

Accessibility for persons with disabilities

MPP Stephanie Smyth: National AccessAbility Week is a time to celebrate the incredible people, advocates, caregivers and community leaders who continue to push Ontario forward every single day.

But it also has to be a moment where we are honest with ourselves about how much work is still left to do, because for a lot of Ontarians, accessibility barriers are not occasional inconveniences; they shape almost every part of daily life. It's the senior who misses a medical appointment because the Wheel-Trans booking never came. It's someone showing up to a subway station elevator only to see the familiar out-of-service sign again—or there isn't even an elevator at all. It's a parent trying to push a wheelchair down a sidewalk blocked by snowbanks in the winter. It's a young person with a disability applying for jobs and wondering if they're being overlooked before they even walk into the interview room. And it's families who are exhausted from constantly having to advocate, explain, fight and push just to access things many of us take for granted.

Speaker, Ontario promised to become fully accessible by 2025. That deadline has come and gone, and for many people, it doesn't feel like we are anywhere close. We have to remember accessibility is not just about infrastructure or legislation. It is about dignity. It is about independence. And it is about whether people feel included in their own communities.

Housing

Mr. Brian Riddell: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

In my riding of Cambridge, families, young professionals and seniors continue to tell me they want to see more homes built that are affordable and delivered efficiently. Over the course of this session, our government has remained focused on tackling Ontario housing challenges by creating the conditions to get more homes built faster, and we are beginning to see renewed momentum in housing starts across our province as confidence returns to the market.

Could the minister tell the House what actions our government is taking to help support new home construction in my community and throughout Ontario?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you to the member for Cambridge for that great question.

We've had a historic session, Speaker. Bill 98 was passed, reducing the time it takes and the cost it takes to get homes built, creating those conditions—very important legislation. We're rolling out a development charge reduction program next week that is going to benefit all municipalities across this province, including our small northern and rural communities. We have introduced the historic HST rebate that is going to affect all construction of new homes for one year, April 1 to next—a great initiative.

We have seen over 4,000 new starts to date, and we thank our federal friends for joining us in this great initiative. But I would ask them to get their legislation in place, to get the initiative in place so we can indeed recognize booming sales for the rest of the year. Speaker, to them, respectfully and thankfully: Slow help is no help. Let's get it done.

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The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Cambridge.

Mr. Brian Riddell: I'd like to thank the minister for that very encouraging update.

Our government recognizes that one of the major barriers to housing construction is the slow and inconsistent approvals process that builders face. Too often, unnecessary red tape, duplication and delays add costs and uncertainty that prevent homes from being built on time.

That is why we introduced Bill 98. This legislation helps address these challenges by creating a more predictable and standardized approval framework that supports municipalities while ensuring projects move faster.

Speaker, could the minister further explain how the measures in Bill 98 will help reduce municipal red tape, speed up approvals and continue to support increased housing construction across Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: A major focus this session has been ensuring approval processes are faster, more transparent and more consistent across municipalities. That's exactly why we introduced Bill 98.

This legislation contains practical reforms that would help streamline planning processes, reduce duplication and create greater certainty from builders to municipalities to families waiting for homes to be built. For far too long, housing projects have faced unnecessary delays, caused inconsistent local requirements, complex approvals and administrative bottlenecks. Bill 98 would help standardize processes.

Clearly, the timelines have to be very clear and improve coordination so projects can move from application to construction more quickly. We're also modernizing and simplifying planning systems to ensure municipalities can focus on resources, on getting homes approved and built instead of navigating unnecessary bureaucracies. Remember: Slow help is no help.

Education funding

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Auditor General has confirmed what parents have been saying: Special education is underfunded, and it is leaving children without access to a meaningful education and the supports and resources to be at school safely.

Instead of investing to support our children, per-student funding for special education teachers, education workers, psychologists and other professionals is going down next year, not up.

How is it that the Premier has \$5 billion to land private jets on Toronto's waterfront, but when it comes to supporting our kids, it's another cut?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, of course that is not true. We've increased special education funding significantly in the province of Ontario by over \$3.85 billion. Each and every year, we've increased special education funding.

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But as I've said—and I know the opposition doesn't want to hear it—what I'm focused on is outcomes. I want to make sure the money we're investing in special education is actually providing the outcomes that our parents and teachers are insisting upon. That is why we'll be taking a further look at special education and all of the models that are being delivered across the province of Ontario: to make sure that it is meeting the needs not only of parents but, more importantly, of students.

We're listening to teachers. We're listening to educators. We're looking at boards that are doing it better. Some boards are doing it better than other boards. Why is that, Madam Speaker? Some boards aren't spending their entire allocation on special education while some boards are spending more than that allocation. So we are going to look at that system, but ultimately it is going to be based on what the outcomes are so that we can ensure our kids get the best possible opportunity to succeed.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Let's talk about outcomes, Speaker, because the outcome of this government's repeated funding cuts is that education workers, teachers and principals are being laid off all across Ontario. Just this week, 171 EAs and admin assistants in York region were told they're losing their jobs, on top of the 78 custodial and skilled trades workers who already got pink slips. The TDSB is now up to 824 positions cut.

I don't think there's a family in this province that would say their priority is a runway in Lake Ontario. So why is the Premier throwing away \$5 billion on that when that money could hire 58,000 more teachers and education workers?

Hon. Paul Calandra: One of the challenges the NDP seems to always have is understanding that when you grow an economy, you have more money to spend in education, and you have more money to spend in health care.

We understand that the NDP doesn't get this. They don't like the private sector. The NDP have never liked the private sector. That's just their ideology. They think government should do everything, and the way that government does everything is by taking all of the money out of your pocket and letting them spend it.

We've been down this road before in the province of Ontario. It was called the Bob Rae government. They bankrupted the entire province, built nothing and laid off teachers. They closed schools. They closed hospitals. That is the record of when you allow socialists near anything to do with government. They're bankrupting the city of Toronto. Anywhere they have a role, whether it's in school boards, education, councils or opportunities to run provinces, they cause chaos.

Here's what we're going to do: We're going to continue to focus on building an economy that works so that we can continue to spend record amounts in education, record amounts in transportation and record amounts in health care to build a bigger, better, stronger and safer province—

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Services for persons with disabilities

MPP Lise Vaugeois: My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

In Ontario, laws are being ignored and disabled persons living in group homes are being subjected to multiple forms of abuse.

No human being should be denied their right to see their family, and no one should be illegally evicted like Andre Seguin, who was dumped on his uncle's farm with three garbage bags containing his belongings.

Minister, Andre's parents are here today. Can you tell them that you will put an end to the abuses experienced by their son and support Andre's Residents' Bill of Rights?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I do appreciate the question from the member across the way.

The safety and well-being of residents and staff is our top priority. It was our government that expanded the investment for increased regular inspections to ensure that those who need support are receiving high-quality care and services.

But let me also be clear: It is not acceptable for service agencies to use trespass notices to punish parents or family members for raising complaints or concerns about the services that they are provided.

Service agencies also know that they need to follow the laws and contracts and rules that require them to have clearly written policies to protect the health and safety of the people they support. They also need to have ways for people to share complaints and feedback, and they are expected to take these concerns seriously and deal with them.

We saw a system that was starved, and we wanted to make sure that people with developmental disabilities get the support, which is why we made those historic investments, doubling—increasing the budget by \$1.6 billion to ensure that families get the support.