. I know my son is in university right now and those services that they get access to matter to them. The

mental health services matter to them. When I was at CAMH, we worked closely with our local university to make sure there were pathways there so people could get what they need.

This just feels like the thin edge of the wedge. What if a student university newspaper or radio station makes what the minister considers an intemperate comment? This bill grants unprecedented power to the minister to take action against student unions at will.

On Bill 33, the Council of Ontario Universities said this: “serious concerns for the post-secondary sector as it conflicts with governing legislation, increases administrative burdens, and fails to address the root causes of student access challenges.

“With a deep understanding of their own students and communities, Ontario universities are best placed to make decisions that support their unique mission and values. Ontario universities were designed with the principle of being autonomous entities, free from government interference and best positioned in meeting student needs.”

In fact, this is something I, as a Canadian, and I know many Canadians, have really valued that we have available to us in this province.

“Bill 33 enters into areas where universities have well-established and rigorous systems and expertise that have served students well.”

Again, pointing the finger elsewhere is a well-worn strategy used by this government. It's the fault of local governors or it's the fault of the federal government—it's the fault of anybody but themselves. Health care and education are the core responsibilities of the province. Ontario is dead last, by a long shot, amongst all provinces in providing provincial funding per student to our colleges and universities. In this government's own blue-ribbon panel, per-student funding was 44% of the average of the rest of Canada, while per-student funding for universities was just 57% of the average of the rest of Canada. Universities and colleges had no choice but to seek more international students and higher fees associated with them to keep their doors open for Ontario students.

This is where we are. Our public education and post-secondary institutions are in crisis. There's nothing in this bill to help to remedy that.

I think about the kids I see every day within my own riding. I think about my son, his friends, teenagers. I've seen their school system change over the time since they were in kindergarten to now. The size of the classes is far larger than they were before. You've got to agree with me on that.

I can say that, again, the mental health needs of students have changed and increased. Just this morning, we were meeting with social workers over breakfast and we were talking about how important it is to be able to provide those kind of supports in our schools, more of them, more access to that—again, more access to the kind of services students want and need in their universities.

But the move with this bill is not about that. It's not about our kids. It's not about increasing the funding that we need in our education; it's not about seeing it as an investment in our prosperity and in our economy. For these reasons, I simply cannot support this bill.

I urge the government to do the right thing: get serious about funding our public education and post-secondary institutions. If you want to put in place new legislation, put it in the places where

we need it to do just that, to serve them better, to make sure that—they are an investment in our future. I don't see signs of that in this bill anywhere; maybe the members opposite do, but I don't. If we want to get serious about supporting our children's future, let's get serious about our public education system. Let's invest in them and make sure that it is there for the long term to meet their needs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I appreciate the remarks from the member opposite.

Back in 2010, one of my former Scouts, Robert Woodrich, was the University of Windsor Students' Alliance VP of university affairs. He said this of the Canadian Federation of Students: "CFS does nothing on our campus except for undermine our stance on many issues. All we want to do is leave. We don't wish harm on any other student bodies, we just want out. They are making that very hard for us."

He's referring to CFS disallowing disaffiliation referendums held on campuses across Ontario, and Canada, for that matter. In 2010, when he made those remarks, 170,000 students represented at universities across the country who voted to disaffiliate from CFS were disallowed from doing so because of these anti-democratic fees that CFS has put in and anti-democratic practices.

My question to the member opposite is: Is she in agreement with the CFS disallowing student unions from removing fees from students, just as CFS has shown that they are willing to do?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I do note that the quote is from 2010 and the correspondence that I had from a constituent is from this year.

Again, I come back to: What are we trying to achieve through all of this and through this bill? What are we trying to do for our universities and our colleges right now? Is this the most pressing issue to address for those students? I think that what the students are looking for, actually, is for us to publicly fund our system in a way that it deserves. If you look at the budget that's in front of us for post-secondary education, it is a decline over the next three years from this government. I expect students would like to have access to their public system, first and foremost, above anything else.

I think that that's where this government should be focusing its efforts and making sure that we're going to have the system that we need there for the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for her comments on Bill 33. I think that we are in agreement that this is truly not about public education. Some of us understand that when you do get public education right, there are a number of other issues that fall into place, like justice, the economy, strengthening democracy, for instance. The bill does give unprecedented powers to the Minister of Education, and for someone who served as a trustee for 10 years, I can tell you that though our powers were steadily whittled down to almost nothing, undermining our roles as duly elected trustees, we fought to hold our voices and our power for parents.

I really want to ask the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore: What do you think is really the motivation for Bill 33, because it certainly is not about public education?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you very much for your question. Yes, I agree with you. I don't think that the motivation is necessarily making sure we have the most excellent public education system in the world, which is exactly what should be our goal.

In my remarks, I commented a little bit on the choices that school boards are even trying to make to balance their own budgets after being underfunded for years and years, decisions around land use—I sometimes question whether this is what this whole act is about. It's about consolidating powers of the Minister of Education for different uses of lands, selling those lands. And I can tell you, if that is this plan, I certainly will be watching closely to make sure every single cent of that goes back into our education—not that I would support it.

I believe that there are other motivations here other than just making sure that we have a truly excellent public education system for our students.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: When I'm out in the community and I'm talking to—whether it's teachers, school administrators, folks when I'm out door-knocking, what I hear over and over again is students with special needs not getting the support that they need in the classroom, and it ends up actually resulting in a lot of the issues and challenges that we're facing in our education system. When we talk about violent incidents in the classroom, a lot of that ends up resulting from larger class sizes and students in the classroom not getting that support that they end up needing. It impacts other students, then, who are just trying to learn, who are trying to do what they need to do. It comes up at the door, believe it or not, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Question, please.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: My question is, do you think that this bill is really more of a smokescreen to hide the underfunding and the challenges that our teachers and educators are facing in the classroom?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to my colleague the member from Ajax for that important question. I too hear a lot from my constituents about how we're currently not able to meet the needs of all of our students. In fact, I recently sent a letter to the Minister of Education on this topic because I've seen it in my own school board, where they were making choices to try to prioritize some of the additional educational supports that we needed for some of our kids, and that, again, became harder and harder to do.

I don't believe that this is the bill that's going to solve that issue. That is the issue that matters a lot to parents, and it matters a lot to our kids. And I'm hopeful that maybe—maybe—through other mechanisms, we'll start to address it. But this is a very serious unmet need that this bill will not address.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I have two questions for the member opposite. She mentioned in her speech—the first one was the renaming of schools. I'd ask her very, very precisely: We have a board that has spent in excess of close to \$300,000 contemplating a change of a name for a school. That's \$300,000 that is not going into the classroom. Currently, the minister has no ability to redirect those funds back into the classroom. Would she agree that is an egregious waste of taxpayers' money?

Secondly, we have another school board that the Auditor General highlighted as being a school board where decisions were being made by trustees that were not democratic, were not open, were not in the best interest of teachers, were not in the best interest of students, but the minister has no ability to make a change in that school board. Should the Minister of Education have the ability to make changes in a school board to put them back on track when they go off the rails? If not, how should we move those school boards back on track?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you, Minister, for those two questions and those two examples. I do believe that, at the end of the day, we need good local governance. I've worked in health care for years. I know what good boards can look like—skills-based boards—and how they can function and make sure that they're using our funds accountably.

I think that the minister has some tools that would allow them to make sure that certain decisions could be made. I don't think pulling out an entire system from our democracy is the right answer, though, especially in an environment where school boards are so underfunded. I also don't believe that we should be designing legislation based on N-of-1s. I think that we should be looking at the systemic issues in our education system and tackling them head-on, which is, truly, the underfunding that exists in our province right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you to the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore for your words. I want to take you to my own riding of Parkdale–High Park. We have a priority school recently renamed Dr. Rita Cox-Kina Minagok. It was an act of reconciliation and restitution that meant a tremendous amount to the community members there. We also have Lucy McCormick, with children with special needs who thrive because of the unique supports.

So I'm deeply troubled by this government's bill that would allow one minister from Queen's Park to undermine the voices of local staff, local families and students. We've already seen that the supervisors appointed have Conservative ties, no experience in education, advocating for privatization in some cases.

To the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore: What do you think this means for the future of local democracy in our school boards, in our colleges, in our universities—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Response?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you for your question. I'd love to come to the neighbouring riding and see the schools that you mentioned.

I think that, again, at the end of the day, the choices that we need to be making in our local communities need to be informed by that local perspective and that needs to be preserved. This bill is not going to do that, and I think that that is deeply troubling.

But, again, I come back to, what are the issues that we should be focused on when we're talking about the education of our kids? It's, are they getting the education that they need and deserve? Are they getting that from teachers that are feeling supported? Are they getting access to the mental health—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'm hard-pressed to find much in Bill 33 that actually supports our children and our students. Under the guise of improving oversight, transparency and the overall effectiveness of the system, there remain in this bill significant concerns about the balance of oversight and institutional autonomy. Right off the get-go, Bill 33 will remove the voice of students, parents and educators in this province. Local issues will go unnoticed, as decisions will be centred in Toronto.

A few weeks ago, one of Ontario's largest and longest-running agricultural fairs was on display: the Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show. My favourite day is Young Canada Day, a day where high school students come out and they show their school spirit, competing in road races, tug-of-war, cheerleading and various other competitions. This is a day that has been part of the opening day of the Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show for several decades. Young Canada Day holds lasting memories for all of the area's students, including me. The Grand Erie District School Board has attempted a few times to stop the tradition, and do you know who came to the rescue? Our school board trustees.

This bill is a smoke screen for the larger issue of chronic underfunding. During COVID, this government kept kids out of the classroom and online, which has created more complex needs within the classroom—\$6.4 billion in underfunding because this government refuses to keep up with inflation. We see aging buildings; education inequities, especially in rural areas like mine; larger class sizes; and less support staff. Teachers and staff are facing burnout like never before, affecting retention and overall education quality.

On the post-secondary side, campuses have made it clear that Bill 33 is a step backwards for students. I've had students ask me why the government didn't seek out their thoughts before drafting this legislation.

Let's look at section 21.1, which will establish an unprecedented measure that grants this government power to decide which ancillary fees are required and which are not. This change could severely cut essential services that students rely upon, like mental health supports, crisis response teams, food banks and transportation programs. These are the monies of the students and their families. These are not the government's monies. Students do not view these as extra; they view them as lifelines.

Adam Chambers, a University of Ottawa student from my riding, is active on campus, and he wrote to me. He said, "As student representatives, we dedicate countless hours, months and years of our lives to listen and support our student peers to represent them the best we can. So, whether it be ancillary fees, merit-based applications, or funding reviews, we ask that the government look to us to provide integral student perspectives when decision-making and we welcome opportunities to consult with the ministry beforehand." That makes sense, but it did not happen.

Schedule 2 is where we see an interesting expansion of overreach, as the minister is given powers to establish policy and guidelines respecting school board expense policies, including discretionary funding. The ministry can already investigate governance and financial concerns in school boards and can already establish, through regulation, reporting requirements on financial information. So I question: Why does this government need new legislation to address the handful of financial mismanagement?

I have a shared school board with the member from Brantford, the Grand Erie District School Board, who have been attempting to silence one of its trustees, Carol Anne Sloat. Carol Anne Sloat attempts to hold things to account. This trustee has been put through the wringer, and courts agree she has done nothing wrong, yet administration continues to seek revenge in an attempt to finally silence her. The point here is that the trustee is not the problem; it's administration. The only thing Carol Anne Sloat is guilty of is advocating for the people she serves, the taxpayers.

Last week, during debate on Bill 9, I described how government deliberately creates or exaggerates a situation or a problem, so they can then implement a predetermined solution that taxpayers might not otherwise accept. Bill 33 can be seen through the same lens. The role of the school board trustee has been chipped away at purposefully, in order to give the illusion that they are worthless. Bill 33 is another chip, as it will take power away from democratically elected trustees and replace community decision-making with directives right here from Queen's Park.

When I was a student, trustees were in the schools and we as students knew them. But today, these school board trustees are no longer allowed to call families back and no longer allowed to intervene in problems within the schools. They're no longer allowed to act on behalf of the people they serve. We are taking away their advocacy efforts on behalf of students and on behalf of Ontario families.

Speaker, this is all a means to an end. As we know, the CBC, at the beginning of September, quoted the Minister of Education as saying that he is 100% looking at eliminating trustees. The minister is going after the low-hanging fruit here.

There's so much to say and such little time. This is not education reform; rather, it's a consolidation of power and a deep erosion of democracy, and we should all be extremely concerned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Haldimand–Norfolk for her presentation, where she outlined that this Bill 33 is a distraction to the cuts and the underfunding of education.

When one considers statutory benefit increases, such as CPP and EI, these are increases that the board can't opt out of, but clearly, the government can, because they have not increased funding to the tune of millions of dollars for boards. They have left the restaurant before the bill arrives.

My question, though, to the member: How is installing a downtown Toronto bureaucrat going to help students in Haldimand–Norfolk, London or anywhere else?

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you to my colleague for the question. Appointing a bureaucrat in downtown Toronto is going to do little to help my students and families in Haldimand–Norfolk—it will do nothing.

I go back to my example of the Norfolk County Fair and the Grand Erie District School board continually trying to do away with Young Canada Day at the fair. It hasn't been a bureaucrat in downtown Toronto, it hasn't been a bureaucrat anywhere who has actually saved Young Canada Day in Norfolk county. It has been the local school board trustees from Norfolk county

who have banded together and have gone to the board and said, “This is an important day for school spirit, an important day for education, and we will continue to fight for Norfolk County Fair and Young Canada Day.”

So the answer to the question is, a government-appointed bureaucrat to look after school boards is not a good idea. We need to retain the local decision-making powers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I find it curious that the NDP and the independent member are both supporting—one is supporting a board where, so far, one official has been charged criminally, where a report was issued at the absolute, utterly disgraceful conduct from the director, from the trustees on down, at the board’s inability to put money back into the classroom—likely more charges to come. That member is supporting that.

The independent member is supporting a trustee on a board that changed the rules. To be clear, they changed the rules to allow themselves to go to Italy, a hundreds of thousands of dollars trip. That member is supporting that type of behaviour. Now, do you know the challenge that the minister has? The minister does not have the ability, right now, to go in and put that board back on track. I do not have the tools to do that.

Should the government of Ontario and the minister be allowed to step in when boards have fallen off the rails, when trustees have fallen off the rails? I think they do. If the members opposite don’t think they do, what powers should the government have to put the boards back on track?

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: To the minister opposite, I don’t support trustees going to Italy and wasting taxpayers’ money. But that’s a separate bill. We’re dealing with Bill 33 here. Do we throw the baby out with the bathwater? How many MPPs, how many other elected officials have been caught squandering taxpayer money? Do we fire them?

Mr. Chris Glover: Not yet.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Not yet.

Trustees are democratically elected. I do not support those trustees who went to Italy. I do not support the trustee who did not pay his monies back. But this is a different issue. And you want to use that issue as a smokescreen on the \$6.4 billion in underfunding? Then go right ahead. Parents see the truth. Families see the truth. Teachers see the truth. But to say that I support trustees going to Italy is absolutely wrong and not factual whatsoever. But this is Bill 33.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions? The Minister of Education—quickly.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That’s interesting, because in the instance that the member is talking about, this is a board that is running at a \$3.4-million surplus. But these board trustees—to put it clear to everybody—weren’t allowed to do something, they got together in camera secretly, and then they changed the rules to allow themselves to go on an all-expenses-paid trip to Italy.

The minister right now does not have the power to step into a board that has done that and put them back on track. What tools should the minister have in legislation to allow him to put the board back on track?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As I begin my comments today, I would like to share my time with the MPP from Windsor West.

I rise today to speak firmly against Bill 33. With my background as an educator, I saw so many kids who were placed, all in the name of inclusion, into classrooms without support. But continuing the legacy of the Liberals before them, we see the Conservatives have cut and underfunded education. They've strangled it and then have the audacity to ask it why it can't breathe.

In reality, Bill 33 does nothing to address the real challenges facing students and families in London, Ontario. This bill does not reduce class sizes, it does not put more caring adults in the classrooms, and it does not ensure children with special needs get the supports that they require. Instead, it adds yet another layer of bureaucracy: an unelected downtown Toronto bureaucrat who will not return phone calls, who will not return emails and who will not bring the voices of students and parents forward. It centralizes control and it is something that is an affront to parents and students and our democratic process.

At a town hall I hosted in my riding in London a few weeks ago, a parent shared a story that I want to share with this chamber, and it highlights why this bill is so concerning. His son, who has special needs, must travel over an hour each way just to attend school. Families like his also already face extraordinary challenges, and now, with Bill 33, they fear their voices will be fully taken away. Instead of providing support for children with special needs, this government is adding stress, removing accountability and limiting the ability of communities to advocate for their children.

Trustees in London, like those across Ontario, are elected to represent local families. They are not highly paid politicians. They earn less than minimum wage, often spending countless unpaid hours returning parent calls and volunteering to ensure every child has a chance to succeed. Yet Bill 33 threatens to sideline these elected representatives, replacing local oversight with centralized control from Queen's Park.

This is not modernization. It is top-down micromanagement. This bill gives the Minister of Education unprecedented power to take over school boards at any time, for any reason, with no limits or oversight. That's not governance. That's authoritarianism. It's a model that silences local communities and undermines public accountability. And while the government always likes to use the word "accountability," it ignores the real issues: underfunding, unsafe classrooms, violence in schools, overcrowded schools and a lack of supports for students with special needs and mental health needs.

Let's talk about funding. London schools, like all boards across Ontario, are under chronic financial strain. There is a \$6.35-billion funding gap created by this government. Per-pupil funding has not kept pace with inflation. Statutory benefits, like CPP and EI, are not funded. That's \$13 million for the Thames Valley District School Board. These are statutory increases that boards cannot opt out of. But this government, like when the cheque arrives in a restaurant, has already gotten in their car and have left. They've skipped out on the bill, expecting someone else to pick it up.

Bill 33 does nothing to solve the funding crisis that we have in our schools. It masks underfunding with control, interference and political spin. Students in London and in Ontario deserve stable, predictable funding, not another layer of bureaucracy.

The government's flawed approach to safety in schools is also problematic. Bill 33 emphasizes policing over care. Students struggling with mental health challenges or special needs risk criminalization rather than support. What students need are caring adults, mental health services and meaningful access to resources and classrooms, not punitive measures that set them up to fail. We know that schools are safer when care comes first. The NDP's emergency plan to end school violence would actually address these issues.

Stakeholders across the province have spoken out loudly. ETFO calls this "authoritarianism cloaked in ... accountability."

OSSTF says the government is trying to distract from "chronic underfunding."

OECTA highlights the centralization of power and weakening of public institutions.

AEFO calls for real investment in French-language schools while OPSBA reminds us that trustees have worked under financial strain for years, particularly in special education and student transportation.

CUPE warns that schedule 1 changes undermine local control of children's aid society budgets.

Post-secondary groups like OCUFA and OUSA are concerned about bureaucratic burdens and underfunding that hurt students directly.

The Canadian Federation of Students has called this "a distraction to the underfunding of post-secondary education" and I could not agree more.

Bill 33 is an attack on post-secondary education. This is just the Student Choice Initiative wrapped up all over again. It's an attack on students. By allowing students who are already financially strapped to opt out of ancillary fees, it's providing them with a false choice. How do you ask someone who is already paying far too much for their education in Ontario—possibly saving a little bit more?

But this government's record on post-secondary education—I mean, we are the lowest funder of post-secondary education in Canada. We are the bottom of the barrel. Last I checked, we would have to increase our expenditures by 43.5% in post-secondary education, and that's not to be first, Speaker; that's to be second-last.

This false choice with allowing students to opt out of ancillary fees would remove things that support students such as food banks, such as mental health supports, such as sexual violence supports. What this does is, this bill actually creates red tape for colleges and universities, something that this government pretends to be opposed to, but yet when it suits them, they love creating their own red tape, or blue tape.

Bill 33 does nothing to make Ontario schools better. It doesn't address class sizes; it doesn't improve learning conditions; it doesn't support children with special needs. The minister has gone ahead and said that he's listening and that if the funding formula is a problem, they will address it. Well, on this side of the House, we have been speaking out loudly for years about the problem with the funding formula. The problem with the funding formula is that it treats all

students in a cookie-cutter fashion, as if all of them will receive the same amount of money, and then the government provides school boards with a purse of money for special education. There are two problems with that: There's no guarantee that it will be spent on the student who needs it, and even if it is, there's no guarantee that it's going to be spent in a developmentally appropriate way and that will benefit that student.

Instead, what we have been calling for and we will continue to call for is a funding model based on students' needs. That way, the funding follows that student and is based on educational assessments, it's based on professionals. It ensures that that funding will follow that student. But also, the problem with the amount of money that this government and past governments have spent on special education is that it's nowhere near enough. School boards are forced to dip into additional monies and cut different programs in order to simply fund special education.

Speaker, our schools, our students and our families deserve better. They deserve predictable funding, supports for vulnerable students, safe learning environments and elected trustees who can respond to local needs. London's families deserve to have their choices heard, not silenced by downtown Toronto bureaucrats.

Instead of helping students succeed, this government is doubling down on control. They're silencing voices and putting politics ahead of kids' education. With this government, there is always an action that is cloaking a hidden action. That hidden action, many have said with Bill 33, is the seizure of land that school boards own. For what purposes? Well, we need really only look toward the current RCMP investigation of this government into the greenbelt, and how that was being parcelled off and sold off to wealthy Conservative donors, turning millionaires into billionaires.

I oppose Bill 33 as an educator and as the MPP for London North Centre. It's the wrong approach for students. It's the wrong approach for the province. We need real investments in education, not political control.

With that, I turn my time over to the MPP from Windsor West.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate the remarks from my colleague from London and the focus on education. I'm going to use the little time that I have to talk about something else that is impacted by this bill. I'm going to talk about child welfare and child protection services and what is happening with the children's aid societies this province.

Almost half of the CASs are running deficits because of chronic underfunding by the provincial government. We are seeing—and we've raised it; I have in this House, my colleagues have raised this, parents have raised this directly with the government and the government members—the fact that parents are surrendering their children to CAS, thinking that those children with complex needs are going to get the supports and services they need because they're not getting it in community, because this government is wilfully underfunding all of those community supports for kids that have special needs. They're wilfully chipping away at public services, and so these parents get to the point—and I'm talking about it happening in the health care system when they try to access health care, mental health supports when they're trying to access therapy. The OAP, the autism program—the wait-list is astronomical in this province.

Meanwhile, the minister stands up and applauds himself when you have tens of thousands of families on that wait-list, and they're getting to the point where they feel like they need to turn

their kids over to the CAS. There are children all around this province—some as young as one, two, three years old—that are currently housed in office spaces and in hotel rooms. They're being trafficked. They're coming in contact, some of these kids, with drug dealers.

Just last year, Jade—not her real name, but they use Jade to protect her identity—15 years old, a year ago this month, died. She was being housed in a hotel because there was nowhere else for her to go.

There is nothing in this bill to address that. In fact, it's the exact opposite. It's this government finger-pointing, trying to blame somebody else for their wilful negligence of the health care system, the education system, the Ontario Autism Program, mental health supports and the justice system. This government has the audacity to bring forward a bill like this to point fingers at somebody else.

When asked to do a review, an investigation into Jade's death, this government refused—outright refused to look at the system that they've created that has led to the death of Jade and so many other children and youth in this province.

We're seeing more and more families coming forward and facing that impossible decision of where they can turn to to actually get help. This government is doing nothing. There is nothing in this bill to support those families.

I'm going to talk about a constituent of mine who reached out just the other day. Again, she's gone to the media. She's gone to the government members. She's raised this numerous times. This parent is on the brink of collapse herself, because her child with complex needs can't get the supports and services that this family desperately needs in order to keep their child at home and for their child to thrive. And so she's contacted my office again, asking if I can help get her child adopted, so that maybe, because that child has gone through the system—one way through the system—her child will get the supports that he needs before he harms himself or someone else.

That is the state of this province. That is the state that this government has brought us to. And yet there is absolutely nothing in this bill to address that. How many children have to die?

And Jade was not the first big news story, folks. We can talk about the child who was found dead in a dumpster. The government didn't do anything about that. We can talk about the child—I remember standing here talking about a child who was literally starved to death, and this government didn't do an investigation. And if they had done an investigation, what they would have seen is their negligence, their lack of funding—proper, sustainable funding—for child protection, for the education system, for the health care system, for the programs that these kids with complex needs need.

What they would have seen if they had done an investigation back then—and this was years ago, and it continues to happen. It is only getting worse. But if they actually did an investigation, a real investigation into the root causes of the problems, that report would come back pointing the finger at them.

And they don't want to take responsibility. It is very clear throughout this bill. They want to point fingers. We talk about the education sector; they want to point fingers at trustees for the government's failures. Here, they want to point fingers at those that work in child protection and say: "It's your fault. It's not our fault."

What they need to do is look in the mirror. We are talking about children's lives here. How many children have to die before this government stops pointing fingers at everybody else and looks inward and says, "Okay, you know what? We do have work we have to do here. There are changes that we have to make"? There are systemic changes that have to happen and the biggest systemic change is funding.

These families that are pushed to the brink, if they could access those supports in community, wouldn't be turning to CAS. No parent wakes up in the morning and says, "Today would be a great day to hand my child over to the CAS. I don't want them anymore. I don't want the hassle." No parent says that.

In order for a parent to get to that point, the anguish that comes with the thought of handing over your child and your rights to your child, because you think that that is the only way that your child is going to get the health care they need, that they're going to get the education supports that they need in schools—the number of these kids that are being excluded from participating in education, from being in school is increasing every day.

The violence in schools is increasing every day, and that is because this government is purposefully underfunding and undermining the public education system. And then these kids don't get the supports they need in school, so they can't participate in school. Then they're isolated; they can't make friends. They're not in school; they're not getting the education they need. Their behaviours start to escalate. Parents can't get the other supports they need out in the community. They can't get the therapy or the mental health supports for the kids.

It just becomes a crisis. The crisis gets bigger and bigger and worse, and these parents get to the point where they feel like there is absolutely—interestingly enough, an Ombudsman report was called *Nowhere to Turn* a long time ago, under the Liberal government. This Conservative government hasn't changed a darn thing since then, except for making the problem worse.

Bill 33 is not about child protection and making it stronger. It's not about ensuring that it's actually supporting the people who need the support. It's not about fixing the problem. It's not about stopping the deaths of children in this province. It's about this government abdicating responsibility for the decisions that they're making and trying to put the blame on somebody else. That is absolutely shameful.

So, again, I will pose the question, as my time wraps up: How many families pushed to the brink is enough for you? How many children have to die before that's enough for you, before you actually take action and reflect on what you've been doing and change course and make it better?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I have a question for the member for London North Centre. He referenced Thames Valley. I want to just explain and see if he agrees.

The Thames Valley report highlighted the fact that not only were the trustees complicit, but that the director of education on down were doing things that were completely wrong and offside. This is a board that had some troubling signs. A couple of years ago, they were in a surplus position, but we could see things going off the rails when massive surpluses started to whittle away because bonuses were given to directors of education and superintendents, and when they went away on trips at expensive hotels. So the surplus went into a deficit. The ministry and

the minister have no ability to intervene, even when they see this happening, until the board falls into a deficit. So we have to allow things to get really bad, even though we know something is coming.

Does the member agree that the ministry and the minister should have the ability to put things back on track when they see things going off the rails, or does he believe the current system—where a board is completely in financial disarray—is the best way to protect students, families and teachers?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the minister for the question.

Unfortunately, the minister is not being entirely accurate when it comes to the audit that happened of the school board. In fact, the ministry's own audit did not uncover that trip. That trip involved 18 senior administration officials. Trustees did not vote on it. In fact, in June, trustees passed a motion prior to being taken under supervision: "All professional development opportunities, travel and catered events must be reviewed to ensure cost-effectiveness aligns with (the school board's) strategic plan." The motion also noted that expenses must be saved where possible by considering location, transportation and catering efficiencies as required.

This government has shut down families of students with special needs by blocking their opportunity to view special education advisory committee meetings. They've also, under the supervisor, sent kids with special needs home because they don't—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank both of my colleagues for their comments this morning.

This Conservative government is the most corrupt, incompetent and fiscally irresponsible government in the history of this province. They keep undermining our democratic ability to fight back against their corruption and their incompetence, so—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will caution the member to phrase his questions more parliamentary.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay.

Bill 33 allows them to intervene and undermine democratically elected student unions on campuses, and it also sets the course to eliminate democratically elected school trustees.

To the member from London North Centre: Do you think that the government is trying to get rid of our—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I think it's important that we all recognize in this chamber that one of the first acts from this government was to meddle with Toronto city hall elections. In the province of Ontario we see a government that is currently under threat because they're under RCMP investigation right now. They're knocking at the door, and people are going to have to come out with their hands up. Just like the Liberals before them, people will be going to jail. Right now in the province of Ontario, we see many, many attacks on our democratic processes and the very nature of the rule of law.

This government has also told hospitals, which have record debt levels, that they need to balance their budgets and find efficiencies. They're doing the same with school boards. They want to undermine the greatest democratizing forces of our society, which are (1) the vote, (2) public education and (3) public health care.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for your presentation today. We've heard the Minister of Education criticize—and I think correctly criticize—the decisions of a board in that they changed the rules to meet what they wanted to do and abuse that public money, but we also know that just two weeks ago, the Premier was quoted at the Empire Club as saying, "Don't break the rules; change the rules."

A brief description from Google AI of the Premier—I'll just read it for you. It says, "This is a long-standing theme of the Premier's political tenure, characterized by his government's use of legislation and constitutional powers to circumvent judicial decisions, override municipal councils and otherwise fast-track things."

I'm wondering if you think that perhaps these trustees and administrators were learning lessons from the government about how to break and change rules and abuse their power?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Orléans for the question. With this government, if they don't like the rules, they will move the goalposts. They are really quite concerned about the centralization of power, and that would be through a downtown, unelected Toronto bureaucrat to replace trustees.

Really, the problem here is that the government has issues with what senior administration has done in some areas, and yet they're not going after senior administration. Instead, they're going after trustees because they know trustees are a democratically elected voice for students. They advocate for special education, which they would like to cut because one of the first few actions they also did was to totally destroy the Ontario Autism Program and replace the wait-list with another wait-list.

Really, we see so many attacks on education—it is almost beyond belief, what they've done to education in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's curious he says we're not going after administration because on the board that he keeps talking about, the director of education was fired; there's been a criminal charge on one of the individuals mentioned in the report. The director of legal services has resigned, so there is accountability happening.

But then let's take the trustees off the table on this particular board. The fact that they did nothing—let's take that off the table. In this board, they went from a surplus a couple of years ago to a deficit. We could see it coming because they were giving themselves bonuses. They were giving themselves bonuses and creating positions, the bureaucracy in that board that did not need to exist. The ministry could see this happening, but because they were in surplus, we had no ability to intervene and say, "This is not right. You have to change the way things are happening."

So does the member think that we should allow boards to go into deficit before we intervene to put more money back into the classroom to support students, parents and teachers?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's really quite interesting that this government would talk about the need for supervision, and yet the deficit that is with Thames Valley has ballooned while under supervision: It went from \$17 million all the way up to \$32 million. It's also curious that this minister would talk about the director of legal services because that director of legal services ran for these Conservatives.

It's really quite interesting that they tried to use these facts in a way that benefits them, but, my goodness, they don't like dealing with numbers; they don't like dealing with the truth. It's really quite concerning that this government wants to underfund and destroy public education, probably because they want to find a way to profitize and privatize the very bedrock of our democratic foundation, which is public education.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Windsor West for bringing up the issue of the child welfare system as it relates to kids in care.

The Auditor General has previously identified significant issues with the child welfare system under this government, including poor adherence to protection standards, cases being closed prematurely and investigations not being completed in a timely manner. The government has done nothing to ensure the safety of vulnerable children. The member from Windsor West talked about medically fragile, vulnerable children whose parents are not receiving the support to ensure that they can be properly cared for, and therefore are considering giving up their children.

Why does the government think these parents don't love their children as much as we love our children? I'm asking the member from Windsor West to really identify what's at the heart of this government's ignorance and lack of leadership on child welfare.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I would say that it is the government's unwillingness to take accountability for the decisions they are making; for the chronic underfunding of all of our social services, frankly, whether that's child protection, education, health—you name it.

I think it's interesting that the Minister of Education was focusing on one school board and one particular issue and talked about how they need to take over responsibility now: "The government needs to be involved." When we look at this government, we're talking about children dying in care because this government is chronically underfunding the system, so it is understaffed and under-resourced.

When we're talking about what's happening in the education system and the health care system; the number of lawsuits that this government has had against them and the millions upon millions of dollars they wasted; the fact that they've increased the size of their government, instead of spending money where it's due; maybe the federal government should introduce a bill to come take over the provincial government and put them under supervision.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Order, please.

Further debate? I recognize the member from Ajax.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Order, please. The members will come to order. The Minister of Education will come to order.

I recognize the member from Ajax.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you, Speaker. I see that the Minister of Education is a little worked up before question period. I think it's a little training ground for later.

Let's talk about publicly funded education in the province. When I look at this bill, I see it as a distraction from what the root causes are that we are experiencing in our public education sector, which is really the broader underfunding of the system. This bill has got a bit of a fancy name that doesn't do that much in addressing the real problems that are affecting students and educators within the classroom. It almost feels as though this government is trying to create another crisis to undermine public education.

We've seen this movie before, my colleagues. You don't fix schools by just silencing school boards and centralizing power within the minister's office. That is going to be a recipe for disaster. We've got 72 school boards in this province. That's a lot of school boards, and I know the minister is quite busy already. So to put fingers within all 72 of them individually, frankly, I don't think is a feasible way of dealing with this. If we hear everything that's happening, that's something that I guess could very well happen because of the chronic issues that we're facing in public education.

I think it's really important that government works in collaboration with school boards, that it works in collaboration with directors of education, that it works in collaboration with the Ontario Principals' Council, that it works in collaboration with parents and with students as well, because when you have collaboration, when you're able to have these discussions and come out with what is the best pathway forward, you are going to get better results in public education. That's informed by local opinions. That's informed by local voices.

Special education: 71 out of 72 school boards in this province are spending more on special education than what's funded by the government. Again, 71 out of the 72 school boards in this province are spending more on special education than what's being provided for funding. Every single school board, with the exception of one, is overspending their allocation on special education because the problem is that bad in this province. There is about an \$800-million to \$1-billion gap in terms of what boards spend and what that funding is provided for. That's a lot of money, but that's going to benefit students in the classroom. That's going to benefit the students with special needs in the classroom to ensure that they get the support that they need so that they can achieve their true potential and everyone else in the classroom also then has that same ability to achieve what their potential is.

During one of the questions earlier, I mentioned knocking on doors, and I had a parent upset because there's a couple of kids in the classroom that continue to cause disruptions. There isn't that EA support in the classroom, and his kids are struggling. He went to say, "If this doesn't change, I'm going to put my kids in private education." And this isn't somebody that makes a lot

of money, but how concerned that that parent is and how far that that parent is willing to go to ensure that his kid gets a better education.

Every school in this province should be a good school. Every kid should have that opportunity. So we can plaster it with the name of the bill, we can plaster it with all the other rhetoric or distractions or stuff that's happening, but at the end of the day, saving a couple of hundred thousand dollars on a school renaming—and I do agree with the minister when he talked about school renamings. No school board should be spending that much. That's ridiculous. But it comes down, again, to students in the classroom and ensuring that they're supported.

Let's talk about reserve funds of school boards in this province, because many school boards are starting to get in the territory where their reserves are so low that the ministry could very easily come in and take over those school boards. But let's look at why that's the case in the first place. The case in the first place is, number one, the chronic underfunding, but number two, let's go back to COVID. School boards were given authorization—and in some ways rightfully so in the absence of provincial leadership in funding schools—to spend some of their reserves on PPE, on COVID supports, helping students in the classroom and the system adjust with what was really a very global pandemic that impacted and touched all of us in all of our lives.

Now, though, we're in a situation where we've got good school boards that have done pretty much almost all the right things—they're in a position where they could be taken over by the minister. That's something that can happen right now. And they're doing all the right things. They're spending money well. They're trying to save. And now those school boards are making tough decisions on, "How much money do we have to cut in the classroom?" That's not right. They're making decisions on technology cuts and, again, supports for students with special needs. That's not a good thing. Support for students really is going out the window.

What I'd love to see from this government—how do we deal with some of these challenges—is, again, kids with autism: Let's deliver more of that support within the school board. The Ontario Autism Coalition was talking about that the other day. We've got to see more collaboration, as I was talking about earlier, more discussion, more working together to really solve the challenges.

With violence in schools—we hear our education partners, education unions, talk about this quite a bit, and I think rightfully so because it's their members that are the ones dealing with these challenges in the classroom day in and day out without the support that they need from this provincial government.

IEPs aren't being followed; individual education plans are not being followed. Again, it comes back to, "What's the root cause?" The system is, right now, set up to fail. That's not a good thing.

There are so many contradictions, I feel, with this government. On the one hand, a recent election proposal saying, "Well, we've got to go back to tradition"—okay, well, some of our tradition in this province is our publicly funded education system, going back to 1867. And I don't know what's going to be coming next. It might work; it might not work. I don't know. It's going to depend on those conversations that take place.

So let's make the system work better. I agree with the minister when he says the system needs to work better, but I think it's how in which we do that is the difference. If you want to support students, support the support staff instead of taking them to court. That lingers quite a bit for

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folks in our education sector around Bill 124; it left a really bad taste in the mouth of workers who are working really hard and supporting our teachers, supporting educators, supporting students and families in the classroom.

I've got probably a minute until we go—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I hate to interrupt, but it is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 29, 2025, on the motion for 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 / Projet de loi 33, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives aux services à l'enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille, à l'éducation et aux collèges et universités.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Ajax, who I believe had the floor this morning.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It's very good to be continuing the conversation we were having around Bill 33 this morning. I see the Minister of Education eagerly coming back to his seat in the chamber.

I was about to talk about trustees. I was going to mention that when I talk to folks in the education spaces and when I had the opportunity to know trustees from before and after, local matters in public education—having local voices, making local decisions—because we're a really big province and the communities all around our province have different needs, different dynamics. And between the different publicly funded school boards, as well, there are so many differences, so having local voices, having local representatives on their school boards is super important.

Trustees help families navigate the education system. Sometimes you end up in situations where a family has a challenge and they try to go through the teacher, the principal—the steps, right? There are steps that you have to take. They eventually either will contact my office or they will contact their local trustee, seeking help. In some situations, absolutely, we're able to help. In other situations, the rules were applied fairly, and it's unfortunate—there might be a difference of opinion or a lack of resources, or whatever it might be. But I know of situations, since I've become an MPP, that I've had the privilege of helping families in my community on.

Trustees, in some ways, are that line of last defence, the person of last resort, and I want to make sure that we have that in our public education system—that trustees are there, being able to be that person of last resort. They're connected into their communities, as well.

I think we've seen some stories of trustees acting bad. I can think of different television shows from the 1990s that we might be able to apply some situations to, and I think we've got to look at that. We've got to make sure that box works. We've got to make sure trustees are being effective and that they are staying within what the Education Act requires them to do.

When we look at situations where we have supervisors right now in school boards—and there are varying reasons why you might have a supervisor in place, and, I really think, some justified reasons from time to time as well. There are times when governance breaks down. There are times, on the staff side of things as well, when things break down. We've seen that before. But it's something that needs to be used very sparingly.

When I look at this bill, the ability to put in a supervisor, in my view, is far too broad; it's too broad in just allowing the minister to take over school boards.

I said earlier that there are 72 school boards. The minister doesn't have 72 fingers. It's going to be hard for 72—I mean, 10 fingers, 10 toes, maybe; okay, 20. That's still a lot of school boards if you were to think about that.

We need to narrow, in my view, the scope of that public interest part. There are justified situations where a supervisor can and should come into place, but that's not in every situation. To give that discretion just to the minister, whichever—the minister of the day, a future minister; who knows who that's going to be? I think it's a bad move, and that decision should really still rest with cabinet. These are big decisions, and putting in a supervisor in a board can be very disruptive. It may not actually achieve the intended outcomes in which you're seeking to look at.

There are some situations where, whether it's financial, other pieces—we're paying some of these supervisors, I think, what is it, \$350,000 or around there, in response to scandals of tens of thousands of dollars. We've got to be very careful in terms of how we use that supervision power.

It's almost kind of like a double standard when I think of some of the debates that we have in the House around the Skills Development Fund. The actions of the government and maybe the Ministry of Labour—if they were a school board, the government probably should be putting that ministry under supervision. I really do believe that. If we want to apply it the same way as how we look at school boards, how we look at things are operating. I think it's a double standard. I think it's important that cabinet has that decision when it comes to appointing a supervisor.

And I fear the path that this bill intends to go down. I fear it because school boards have a lot of land. School boards have a lot of property. In some cases, that property is very, very valuable. Is it a land grab? I guess time will tell. But I think that's a very real fear.

If I look at the Toronto District School Board, before they were put under supervision, the Toronto District School Board trustees, of their own volition, to try to get their house in order—and it's a really big house, and it's a bit of a messy house, because it was an amalgamation of different school boards. Trustees on the Toronto District School Board asked for permission to be able to close schools so that they can deal with their own affairs and uphold the responsibilities that they have and consult with those local communities. The government said no in that way and then put in a supervisor later. We'll see what that supervisor ends up doing in this area.

I think that local matters in education; having that local governance able to make those decisions, to be empowered to make those decisions as well.

Earlier on I spoke about some of the structural challenges with public education, the underfunding. I know we're spending more than we ever have before. We're also, as a province, bigger than we ever have been before as well. And we know that that gap in special education is

\$800 million to a billion dollars. It's a lot of money. If we fix that piece, we're going to fix a lot of the other pieces that are happening in public education.

Around school renaming: I don't think giving ministerial power around school renaming is good governance. What, is the PC Party going to be soliciting donations next on how to name schools? I think we've got to create a—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Don't give them any ideas.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I know. I might be giving too many ideas here.

Create a box. We've had these debates at different school boards around school renamings. Some argue it's not a very good practice to name a school after a living individual, for example, because you don't know what's going to happen next. The ministry has that ability to set the parameters and let school boards then go off and make their own decisions. They need to consult. They need to consult effectively. They need to do it thoughtfully. So what the ministry should do, I've said it a little bit: Create a box. What are the requirements? What are the expectations of trustees and also school administrators? The ministry doesn't need this whole new suite of legislation in order to fix a lot of these issues. The ministry can prescribe the policy requirements.

What happened in the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic board shouldn't have happened. Trustees should not have changed their own policies to be able to go on a junket to Italy. That's not right. That's not good use of taxpayer dollars. That doesn't uphold confidence in the public system. Sometimes you see times where trustees or boards—some of these individual trustees make some decisions, and what that does is that's all we end up talking about instead of the really good work that teachers are doing in the classroom, the really good work that EAs and ECEs and social workers and other folks in our education system are doing. Some of those scandals end up distracting from it. So we do need to put, in some ways, a little bit more of a box around what's happening, and that means good travel and expense requirements.

Procurement and school naming requirements: Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater on this. Make the system more effective, make it work better so that, as the minister says, we are supporting students; we are supporting families. I'm just not quite sure that this is the approach which we need to be doing around that.

Hold boards accountable for results, not by micromanaging but measuring outcomes and supporting success. Public education is a really big beast in this province, and we need to provide better support for our school boards, especially right now around technology, AI and innovation. To have a different process from school board to school board to school board, frankly, is a waste of time. It's a waste of individuals' time at those boards.

We need to look more at how you do some of those things centrally. How do you provide that coordination and support so that, for some technology tools in the classroom, that really wouldn't be very much different if you were in Thunder Bay or in Durham or in Peel or wherever. We need to support that in the classroom. Things like human resource supports, even—some type of centralization of support. Back services, especially with smaller boards as well—because sometimes you're dealing with really challenging issues and you need an outside perspective, legal advice, to be able to do that.

It would be good to see things to help make new school builds go faster as well. I've written to the minister around that, and I hope the ministry is looking at that. How do we make education work better? How do we build schools faster? How do we save money? But I think with this bill, it should go to the committee. I think it's important that we give stakeholders the opportunity to put forward their positions on this through the committee process. As I talk to people in the sector, that's something that they would like to see. How do we make the bill better? How do we make sure things work? How do we ensure that the feedback that's being given is being done in a way that's also public as well?

Around post-secondary—I'll leave the last two minutes to talk about that. Our post-secondary sector, in my view, is failing. It's underfunded. This is, again, a crisis that's being created by an overreliance on international tuition. And then, we've seen the minister blame institutions for the fallout instead of the government taking responsibility and fixing a system that, at the college level especially, isn't working, and at the university level, isn't focused nearly enough on creating new innovations and new jobs and opportunities in all parts of the province.

Around ancillary fees: Students approve those ancillary fees through referendum. You can rescind those ancillary fees as well through referendum. And we see, for some student associations, they provide resources; they provide support to students on top of the institution. I know earlier, I think one of the members spoke about CFS. I think both OUSA and the CFS are opposing this change.

I'll give you a good example about ancillary fees. At York University, there's the Second Student Centre building. That building got built, was funded, by students—the First Student Centre building as well. Students said, "Yes, we want to pay. We will actually, in this case, pay the same amount of money that we were paying before to get a new building." It's providing a lot of support for students, and space for students, on that campus—and it's student owned, student run and student operated. I'm very proud to have had an opportunity to be a part of that process in negotiating that deal on behalf of students, way back when I was a student. These things can work.

Universities have levies around mental health and well-being. They're providing supports outside of the health care system, on campus, where students are, so that they can get the support and the help that they need, because this has been a conversation that has grown quite a bit over the last 15 years. Speaker, 15 years ago, we didn't hear very much about this. We didn't talk very much about this on university campuses. We are today. That's a good thing, and we need to be able to be doing more around it.

So what I would say is, universities were designed to be autonomous and not to act just at the whims. Universities can be great tools for better outcomes, driving jobs and opportunities in the future.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I enjoyed the member's speech. To be honest with you, I'm a little bit shocked and disappointed that he thinks that somehow I'm trying to consolidate power for myself. I'm somewhat disappointed also that the Liberals can only manage to do 10 things at one time, because that's the amount of fingers they have.

But I would ask the member this—just very specifically, because we hear this: In instances like Thames Valley, in instances like we're seeing in Brant Haldimand Catholic—these are boards that the minister currently does not have the authority to step into and to put back on track. Both of those boards at one point—and in Brant Catholic still—were in a surplus position, and because they were in a surplus, I did not have the ability to step in and make changes. The act does not allow me to do that.

So I had to wait until they went into deficit and started cutting before I could make changes to put them back on track. Does he think that's the right approach or should we modernize the system to allow the minister to step in quicker?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I would say that with great power comes great responsibility. We've seen with actions of this government—and I'm not even necessarily saying this minister; it could be a future minister as well. We've got to be really careful around this situation, because we see some of the issues—a lot of the issues—really do result in the underfunding and lack of support for our school boards.

Around the issue of Thames Valley: If I remember correctly, that was an issue that originally primarily involved staff, and there are some criminal charges being levied against one of the associate directors there, and that's progress. We've got to ensure that our school boards are staying within their mandate, and that's why I'm saying we need to put a box around them.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm sure that if this government had allowed this bill to go to committee, parents would have come and said that what they would like to see is some action on lead in the drinking water in our schools. It needs to be said that there is no safe level of exposure to lead, especially when it comes to our kids.

In Hamilton, 18 schools have recently tested positive. They exceeded the provincial safety standard for lead in drinking water. In fact, half of all Ontario's public schools have had a positive test, showing excessive levels of water in our public schools where kids go to school.

My question to the member is: You said, "How could this bill be made better?" Do you think that a bill that purports to be talking about supporting children would've taken as a priority the fact that they're being exposed to lead in the drinking water in public schools all across Ontario?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I didn't mention it in my remarks, but I think it goes down to the capital funding, especially for renovations of new schools. We don't see that in the budget. We see that backlog. It continues to grow. It continues to be there.

I talk quite a bit about how in Durham region, we're an area of growth where we need to build new schools, which is why I spoke that we've got to build schools faster. But areas of Toronto and Hamilton and other parts of this province—no kid should have to have water in that school that has lead. You can't drink out of the taps—just like in this building, actually, as well; you can't drink out of the taps in this building.

We should not be here, in this day and age, in any public facility, any facility in this province, where there is lead in the water and there's a sign there that says you can't drink the water.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to the member from Ajax, my seatmate here in the Legislature, for your remarks. I think you offered, actually, some good solutions here in your remarks.

I guess my question would be—we've heard from the minister that there are some examples of rogue behaviour, but what's been publicly said is that this bill is going to allow the full dismissal of the full system of governance. Maybe you could just talk a little bit more about what might be the best, most appropriate way to be responding to these situations, and what more we could be doing for our schools if you were able to have these cross-cutting approaches to the boards.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I thank my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the question. I think, at the end of the day, it comes to what is the structure that we need to create for school boards, and I don't think that that is going to happen in this individual bill.

When we talk about public education, it's our system that's existed, with school boards, since 1867. It went through some changes—big changes—in 1997. I think we're at the time where we do need to look at how do we ensure our public school system is going to be effective, but we can't do this by playing whack-a-mole: "Oh, there's an issue here, there's an issue here and there's an issue here." Let's involve everybody as part of that conversation and truly create a system that's going to be effective and that's going to deliver results for students and their families.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the member's answer just now, Madam Speaker, because he's talking about centralizing, really, in that answer right there. He's talking about centralizing. Again, we have to drill down on his comments, right, and I haven't heard an answer from any of the opposition on this. Under the current rules, if a board is running at a surplus, no matter what is happening in that board, the minister does not have the authority to step in and make things right. So when they went on a vacation to Italy and spent \$200,000 as opposed to fixing lead pipes in a school, I could not step in and do anything about it.

When Thames Valley was at a surplus and then hid what their expenses were, so that now they're at a multi-million-dollar deficit, I could not step in. This bill allows me to step in in boards that have fallen off the rails, where we know things are happening, as opposed to waiting for their circumstances to change to a point where it is so bad for teachers, parents and students.

So if he doesn't like that—if the members don't like that, what is their alternative to dealing with boards that are rogue and not hurting students in the classroom?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I would say, working in school boards before, most school boards were generally, in some ways, quite afraid of the Ministry of Education already. We saw that throughout COVID. There were directives upon directives upon directives that the ministry expected school boards to comply with, and school boards by and large did comply with those directives.

I'm saying, let's stop this whack-a-mole approach. Let's stop this. Let's stop saying, "Oh, we've got all these issues," when really the real issue here is the underfunding of our public education system where kids with special needs are not getting the support in the classroom. Being able to step in and put a board under supervision is not going to fix that issue, and that is the issue that's impacting student learning and well-being in the classroom.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I have a question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to continue to debate on this again. Let's drill down exactly to what the member is talking about, yet again. We'll try again. We've been trying with the NDP and we'll try again with the Liberals.

Again, when a school is in surplus, I'm not talking—whack-a-mole, yeah; I want to whack the boards that aren't doing the things that they're supposed to do—when you're in a surplus and you're diverting money from students, parents and teachers, but you are protected by a surplus so the minister can't do anything about it, should the minister have the ability to whack them, put them back on track and redirect resources back into the classroom, or do I need to wait until they go into a deficit, have cut funding from students, have cut funding from teachers, have taken away money from capital projects, because that is how you think the system should work. I think the opposite, but give me the solution to that problem and why you don't support the bill when it is fundamentally about putting boards back on track no matter where they are in their fiscal situation, putting them back on track and putting more resources back into the class.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I would say simply the criteria is way too broad in order to do that and just give the minister carte blanche to be able to go in there and take over a board. As I said during my remarks, I think there are situations where it makes sense that a board should be taken over. Financial mismanagement is absolutely one of those situations. What happened in Brant Haldimand Norfolk, what happened in Thames Valley, frankly, should never have happened in our system.

But if we don't actually deal with the structure of the system. Instead of just saying we're going to go in and you're saying some of these boards—well, what about other boards that are actually, maybe, doing some good things, but there's a piece of property that the Premier or folks lobbying the Premier want? Well, create a false pretext, go into that board and do that. That's what I'm saying we need to try and avoid in this situation. Let's create the system so that it works—so that it works for students, so that it works for families.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There isn't enough time.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Oh, I think there is.

Laughter.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): And as the Acting Speaker, it is up to me.

Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise to debate Bill 33, and I think this is an especially important time to have a debate around our education system, our support systems for children and youth and our post-secondary education, because our public schools, colleges and universities are facing a financial crisis that is having a negative impact on students and the quality of education they deserve. And the support systems for children and youth services are quite frankly—I said this a couple of weeks of ago for purple shirt day—being held together with love and duct tape due to underfunding of the systems of support and care for our most

vulnerable children. As a result, our kids are not okay, our students are not okay, and I don't think Bill 33 is going to solve those problems. As a matter of fact, it will likely make them worse.

I especially want to thank my colleague from Kitchener Centre who, as a long-time school social worker before being elected as an MPP, was working on the front lines on many of these issues in our schools and in our communities and has been a passionate and strong advocate on these issues.

Speaker, I just want to quickly start on schedule 1 to point out—and I know the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services has a big heart. I've told him that many times, but it's hard to make your ministry work when, according to the Financial Accountability Officer, MCSS currently has a \$1.5-billion funding shortfall just to meet their basic services, and that's going to grow to \$3.1 billion over the next three years. And it's our most vulnerable children who are paying the price for that. So, while we can clean up some language about oversight in children and youth services, it's not going to solve the problem that there's insufficient funding to have the capacity needed to care for children, especially those in care.

I want to move to schedule 2. Again, we hear over and over that funding for schools has gone up—when population goes up, when inflation goes up, aggregate funding goes up—but per-student funding has actually been going down by \$1,500 per student since this government was elected. When that happens, it becomes incredibly challenging for school boards and school districts to meet the basic education needs of our students, especially those with special needs. So, a lack of ECEs, a lack of special education, a lack of having manageable class sizes in our schools is the real problem that our education system is facing.

I know the minister seems to want to use this bill as a way to set up the elimination, sometime in the future, of our school boards, but I want to remind members here that our school boards play a vital role in local democracy, hearing from parents, acting on the needs of the community, and oftentimes, Queen's Park-imposed solutions don't work for every community. I think the school resource officer issue contained in this bill is an example of that. Some school boards in some communities want resource officers, and it makes sense for those schools, and others don't, because it doesn't make sense for those schools, especially those with higher populations of students who may be Indigenous, people of colour. So I'm just wondering why the government wants to impose one-size-fits-all solutions and not allow our local school boards to have some local decision-making that makes sense for their communities and their schools. I'm concerned about what seems to be the increasing centralization of power into the minister's hands at the expense of local school boards.

Speaker, I want to close with schedule 3, affecting post-secondary education. I can tell, as somebody who represents a community that has the University of Guelph in it—I've been meeting with so many students, did a town hall with students from the University of Guelph, and what I heard from each and every one of those students was they are deeply concerned about the loss of student fees and the important role that student fees play in enhancing the educational experience and the quality of life for students. Those fees pay for a number of things, like student-run food banks. You would be shocked at the number of university and college students experiencing hunger. They pay for things like mental health and health and wellness programs that support students. They pay for student clubs that enhance the educational experience and the résumés that students have when they seek jobs after graduation. They support important campus events.

I know the government has gone after student fees in the past—they lost in the courts—and now they're taking another approach to go after student fees. I think that's going to deteriorate the experience of students—the democratic experience of running their own governments and quality of life on our campuses.

I also want to just briefly talk about—in the few minutes I have remaining—how our universities and colleges have done a great job of making sure that equity-deserving people have access to post-secondary education. I don't want to see that undermined by the changes in this bill. Why not leave universities and colleges to have the autonomy they need to make the decisions that make sense for them?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate that the member brought up the school resource officers because I think that's an important part of what this bill is. But I wonder if the member—he talks about the ability of boards to make decisions, and let me be clear: I've never said that I would eliminate school boards. It's never come out of my mouth. It's not on the agenda, not going to happen. School boards will still exist.

But I wonder if he would agree with me that our police forces across the province have the ability and are smart enough to know how to work with school boards in order to make this program a success in each of the boards and that, by working with our police officers and with our school boards and with principals and teachers, we can make the program a better success than it was before and that the answer isn't always just saying no to the very same people who we ask to come in and help us when things go awry in a school.

Does he agree with me that we can do this in a fashion that works better than it did back in 2017?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I just want to put on the record right now, today, that the minister said school boards will not be eliminated. I'm actually pleased to hear that today.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I said that all the time.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Okay. So that is on the record. I'm glad we have that on the record because I can't tell you how—I'm a regular on Newstalk 1010, and I can't tell you how many political panels I've been on where Conservative commentators are talking about the fact that they're going to get rid of school boards. So I'm glad we have it on the record today.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Oh, the trustees. Oh, okay—maybe it's the trustees then.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Anyway, I just want to be clear on that. I want to be really clear on that.

On school resource officers, I think the point you're making is the point I'm making: Why not allow local school boards to make these decisions and to work with our police services at a local level to have the program work the way it should in schools, in a way that benefits schools? It can be different in different schools rather than saying every school has to have the program. The bill says every school—

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

Questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: We know—and you mentioned this—that \$1,500 per student in public schools has been cut. So boards, teachers, everybody is really struggling to meet the needs of students, especially special-needs students.

We also know that the colleges are down at least \$13,000 per student relative to the average in the province, and university students are also way below the national average.

My question is, when you see in this bill—we see a tax on democracy through the potential loss of locally elected trustees; we see a tax on student organizations and their democratic processes. Do you see this bill as a distraction from the persistent underfunding of our public education system?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Well, I certainly see that the underfunding of our public education system, K-to-12 and post-secondary, is a huge problem that is negatively affecting our students and children in the province—no doubt about it.

Let's take post-secondary as an example. We have the lowest-funded college system of any province in the country. We have the second-lowest-funded university system of any province in the country. It would take a \$2-billion-to-\$3-billion-a-year increase in funding just to get us to the Canadian average—just to get us to the average.

The next great companies come out of the research, both applied and theoretical, out of our post-secondary sector—future workers. The under-investment in our colleges and universities is going to have real, negative impacts on our economy and jobs moving forward, and the ability to have innovation and research develop great companies.

Same thing at K-to-12. I was just meeting with the miners. They tell me it's safer to work in a mine now than in a school because the underfunding in our schools is leading to an increase in violence.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Speaker, and good afternoon. Before getting started, I'd like to just share that I'll be sharing my time with the MPP for Essex.

I'm pleased to be here today to speak in support of Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025. This bill, if passed, would amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, more commonly known or referred to as the CYFSA, and other related acts, to improve accountability and transparency in children's aid societies and expand and clarify Ombudsman oversight to better support children and youth receiving services under the CYFSA.

Since first being elected, our government has taken action to improve the child welfare system in the province of Ontario. Bill 33 builds on this important work and will help improve the child welfare system so that the focus is on services that prioritize safety and protection; are high-quality; and are responsive to the cultural and social needs of children, youth and families.

Throughout this process, we've consulted with community partners about how we can better support children and youth, and I sincerely thank everyone who took the time to share their

thoughts and experiences with us. The measures we're proposing in Bill 33 build on much of that feedback, as well as recommendations from Ontario's Ombudsman who, by the way, has been doing this incredibly important work in the province for 50 years now.

But not only that, Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025, was also informed by public consultation on Bill 188, the Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024, and extensive public engagement as part of the CYFSA legislative review.

Speaker, we will never stop working to better protect children and youth. Ongoing engagement with community partners is an important element of the changes we're making to improve the safety and well-being of children and youth receiving services from a children's aid society.

That's why the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is building on the work of Bill 33 and is consulting with children's aid societies and out-of-home care licensees on proposed regulatory amendments. These proposed regulatory changes would require societies and out-of-home care licensees to display age-appropriate information about the rights of children and youth and the complaints procedures in child-friendly language and in areas that are accessible to youth.

Through engagements, as well through the CYFSA legislative review, we heard that children and young people don't always remember or understand their rights. We want children and youth to feel more supported and heard by having an increased awareness of their rights and understand how to make a complaint because every child and youth in this province deserves to be protected. These proposed requirements would help ensure all children and youth in care better understand and exercise their rights by having information more accessible and available to them.

This change would align with existing requirements for societies and out-of-home care licensees to post information about the Ombudsman and similarly aligns with requirements in other care settings.

These proposed regulatory requirements build on our work, including the release of Ontario's Quality Standards Framework. This important framework was developed in response to a recommendation from the Office of the Chief Coroner expert panel. The quality standards framework provides an overview of what high-quality out-of-home care looks like across all sectors and settings that make up licensed out-of-home care for children and young people in the province of Ontario. These sectors include child welfare, youth justice, child and youth mental health and special needs.

The quality standards framework is an educational tool that provides guidance on the many aspects of high-quality care that are necessary to support vulnerable children and youth in out-of-home care and help to meet their needs, supporting them to thrive and achieve better outcomes.

To help ensure the success of the quality standards framework, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services released free training to help the sector better understand and apply the framework. The ministry also released a child-friendly website and poster called "The Care You Deserve" to help children and young persons understand the quality standards.

As you can see, Speaker, Bill 33 and the regulatory amendments that we are proposing are part of our continued commitment to people across Ontario who depend on our services. We're

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working to help ensure that all children and youth have access to the resources and supports they need to thrive and succeed.

This work builds on our government's introduction of the children and young—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, please adjourn the debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.